

# **People Select Committee**

## **Scrutiny Review of Disability Inclusive Borough**

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### **Final Report November 2021**

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People Select Committee  
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council  
Municipal Buildings  
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## Select Committee – Membership

Councillor Marilyn Surtees (Chair)  
Councillor Mrs Jean O'Donnell (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor John Gardner  
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Cllr Lee Spence  
Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley  
Cllr Bill Woodhead MBE  
Cllr Barry Woodhouse

## Acknowledgments

The Committee would like to thank the following people for contributing to its work:

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**Foreword**

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**Councillor Marilyn Surtees  
Chair**



**Councillor Mrs Jean O'Donnell  
Vice Chair**

## **Original Brief**

### **Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?**

The review will contribute to the following Council Plan 2020-23 themes and objectives:

#### **A place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm**

- People live in cohesive and safe communities
- People are supported and protected from harm
- People live healthy lives

#### **A place with a thriving economy where everyone has opportunities to succeed**

- A growing economy
- Job creation and increased employment
- Improved education and skills development

### **What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?**

The vision for the borough set out in the council plan is that Stockton-on-Tees will be 'a place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm' and 'a place with a thriving economy where everyone has opportunities to succeed'. This review will explore how Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council can contribute to a more disability inclusive borough.

Disabled people have been one of the most disproportionately affected groups by Covid-19 and going forward, it is important they are no longer marginalised and have equal opportunities to participate in the social, cultural, and economic activities within the borough.

In the UK, approximately 1 in 5 people have a disability. If disabled people faced less barriers, the social and economic well-being of the area is likely to improve.

Potential outcomes from this review could include better engagement with disability groups to understand barriers disabled people face going forward and a process for the council to consider and implement recommendations from these groups. Where relevant, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council could also champion disability inclusion in its partnership work with its public, private and voluntary sector stakeholders.

### **The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:**

- Do the Council communicate with and implement recommendations from disability groups and how can this be improved?
- How can the Council improve services for those with hidden disabilities?
- How can the Council go beyond statutory minimum standards and beyond providing wheelchair access?
- Are there any quick wins the Council can implement to support a more disability inclusive borough?
- What have other Local Authorities done to improve disability inclusion?

<p><b>Who will the Committee be trying to influence as part of its work?</b></p> <p>Cabinet, Service Departments.</p>	
<p><b>Expected duration of review and key milestones:</b></p> <p>8 months: (reporting to Cabinet in January 2022)                  Approve scope and project plan – 24 May 2021                  Receive evidence – June – September 2021                  Draft recommendations – October 2021                  Final report – November 2021                  Report to Cabinet – January 2022</p>	
<p><b>What information do we need?</b></p> <p>Existing information (background information, existing reports, legislation, central government documents, etc.):</p> <p>Council Plan 2020-23, background information, existing reports.</p>	
<p>Who can provide us with further relevant evidence? (Cabinet Member, officer, service user, general public, expert witness, etc.)</p> <p>Council Officers</p> <p>Representatives from another Council</p> <p>Teesside and District Society for the Blind</p> <p>Bright Mind Big Futures (BMBF)</p>	<p>What specific areas do we want them to cover when they give evidence?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Context setting. Information on existing policies, forums, and engagement with disabled people across the borough. Is there anything we can improve upon?</li> <li>• What is their approach to disability inclusivity? Is there anything we can learn?</li> <li>• How do they assist and support people with visual impairments? Is there anything we can learn?</li> <li>• How does disability inclusion form part of the activities and ethos of BMBF?</li> </ul>
<p><b>How will this information be gathered? (e.g. financial baselining and analysis, benchmarking, site visits, face-to-face questioning, telephone survey, survey)</b></p> <p>Committee meetings, desk top research, evidence from other Councils.</p>	
<p><b>How will key partners and the public be involved in the review?</b></p> <p>As above.</p>	
<p><b>How will the review help the Council meet the Public Sector Equality Duty?</b></p> <p>The Equality Act 2010 protects everyone from discrimination on grounds of nine Protected Characteristics including disability.</p> <p>Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's Workforce Equality Action Plan for 2020-21 states, "Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's aim is to have a workforce that reflects the diversity of our</p>	

residents, customers and stakeholders and we recognise that promoting equality, benefits public services for all.”

**How will the review contribute towards the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, or the implementation of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy?**

This review will contribute to the Stockton-on-Tees Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy priorities 2019-2023:

All children and families get the best start in life.

All people in Stockton-on-Tees live well and live longer.

All people in Stockton-on-Tees live in healthy places and sustainable communities.

**Provide an initial view as to how this review could lead to efficiencies, improvements and/or transformation:**

The creation of a policy for all council directorates and service areas to consider disability inclusion in their work which could potentially be trialled in one service area first. All new council policies and projects could also consider disability inclusion.

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## Executive Summary

The aim of the review was to explore how Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council could contribute to a more disability inclusive borough.

At the outset of the review, potential outcomes included better engagement with disability groups to understand barriers disabled people faced and how best the Council could consider and implement recommendations from these groups. It was also recognised that Stockton Borough Council could champion disability inclusion in its partnership work with its public, private and voluntary sector stakeholders.

The Select Committee's key findings were as follows:

- In the UK, approximately 1 in 5 people have a disability. If disabled people face less barriers, the social and economic well-being of the area is likely to improve
- Disabled people have been one of the most disproportionately affected groups by Covid-19 and it is important they are no longer marginalized and have equal opportunities to participate in the social, cultural, and economic activities within the Borough
- The Equality Act 2010 defines disability as a protected characteristic. Therefore, an individual with a mental or physical impairment which has 'a substantial or long-term adverse effect' on their daily activities is protected from discrimination
- The Public Sector Equality Duty requires organisations, such as Local Authorities, "to consider how they could positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations. It requires equality considerations to be reflected into the design of policies and the delivery of services, including internal policies, and for these issues to be kept under review"
- As a Local Authority, and a service provider, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council has a duty to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and reasonable adjustments must be made to enable disabled people to access services and functions
- Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council is committed to putting every person who needs support at the heart of all that they do and for people with disabilities and mental health needs this means being flexible and offering everyone who is eligible for social care services the opportunity to direct their own support
- SBC is committed to providing appropriate support and services to employees and residents across the Borough with disabilities. This review has demonstrated that each directorate strives to incorporate the needs of disabled people into the delivery of their services. As part of the review, a vast amount of evidence has been collated highlighting best practice across the Council
- SBC also work with external organizations and charities, such as Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust and Middlesbrough and Stockton Mind, to provide services and support to residents and employees
- Children and young people (0-25) with special educational needs and disabilities, and their parents and carers, are supported through a variety of strategies and services, including The Stockton-on-Tees SEND Joint Commissioning Strategy 2018-2021, the Local Offer, and The Educational Psychology Service

- The needs of disabled people are also considered when new projects or schemes are devised and implemented
- The SBC Local Plan states that, for new dwellings, 50% are required to meet Category 2 standard (accessible and adaptable dwellings) and 8% are required to meet Category 3 standard (wheelchair user dwellings)
- The Council is dedicated to engaging positively with residents and values their input on planning, developing and managing the built environment. The Council's 'street charter' sets out a list of actions and commitments, which everyone involved agrees to abide by. These have been formed under different headings, which represent the main issues that pedestrians, particularly those that are blind or partially sighted people face when negotiating the built environment in Stockton-on-Tees:
  - Advertising boards and street and café furniture
  - Wheelie bins and recycling bags
  - Overhanging shrubbery and branches
  - Parking on pavements
  - Crossings
  - New Council developments: shared space
  - Consultation
- There have been reported problems with dropped kerbs for disabled people across the Borough. SBC follow government guidance, contained in the 'Inclusivity Mobility Document', to ensure that dropped kerbs are installed in the correct location and to the correct specifications. Funding for dropped kerbs currently sits within the wider budget for all Highways Asset Maintenance. Dropped kerb projects are also eligible for funding through the Ward Members Community Participation Budget and the Ward Transport Budget. Inspections have been, and can be, carried out where there are issues with dropped kerbs to identify areas for consideration if potential funding opportunities arose
- Changing Places Toilet (CPT) are larger accessible toilets for severely disabled people, with equipment such as hoists, privacy screens, adult-sized changing benches and space for carers. Currently there are only two registered CPT facilities within the Borough. Based on the current lack of geographical coverage, there is a clear need to deliver more facilities across the Borough in places of high footfall such as town centres, visitor attractions and retail parks
- The Council has a strong workforce culture and environment that supports employee wellbeing. The Council aims to attract, retain, and develop an inclusive workforce with the right values and behaviours that reflects the diversity of the community. The Council provides an accessible and inclusive recruitment process by making reasonable adjustments where required, offering flexible approaches when assessing people so disabled job applicants have the best opportunity to demonstrate they can do the job, and guaranteeing an interview to those applicants who declare a disability and meet the essential criteria for the role. SBC works alongside the VCSE to promote job vacancies with the aim of attracting and recruiting people with disabilities
- The Disability Staff Forum provides a peer support network for employees with a disability. The forum is a platform for sharing information about disability issues. Forum members are also able to champion issues affecting employees with a disability. Through the forum there is an opportunity to make recommendations regarding service delivery. The forum serves to

encourage and influence better organisational support for employees with a disability and to support individuals in the workplace

- Whilst recognising the positive work across the Borough and the examples of best practice, feedback from disability groups and organisations has shown that there is no room for complacency and highlighted the need for:
  - Better understanding of the needs of the Borough
  - Improved communication and consultation including direct contact with service users
  - Better information about support
  - Increasing opportunities for individuals to become active local citizens
  - Raising awareness, acceptance and understanding of all disabilities and hidden disabilities among Council staff and the wider community
  - Educating and training staff
  - Supporting professionals to understand each need
  - Commitment to co-production of services
  - Creating a progression model for continuous steps to promote inclusion

## **Conclusion**

The review has demonstrated that Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council is committed to putting every person who needs support at the heart of all that they do and providing appropriate support and services to employees and residents across the Borough with disabilities. The Council also works with other organisations, the VCSE and local businesses to deliver this and each directorate strives to incorporate the needs of disabled people into the delivery of their services. As part of the review a vast amount of evidence has been collated highlighting the services and support available and best practice across the Council.

However, whilst recognising this commitment and positive work, feedback from disability groups and organisations has highlighted the need for greater understanding and awareness of all disabilities and hidden disabilities as part of a continuous journey to make Stockton a disability inclusive Borough.

The review has also shown that it is only possible to ensure that equality considerations are fully reflected in the design of policies and the delivery of services where there is genuine dialogue and co-production takes place with people with disabilities.

## **Recommendations**

1. That opportunities to share and promote good practice across the Council and wider community are identified.
2. That all Directorates be asked to review and demonstrate how disability inclusivity and co-production of services is embedded within their areas.
3. That a Disability Inclusion Charter is published to evidence the Council's commitment to being a Disability Inclusive Borough.
4. That an Equality Statement is produced setting out the Council's approach and commitment to equality and diversity.
5. That an external Equality Information Directory is developed to better inform the public and assist with signposting of services.

6. That improvements are made to the Council's website to support easy navigation to up to date information about current services and future plans.
7. That a programme of staff awareness raising is put in place to highlight the different types of disability and how to best serve those with physical and hidden disabilities in order to improve communication and customer service.
8. That additional disability training modules be incorporated in the proposed E-learning management system, due to go live in February 2022 and consideration be given as to how to make disability training procured directly by services more widely available.
9. That a publicity campaign is developed to continue to highlight the problems caused by parking over dropped kerbs with opportunities for improvements investigated subject to funding.
10. That engagement of disability groups in the VCSE Adults Forum/ Disability Task and Finish Group, facilitated by Catalyst, be kept under review to ensure that it provides a representative and effective voice for disabled people of the Borough.
11. That lessons learnt from the upcoming refurbishment of the junior/toddlers play area at Preston Park be used to inform future play provision designs with respect to inclusion and accessibility.
12. That the provision of changing places toilet facilities be progressed, where practicable, as part the Town Centre Development Programme, subject to funding through the Changing Places Fund.
13. That posters/ cards promoting simple sign phrases are adopted across customer services centres and receptions to assist communication with the deaf community.

## 1.0 Introduction

1.1 This report presents the outcomes of the scrutiny review of Disability Inclusive Borough.

1.2 The aim of the review was to explore how Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council could contribute to a more disability inclusive Borough.

1.3 At the outset of the review, potential outcomes included better engagement with disability groups to understand barriers disabled people faced and how best the Council could consider and implement recommendations from these groups. It was also recognised that Stockton Borough Council could champion disability inclusion in its partnership work with its public, private and voluntary sector stakeholders.

1.4 In the UK, approximately 1 in 5 people have a disability. If disabled people face less barriers, the social and economic well-being of the area is likely to improve.

1.5 Disabled people have been one of the most disproportionately affected groups by Covid-19 and it is important they are no longer marginalised and have equal opportunities to participate in the social, cultural, and economic activities within the Borough.

1.6 The vision for the Borough set out in the Council Plan is that Stockton-on-Tees will be 'a place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm' and 'a place with a thriving economy where everyone has opportunities to succeed'.

1.7 The Committee examined the following key lines of enquiry:

- Do the Council communicate with and implement recommendations from disability groups and how can this be improved?
- How can the Council improve services for those with hidden disabilities?
- How can the Council go beyond statutory minimum standards and beyond providing wheelchair access?
- Are there any quick wins the Council can implement to support a more disability inclusive borough?
- What have other Local Authorities done to improve disability inclusion?

1.8 The Committee has taken evidence from Council Officers, BMBF, Disability Staff Forum, Horizons Specialist Academy Trust, Stockton Parent Carer Forum, Daisy Chain, Guide Dogs for the Blind, RNID and Middlesbrough Council.

## 2.0 Evidence

### Legislative Framework

#### ***Equality Act 2010***

2.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, disability is included as a protected characteristic and is defined as:

#### ***6 Disability***

*(1)A person (P) has a disability if—*

*(a)P has a physical or mental impairment, and*

*(b)the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on P's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.*

2.2 Under the Act:

- 'substantial' is defined as "more than minor or trivial, e.g. it takes much longer than it usually would to complete a daily task like getting dressed."
- 'long-term' is defined as "12 months or more, e.g. a breathing condition that develops as a result of a lung infection."

### 2.3 Examples of impairments include:

- sensory impairments, such as those affecting sight or hearing
- impairments with fluctuating or recurring effects such as rheumatoid arthritis, myalgic encephalitis (ME), chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), fibromyalgia, depression and epilepsy
- progressive, such as motor neurone disease, muscular dystrophy, and forms of dementia
- auto-immune conditions such as systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE)
- organ specific, including respiratory conditions, such as asthma, and cardiovascular diseases, including thrombosis, stroke and heart disease
- developmental, such as autistic spectrum disorders (ASD), dyslexia and dyspraxia
- learning disabilities
- those produced by injury to the body, including to the brain

2.4 A person who has cancer, HIV infection or multiple sclerosis (MS) is protected by the Equality Act, as a disabled person, from the point of diagnosis.

2.5 The Equality Act also protects a person who is no longer disabled but would have met the definition requirements in the past. A person who has received treatment for a past disability and still experiences debilitating effects as a result of this treatment would also be protected.

### ***Equality Act 2010: Mental Health***

2.6 A person with a mental health condition which has a long-term effect on their normal daily activities would be defined as disabled under the Equality Act 2010.

### 2.7 Examples of mental health conditions which can lead to a disability, include:

- dementia
- depression
- bipolar disorder
- obsessive compulsive disorder
- schizophrenia

### ***Equality Act 2010: Exemptions/Exclusions***

2.8 There are a number of conditions which are not regarded as impairments under the Equality Act. These are:

- addiction to, or dependency on, alcohol, nicotine, or any other substance (other than in consequence of the substance being medically prescribed)
- the condition known as seasonal allergic rhinitis (e.g. hay fever), except where it aggravates the effect of another condition
- tendency to set fires
- tendency to steal
- tendency to physical or sexual abuse of other persons
- exhibitionism
- voyeurism

## **GOV.UK Disability Rights: Employment**

2.9 Under the Equality Act, a disabled person is protected against discrimination from employers. This includes:

- application forms
- interview arrangements
- aptitude or proficiency tests
- job offers
- terms of employment, including pay
- promotion, transfer and training opportunities
- dismissal or redundancy
- discipline and grievances

2.10 When recruiting, employers can only ask a candidate about their disability or health:

- to help decide if a candidate can carry out a task that is an essential part of the work
- to help find out if a candidate can take part in an interview
- to help decide if the interviewers need to make reasonable adjustments for candidates in a selection process
- to help monitoring
- if they want to increase the number of disabled people they employ
- if they need to know for the purposes of national security checks

## **GOV.UK Disability Rights: Education**

2.11 A school or education provider would be breaking the law through:

- direct discrimination, for example refusing admission to a student or excluding them because of disability
- indirect discrimination, for example only providing application forms in one format that may not be accessible
- discrimination arising from a disability, for example a disabled pupil is prevented from going outside at break time because it takes too long to get there
- harassment, for example a teacher shouts at a disabled student for not paying attention when the student's disability stops them from easily concentrating
- victimisation, for example suspending a disabled student because they've complained about harassment

## **Advice for Service Providers**

2.12 All organisations that provide a service to the public or a section of the public must comply with the Equality Act 2010. The Equality Act also applies to those who sell goods or provide facilities and applies to all services whether or not a charge is made for them.

2.13 The Equality and Human Rights Commission have issued the following advice to service providers to assist them in complying with their duties under the Equality Act 2010. Service providers should:

- establish a policy to ensure equality of access to and enjoyment of their services by potential service users or customers from all groups in society
- communicate the policy to all staff, ensuring that they know that it is unlawful to discriminate when they are providing services
- train all staff, including those not providing a direct service to the public, to understand the policy, the meaning of equality in this context and their legal obligations

- monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the policy
- address acts of discrimination by staff as part of disciplinary rules and procedures
- ensure that performance management systems address equality and non-discrimination
- maintain an easy to use, well-publicised complaints procedure
- review practices to ensure that they do not unjustifiably disadvantage particular groups
- consult customers, staff and organisations representing groups who share protected characteristics about the quality and equality of their services and how they could be made more inclusive

2.14 Service providers, and those exercising public functions, are also required to make reasonable adjustments so disabled people can access that service or function. These requirements are:

- Where a provision, criterion or practice puts disabled people at a substantial disadvantage compared with those who are not disabled, to take reasonable steps to avoid that disadvantage.
- Where a physical feature puts disabled people at a substantial disadvantage compared with people who are not disabled to avoid that disadvantage or adopt a reasonable alternative method of providing the service or exercising the function.
- Where not providing an auxiliary aid puts disabled people at a substantial disadvantage compared with people who are not disabled, to provide that auxiliary aid

### ***Public Sector Equality Duty***

2.15 The Public Sector Equality Duty falls under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 and came into force in April 2011. Consequently, when carrying out functions, Public Authorities are required to:

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

2.16 According to the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the Public Sector Equality Duty requires organisations, such as Local Authorities, “to consider how they could positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations. It requires equality considerations to be reflected into the design of policies and the delivery of services, including internal policies, and for these issues to be kept under review.”

### ***UK Government Disability Strategy, July 2021***

2.17 In July 2021, the UK Government launched a new disability strategy. The report outlines the areas where disabled people face barriers and challenges. These are:

- While at home – only 1 in 10 homes in England have at least one adaptation for disabled people
- When commuting – just a quarter of train stations have step-free access between all platforms
- At work or in education – there remains more than a 28 percentage point gap in the employment rate of working age disabled people compared with working age non-disabled people, and while the proportion of disabled people with a degree has increased from 15.9% in 2013 to 2014 to 23.0% in 2019 to 2020, the gap between disabled people and non-disabled people has not narrowed



- When shopping or getting about – 2 in 5 disabled people had experienced difficulties shopping around for products or services, with reported barriers including a lack of appropriate facilities (16%), difficulty using public transport (15%), and difficulty moving around premises (13%)
- When accessing public services online – when tested in September 2020, the websites of nine of the 10 most populated English county councils did not meet accessibility standards
- In feeling connected to others – disabled people are more than three times more likely than non-disabled people to often or always feel lonely, with well-being rates for disabled people consistently lower than for non-disabled people. Disabled people more often indicated that the impact of the pandemic had affected their well-being than non-disabled people. The disparity in wellbeing and loneliness between disabled and non-disabled people has not improved since 2013 to 2014
- When it comes to basic rights like the right to be safe from harm, disabled people are disproportionately affected by crime

2.18 The strategy is divided into three parts:

Part 1 – *“sets out immediate commitments we (the UK Government) will make to improve every part of a disabled person’s day – from the moment someone gets up to the moment they go to bed”*

Part 2 – *“sets out ambitious changes to how the government works with and for disabled people into the future. We (the UK Government) commit to putting disabled people at the heart of government policy-making and service delivery – laying the foundations for longer term, transformative change.”*

Part 3 – *“summarises clearly the actions each government department will take as part of this strategy to improve disabled people’s everyday lives. This section makes clear which department is responsible for which commitment. Each department commits to play their part, with ministerial champions setting out how they will personally drive progress.”*

### **Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC): Support for People with Disabilities**

2.19 The following information has been taken from the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) website. Whilst not exhaustive it highlights some of the key areas of support:

2.20 SBC aim to promote wellbeing, independence and safety for all people with a disability and their carers. To do this SBC organise and provide a range of services. These include information and advice, assessment of needs, provision of services whilst an individual remains at home and residential or nursing care. SBC also provide advice on local support groups, education and employment.

#### *Reablement Service*

2.21 SBC provide support and rehabilitation through their Reablement Service to help people regain their functioning resulting from illness, disability or injury.

#### *Safe Place Scheme*

2.22 Safe Place Schemes are places in the community where people who need extra support can go if they need some help. This 'help' can range from a phone call to home to ask a relative to pick them up or help with directions. Most people who use these schemes have a learning disability and often just the knowledge that schemes are in place makes people feel safe and able to go out and about more independently. Members of the schemes already use places in Stockton, for shopping, leisure, travel and sport but now know that they could get extra help from them if needed. The schemes are in various places across Teesside and are supported by the Police, Fire Brigade and local councils.

### *Sensory Support Team*

2.23 The Sensory Support Team offers advice and information to clients with a sensory loss for example: clients with a visual impairment, clients who are hard of hearing, clients who are deaf and those with dual sensory loss. Support and guidance are provided by specialist social workers and include:

- Assessment of needs
- Equipment to assist daily living
- Signposting to local support groups
- Registration of impairment, where appropriate

2.24 The team employs specialist mobility/rehabilitation officers who provide advice and training in independent living skills, communication and orientation and mobility to enable people to be as independent as possible. The team also run an Independence Plus Course which provides information and support to clients who are experiencing difficulties due to significant failing sight, or who have recently been registered as partially sighted or blind. Their carers are also welcome to attend.

### *STEPS*

2.25 STEPs support people with disabilities so they can discover and explore the many activities, facilities and organisations that exist within their local community. STEPs aim to improve choice and provide more flexible options for local people.

### *Stockton Information Directory*

2.26 The Stockton Information Directory provides information and advice on a range of services and opportunities for adults across the Borough of Stockton. The wide range of services include information and advice on where local groups or leisure activities are taking place and help for residents to remain in their own homes as well as housing and care home information, and much more.

### *Social Care Support and Services*

2.27 The Local Authority has a specialist team to support people with a learning disability. The operational team is co-located with health professionals including psychiatrist, psychologist, community learning disability nurses, occupational therapist and physiotherapists.

2.28 SBC have several teams in social care that support people with various disabilities. This includes the Multidisciplinary Service (MDS) and early intervention and prevention (EIP) to support people and offer advice and sign post to other services working with the person and the community assets. The assessment and support planning long term team also exists, which supports people with a range of needs.

2.29 The older person mental health services are collocated in TEWV. The Dementia Hub, Halcyon Centre provides day support to this client's group's needs. Assessment and reablement services are also provided at Rosedale.

2.30 Other internal services include Allensway Day Support, Ware Street for people with Autism, Oak Road residential for people with learning disabilities, and there are also community day options which support people with learning disabilities.

### *Lanark Short Breaks Service*

2.31 Lanark Short Breaks Service is a purpose-built facility, which offers planned short breaks and emergency support to any person with an identified learning disability aged 18-65 years old who live in the Borough. The activities offered include baking, cooking, arts and crafts, a gym, a sensory support room, a games room, a garden as well as access to community facilities. Lanark Short Breaks Service received an 'Outstanding' rating from its most recent Care Quality Commission inspection in 2017.

### **SBC: Support for people with mental health needs**

2.32 The following information has been taken from the SBC website. Whilst not exhaustive, it highlights some of the key areas of support:

2.33 There are many services in Stockton that support people with mental health needs and their carers.

2.34 SBC work with a number of groups and organisations to make sure that people get the services they need. Social care services are provided in partnership with Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust (TEWV) and SBC also work with local service user and carers groups, voluntary groups and private sector providers.

2.35 The social care team is co located with TEWV. People with autism have their needs assessed in mental or learning disability services.

2.36 Local Support is also provided by:

- Middlesbrough and Stockton Mind
- Impact on Teesside
- Cruise Bereavement Care
- Mental Health Emergency

2.37 And other support by:

- NHS – Every Mind Matters
- Samaritans

### **SBC: Support and Services Children and Young People (0-25)**

2.38 SBC provide a wide range of services for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and their families. These include services supporting care, development and education.

2.39 Important changes to SEND were introduced by the Children and Families Act 2014. The changes introduced Education, Health and Care Plans and the new approach focuses on ensuring coordinated services are planned across different services for education, health and care.

### *The SEN and Engagement Service*

2.40 The SEN and Engagement Service is responsible for the statutory (legal) processes for children and young people with SEND. These include Education Health and Care assessments, plans and reviews. The service is also responsible for placements of children and young people with Education, Health and Care plans and for placing children and young people in the Enhanced Mainstream Schools. The service works to make sure the Council's Local Offer is up to date and relevant. It also provides support to schools, early years settings and further education providers

about special educational need and disability and has responsibility for some of the Council's short breaks provision for disabled children.

### *Stockton-on-Tees SEND Joint Commissioning Strategy 2018-2021*

2.41 SBC's vision for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is the same as for all children and young people – that Stockton-on-Tees is a great place to grow up, where children and young people are protected from harm and supported to be the best they can be in life.

2.42 Most importantly SBC want the views of children and young people and their parents/carers to be actively sought and their voices heard. The Council want services to be joined up with reduced waiting times and good information sharing in place so that families can tell their story once. SBC want outcomes for children and young people to be co-produced and identified and that outcomes are assessed and measured across education, health and social care to ensure outcomes for children and young people improve. Partners have worked to develop this shared strategy with representatives across Children's Services, Adult Social Care, Public Health, Schools and Hartlepool & Stockton-on-Tees Clinical Commissioning Group. Parents/carers, children and young people have been integral to developing priorities for action.

2.43 A 'Local Offer' has been developed to enable children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (aged 0 - 25) and their families to access information about all of the services available to them from one place.

### *Educational Psychology Service (EPS)*

2.44 The Educational Psychology Service (EPS) is part of SEN and Engagement Service. Educational Psychologists (EPs) in Stockton provide independent advice to children, young people, parents and setting with the aim of supporting and promoting positive outcomes for all children and young people (0 – 25 years old) living in the Borough.

2.45 Service delivery is based on a consultation model of psychology that is research and evidenced based, solution focused and can facilitate change. EPs will work with vulnerable children and young people and those who have complex and additional needs. All EPs apply psychology (the study of thinking, learning and behaviour) and knowledge of child development to help understand how to remove barriers to a child or young person's development and learning. These barriers may relate to the broad areas of needs within the SEND code of practice such as communication and interaction, cognition and learning, social, emotional and mental health difficulties, sensory and/or physical needs.

2.46 The service works closely with other team members in the Schools and SEN directorate as well as schools, health, social care professionals and the multi-agency early help panel. The service provided is designed to promote the best possible outcomes in terms of learning, social and emotional development and inclusion. To do this the service work indirectly and directly with children and young people, offer advice, consultation, assessment, intervention, training and development for professionals and information and guidance for parents.

2.47 An EP is likely to become involved where a setting has asked for help with a child/young person's substantial learning or behavioural problems, or where a setting feels there has been no improvement despite support being provided. The service operates both a free service and a traded service (schools/settings purchase an amount of time they believe they need).

## **Building Regulations 2010 (2015 amended)**

2.48 Officers presented evidence on building regulations in response to Members' queries about the possibility of registered providers of social housing making housing more 'user-friendly'. Relevant Regulations relating to the access to and use of buildings are set out below:

### *Category 1 – Visitable dwellings*

2.49 Compliance with this requirement is achieved when a new dwelling makes reasonable provision for most people, which includes wheelchair users to access and enter the dwelling, and access habitable rooms and sanitary facilities on the entrance level.

### *Category 2 – Accessible and adaptable dwellings*

2.50 This requirement is met when a new dwelling provides reasonable provision for most people to access the dwelling and includes features that make it suitable for a range of potential occupants, including older people, individuals with reduced mobility and some wheelchair users.

### *Category 3 – Wheelchair user dwellings*

2.51 This requirement is achieved when a new dwelling provides reasonable provisions for a wheelchair user to live in the dwelling and have the ability to use any outdoor space, parking and communal facilities.

2.52 Requirements Category 2 and Category 3 are 'Optional Requirements' as defined in the Building Regulations. An Optional Requirement only applies where a condition that one or more dwellings should meet the relevant Optional Requirement is imposed on new development as part of the process of granting a planning permission. Where no condition is imposed, dwellings only need to meet the requirements of M4(1). Compliance should only be assessed against one of the Requirements for any given dwelling.

SBC standards from The Local Plan:-  
50% Category 2  
8% Category 3

2.53 Planning conditions are dictated by the Local Plan, which states that under current building regulations, 50% are required to be Category 2 dwellings and 8% are required to be Category 3 dwellings. However, a private firm could be contracted to oversee building regulations rather than the Local Authority.

## **SBC - Disabled Facilities Grants and Equipment Loan Scheme**

### *Disabled Facilities Grants*

2.54 Disabled Facilities Grants are available to eligible people with disabilities living within the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees. An individual must occupy the property the grant is applied for as their main residence and intend to occupy the property for the full grant period of 5 years. An individual can also apply if they are a landlord and have a disabled tenant. The Local Authority needs to be satisfied that the work is necessary and appropriate to meet the disabled person's needs and that the work is reasonable and can be done, depending on the age and condition of the property. The Housing Regeneration and Investment Team are responsible for the administration of DFGs.

### *Equipment Loan Scheme*

2.55 The Equipment Loan Scheme means that SBC can enable more people to live independently in their own homes by providing suitable adaptations to meet the specific needs when they need them. SBC aim to limit the time people may have to wait for certain adaptations by offering an equipment loan scheme to certain eligible people. In circumstances where people require stairlift or ramp adaptations, equipment can be loaned and recovered for re-use when no longer needed. In addition, supported living models exist for people with learning disabilities and mental health and autism, such as Acorn House and Kirkdale.

### **SBC Street Charter May 2016**

2.56 Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council is dedicated to engaging positively with residents and values their input on how the Council plans, develops and manages the built environment. The SBC 'street charter' sets out a list of actions and commitments, which everyone involved agrees to abide by. These have been arranged under different headings, which represent the main issues that pedestrians, particularly those that are blind or partially sighted, face when negotiating the built environment in Stockton-on-Tees.

#### ***Advertising boards and street and café furniture***

We agree to:

- Work with local business owners to make them realise how advertising boards and street café furniture cause real difficulties pedestrians in particular those that are blind or partially sighted and to consider alternative forms of advertising.
- Undertake regular street furniture audits in town centres to ensure that they are as safe as they can be.
- When town centres and neighbourhoods are redeveloped, proactively engage with blind and partially sighted people around design of the development and implementation of street furniture.

#### ***Wheelie bins and recycling bags***

We agree to:

- Require residents, where possible, to leave their bins at the curtilage of, but within, their property boundary.
- Proactively encourage residents to be considerate in how they place their bins, which will include coverage in the annual 'Up Your Street' leaflet which is delivered to all homes in the borough on an annual basis.
- Make sure that all bin crews are required to return bins to the same place and are made aware why it is so important to store bins as safely as possible.

#### ***Overhanging shrubbery and branches***

We agree to:

- Promote accessible ways for blind and partially sighted people to report overgrown shrubbery and branches through Care for your Area.
- Act swiftly upon reports of overgrown shrubbery and branches by alerting the residents or taking action if it is a council owned property.
- Proactively encourage residents to be considerate in managing their shrubbery and trees as part of our annual highway safety inspection programme.

#### ***Parking on pavements***

We agree to:

- Use our existing powers to endeavour to keep the pavement clear of obstructions caused by parked cars.
- Work with the police to use their existing powers under the Highways Act and other legislation to endeavour to keep the pavement clear of obstructions caused by parked cars.

- Work with the police to engage with blind and partially sighted people and the wider community to improve awareness of the dangers of parking on pavements.

### **Crossings**

We agree to:

- Undertake regular monitoring of the controlled crossing points across the Borough and adjust the crossing times to meet the needs of pedestrians accordingly.
- Follow the national guidance and equalities legislation to ensure the correct use of audible beeps, rotating cones, tactile paving and dropped kerbs.
- Assess requests for new crossing points and seek to provide these in the appropriate locations.

### **New Council developments: shared space**

We agree to:

- In accordance with our Public Sector Equality Duty, involve and consult with blind and partially sighted people when new developments such as shared space schemes are put forward and make any necessary changes to the schemes.
- Where this is not possible, we will consider whether or not the scheme should still go ahead.

### **Consultation**

We agree to:

- Engage with the Disability Advisory Group to assist in the development of major highway improvement schemes which are to have an accessibility impact.

### **SBC: Employer Practices and Disability Staff Forum**

2.57 The Council has a strong workforce culture and environment that supports employee wellbeing. The Council aims to attract, retain, and develop an inclusive workforce with the right values and behaviours that reflects the diversity of the community we serve.

2.58 The Disability Confident Leader Scheme aims to support employers to make the most of the opportunities provided by employing disabled people. In 2019, the Council achieved Disability Confident Leader accreditation and has maintained this status by acting as a champion within our local and business communities and supporting others with the achievement of the award.

### **Recruitment**

2.59 The Council provides an accessible and inclusive recruitment process by making reasonable adjustments where required, offering flexible approaches when assessing people so disabled job applicants have the best opportunity to demonstrate they can do the job, and guaranteeing an interview to those applicants who declare a disability and meet the essential criteria for the role.

2.60 SBC works alongside the VCSE to promote job vacancies with the aim of attracting and recruiting people with disabilities. In conjunction with the Council's STEP's service, we have created a number of supported roles for individuals with learning difficulties, one successful example being the creation of an in-house confidential waste disposal facility.

2.61 A range of policies and support are in place to retain and develop an inclusive workforce:

- Equality and Diversity training is built into the SBC induction process, highlighting disability awareness and the Disability Staff Forum.
- The Council continues to promote and support the use of our Equality Staff Forums. We value and listen to feedback from staff with disabilities

- A comprehensive Work-life Balance and Attendance Policy which focuses on employee wellbeing and flexible working provision. The policy includes information on paid Disability Leave for appointments and treatment, adjustment to trigger points for disability related sickness absence and guidance on supporting employees with disabilities and health conditions. Associated training is available to managers to support knowledge, confidence and implementation of the policy
- Managers are well informed and supported to implement reasonable adjustments, to support employees on sick leave or where a disability and/or health condition may be impacting on work, and to apply policies affecting disabled people consistently and fairly. Examples of reasonable adjustments include phased return to work following a period of sickness, changes to work patterns, homeworking, modifying or acquiring equipment, alterations to premises
- Liaise with DWP Access To Work to support the needs of disabled employees
- Employees are eligible for re-deployment support where, by reason of disability or health condition, the employee is no longer able to continue in their role, despite consideration of reasonable adjustments to that role. Employees who are re-deployed for this reason may be eligible for salary protection for a defined period of time to mitigate against the financial difficulties that may be caused by an immediate reduction in pay
- Provision of an in-house occupational health service to advise on appropriate support and reasonable adjustments
- Physiotherapy services are available to employees by Body2Fit and they also undertake workplace assessments to check employees are going about their work in the right way. Positive feedback is given on this service by employees who have conditions such as Fibromyalgia, arthritis and other chronic musculoskeletal conditions
- Confidential counselling service provided by Redcar & Cleveland Mind to support the emotional wellbeing of our employees. In addition, training on Mental Health Awareness for both employees and managers is provided, and an in-house Mental Health First Aid course. The Council has also invested significantly into Mindfulness courses, beneficial to people affected by depression and anxiety
- SBC has 'Keeping You In Touch' our weekly newsletter, a good source of information for disability awareness and health and wellbeing campaigns, as well as the Employee Support page on the Intranet
- Service areas provide/procure specific disability related training, for example Daisy Chain have facilitated autism awareness sessions

### **Disability Staff Forum**

2.62 Established in January 2010, the aim of the Disability Staff Forum is 'to improve the working lives of disabled employees at work'. It provides a peer support network for disabled employees. The forum is a platform for sharing information about Disability issues, for example, the International Day of People with Disabilities. Forum members are also able to champion issues affecting employees with a disability. Through the Forum there is an opportunity to make recommendations regarding service delivery. The forum serves to encourage and influence better organisational support for employees with a disability and to support individuals in the workplace. For example, through the access to work process. Examples of recent work include:

- Accreditation to SBC achieving Disability Confident Leader Status
- Accessibility work regarding Branding Guidelines
- Regular working with Employees, Managers and Occupational Health on:
  - Accessibility,
  - Assistive technology,
  - Access to Work applications
  - Support during COVID e.g. Homeworking
- Promotion of disability related events



## **SBC: Bright Minds Big Futures**

2.63 BMBF is open to all young people aged 11 to 19 or up to 25 with SEN. When any young person wishes to join BMBF, there is a recruitment form and pledge which must be completed. If under 18 there is a section which a parent or guardian must complete.

2.64 BMBF ask for basic personal information, along with any health conditions / dietary requirements etc. BMBF also have two questions around disabilities. These ask if a young person considers themselves to have a disability or if they are registered disabled. BMBF always reach out to any new members who had ticked Yes to either question to see what additional support they would need to help them engage with BMBF and to ensure that any events or activities could be tailored to enable full engagement and involvement.

2.65 In addition, all members must agree and sign a pledge before joining. This includes respecting and listening to the views of others and create an inclusive environment, where everyone is confident to make their voice heard.

2.66 The Big Committee is a self-elected group that leads on various departments and oversees activity within BMBF. At the last election, some changes were made to ensure that all groups were represented and a Head of Diversity and Equality and Head of Special Educational Needs (SEN) was established.

2.67 Each Head works with SBC to develop their Big Objectives. These are the main priorities they want to focus on during their elected term. They are developed by consulting with young people and by using information gathered from British Youth Council's Make your Mark scheme. Some of the Big Objectives 2020/21 include:

- Support and empower young people with SEN to have a voice
- Engage and recruit young people with SEN to get involved in activities and events
- Improve knowledge and understanding of SEN
- Promote and value equality and diversity
- Zero tolerance of bullying, harassment and victimisation
- Improve knowledge and understanding of beliefs, cultures and disabilities

2.68 A BMBF video created for Autism Awareness Week can be accessed by clicking on the following link - <https://youtu.be/hOkdtniyXHA>

2.69 As part of the review the Select Committee received testimonials from two BMBF members about their disabilities and the support they received to help them fully participate.

### *BMBF Approved*

2.70 Across the Stockton-on-Tees Borough, children and young people should feel welcome when they provide the borough's shops, cafés and leisure activities with their custom.

2.71 Head of Business, Regeneration and Transport developed the 'BMBF Approved'. An award to recognise businesses who provide a welcoming atmosphere to young customers. To achieve this award, businesses must simply meet specific criteria.

2.72 Most recently BMBF identified that there were some gaps in the criteria and the following have now been included: Is the business venue suited to customers with disabilities, visible and invisible? How does the business help people that have hidden disabilities?

## SBC Dementia Friendly Stockton High Street Project

2.73 The Dementia Friendly Stockton High Street Project is a one-year pilot project to make businesses and organisations in Stockton High Street dementia friendly and more accessible for people with dementia and their carers. The project encourages people with dementia and their carers to be more active and independent, so they can continue to live well with their conditions and reduce loneliness and isolation. The project is jointly funded by Stockton Business Improvement District and Stockton Borough Council Public Health.



2.74 The objectives of the project are:

- Prevention and early intervention
- Re-establish Stockton-on-Tees as a nationally recognised dementia friendly community
- Recruit a Community Link Worker (Lesley Tart) to deliver the project
- Support businesses and other organisations in Stockton High Street to deliver their services in a manner that is accessible to and inclusive of people living with dementia and carers to enable people to live as independently as possible
- Develop existing community spaces to offer more social opportunities for people living with dementia
- Increase awareness of dementia and local support services (including how to reduce the risk and how to get a diagnosis)
- Empower commitment to support social prescribing and providing a meaningful retail and leisure experience

Achievements	
Achievement	Number
Dementia friends created (excluded DF created by businesses themselves)	511
Dementia sessions delivered (excluded number of sessions delivered by businesses own champions. Some small businesses have only owner and no employee, so some sessions had to be delivered on one to one basis)	46
Dementia champions trained (Champions deliver dementia friends sessions. Some large companies created their own champions)	6
Events (award ceremonies and consultation) organised	4 (including one virtual)
Number of businesses accredited as dementia friendly	29

\*Figures are increasing rapidly following easing of all restrictions.

2.75 Examples of social opportunities for people with dementia have included:

- A hotel was offering tea and chat monthly, charging £1 per person and all proceeds go to local charities
- A pottery shop was running pottery classes
- Splash was running dementia friendly swimming sessions and is planning to expand it to dementia friendly gym sessions
- Queens Park GP practice has added dementia to their awareness event
- Hi Fi sound were developing a museum of stereo equipment, vinyl etc, and are opening this in the summer
- Ivy House has changed the layout of their menu and will add a photo when they next change their menu print
- Cycling Hub is considering installing static bikes
- Arc has hosted 4 dementia friendly screenings with positive results
- Linked with a bank for fraud training
- A solicitor firm to support power of attorney
- Teesside Princess already provide special sailings but now have the understanding to better support their customers living with dementia
- Other businesses have made changes at the request of the mystery shoppers such as adding a high back chair along with comfy seating or simply making the area clutter free

2.76 During the lockdowns the Community Link Worker continued to engage and support businesses and organisations and a leaflet was developed to support businesses and organisations to be COVID safe and remain dementia friendly. Ten businesses achieved the accreditation, and a virtual award ceremony was held, the Mayor presented the certificates.



2.77 The next steps for the project are to:

- continue to engage businesses to become dementia friendly
- continue to support businesses to restart or develop bespoke services
- submit a business case for further funding to increase capacity and roll out the project across the Borough
- advise businesses, market in Billingham Town Centre and Café in The Park to be dementia friendly

### **SBC: Examples of Best Practice and Disability Inclusive Initiatives**

2.78 To support the review, a cross-directorate steering group was established. The following examples of inclusive practice were gathered by this Group.

#### ***Finance, Development and Business Services***

2.79 The Economic Development team use social media and email to communicate with businesses. The team would like to improve their engagement with disability groups to understand how businesses can better support them and vice versa.

2.80 As part of the planning phase for any relevant project or initiative SBC would actively engage with the relevant disability groups, including hidden disability groups, to seek their views and recommendations. When developing both the Stockton High Street and Yarm High Street public realm schemes, the Council worked in partnership with an independent accessibility consultant and local representatives from Guide Dogs for the Blind and Royal National Institute for the blind (RNIB) to deliver a solution which provided accessibility for as many disability groups as possible. The recommendations and subsequent designs were implemented on site and remain in place. SBC also project manage the delivery of school building improvements across the borough. All works are undertaken in accordance with Building Regulations.

#### ***Employment and Training HUB***

2.81 The Employment and Training Hub has a dedicated team of experts ready to help people with anything employment and training related. Working with partners at Stockton Learning and Skills, Youth Direction and others across the Borough, the team can help with:

- Employability support (CV writing, interview techniques)
- Job searches
- Skills, education and training (including ESOL)
- Funding and benefits advice
- 1-to-1 support

2.82 The team will engage with disability groups to ensure the Hub building and service is accessible and support needs for the whole community, including those with hidden disabilities.

2.83 There are also plans for an outreach 'spoke' provision in the local communities. This will be delivered out of existing centres and key locations within communities, but the main Hub team will ensure the service is still inclusive for all.

### ***Healthy Streets***

2.84 Every decision the Council make about the Borough's built environment, however small, is an opportunity to deliver better places for people to live in and thereby improve their health. SBC is promoting a Healthy Streets approach across its scheme which a human-centred framework for embedding public health in transport, public realm and planning.

2.85 There has been a recent upward trend in considering the potential positive impact that placemaking can have on the mental health and wellbeing of people. The recent global pandemic and the travel restrictions that have been enforced as a result, have highlighted not only the importance that daily exercise has on our mental health and wellbeing, but it has given the nation an appreciation for what facilities can be accessed more locally

2.86 Streets must be welcoming places for everyone to walk, spend time and engage with other people. This is necessary to keep everyone healthy through physical activity and social interaction. It is also what makes places vibrant and keeps communities strong. The best test for whether SBC are getting our streets right is whether the whole community, particularly children, older people and disabled people are enjoying using this space and thus increasing their physical activity.

### ***Community Services and Transport***

2.87 The Government is committed to comprehensive civil rights for disabled people. An integrated transport policy, which encompasses accessible public transport, public transport infrastructure and a barrier-free pedestrian environment is fundamentally important to delivering that commitment. Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) gives disabled people a right of access to goods, facilities, services and premises. These rights are being phased in over the period 1996 to 2004. Since 1996, it has been unlawful for service providers to treat disabled people less favourably than other people for a reason related to their disability.

### ***Inclusive Mobility – A Guide to Best Practice on Access to Pedestrian and Transport Infrastructure (DfT)***

2.88 The Department for Transport provides specifications and guidance as to how to design and layout the highway. To meet disability needs, this is set out in the Inclusive Mobility - A Guide to Best Practice on Access to Pedestrian and Transport Infrastructure. The DfT's guidance and specifications is formulated to be considerate of all highway users. Although, it is acknowledged that there are some conflicts with the guidance and specifications. A measure designed to assist one type of disability/mobility issue can negatively affect another. For example, blister tactile paving installed at crossing points is designed to assist those with a visual impairment to identify the safe place to cross, but these raised features can cause discomfort to those with diabetes

(which can affect the feet) and those in wheelchair/mobility scooter with back issues when they travel across them.

### ***Tees Valley Residential and Industrial Estates Design Guide***

2.89 There isn't a minimum/maximum standard to building a highway. For new Highways, the DfT's guidance and specification has been used to create the Tees Valley Residential and Industrial Estates Design Guide. This sets out how any developer wishing to build has to set out the roads and footpaths on their development. Council officers follow this design detail too when they build new roads and footpaths.

2.90 The main issue for wheelchair access is the existing historic Highway network – the design specifications when these roads and footpaths were built was different to now – the provision of dropped kerbs etc unfortunately wasn't included – the constraining factor to meeting the current specifications on the existing highway network is funding. Dropped kerbs will be installed as part of footway resurfacing schemes, through the Highway network maintenance budget. Outside of this there is the Community Participation Budget and Ward Transport Budget which the Ward Councillors can prioritise to meet the needs of their own residents

### ***Road Safety Audit Process***

2.91 Any major Highway infrastructure project carried out in the Borough is subject to a Road Safety Audit process. This is to ensure the changes do not pose any road safety risk to users, the needs of those with disabilities or mobility issues is considered as part of this process.

### ***Customer Services & Digital Inclusion***

2.92 With all content design on the new website and SBC digital services (specifically online forms) the team are following the Government Digital Service (GDS) guidelines which is inclusive and has a specific style. The team are also adhering to the WCAG 2.1 AA regulations (under Section 3 'Understandable') and have a writing guide for the web which ensures that information is presented in a clear and concise way (for example: plain English, no jargon, short sentences, bullet points, clear titles, reading age of 9). Work has also been undertaken with the Disability Advisory Group / Digital Inclusion Group as part of the Council's approach on inclusive usability testing.

### ***Adults and Health***

2.93 The service considers disability groups to be particular groups of people with a disability and not just a formal group, for example RNIB.

2.94 Social Work Professionals, under the obligations of the Care Act, will discuss a persons' needs and care options where they have asked for a social care assessment or review.

2.95 Where a service user has mobility issues, the Social Work Professional will work with Housing, appropriate allied and health professionals to ensure the accommodation and care meets their expectations and ensure that they can live as independently as possible.

2.96 On an annual basis, Health and Social Care undertake a statutory User Experience survey (UES) which covers all client group to assess the quality of the support they receive and their overall experience.

2.97 Where Health and Care commission services through the independent and VCSE sector, the team would survey people who accessed these services as part of the review process to get their feedback and experiences. Recent examples include:

- Engagement with all vulnerable and disability groups accessing day opportunity services (October – November 2020); and
- People accessing home care (June-July 2021).
- Work in partnership with local forum, such as the Over 50s Assembly and the Learning Disability Partnership Board to get their views.
- Work collaboratively with groups such as Inclusion North.

2.98 Health and Care offer specific services / support for people with hidden conditions, including:

- Ware Street, a bespoke day opportunity service for people with autism which was introduced in 2014/15
- Commissioning home care providers with specific skills and knowledge to support people with conditions such as autism on the Teeswide PBS framework

2.99 In terms of general service improvement, the Council undertakes an assessment of the market for vulnerable groups, such as autism, in the joint strategic needs assessment. This identifies gaps in services and areas for the Council and partners to focus. The Council also engage with service users and families to review services and identify gaps in provision.

### ***HR, Legal and Communications***

2.100 SBC advocates that, as an organisation, the Council should always be going beyond minimum standards and would always welcome the opportunity to have dialogue with service providers.

2.101 The Council promotes a culture of being disability aware and ensuring that any barriers in the development and progression of staff with disabilities are addressed. Staff who are sick or absent from work are also supported by the service. The Council also value and listen to feedback from staff with disabilities. Disability awareness and equality training is also included in the SBC induction process.

2.102 As a Disability Confident Leader, SBC has set an example on the re-deployment of disabled people and this should always be reflected in service provision. The self-assessment for this scheme is reviewed regularly.

### ***Additional support/services***

- Developments: IB Leisure Facility, crematorium - The Council's work on delivering Stockton High Street and Yarm High Street has been recognised as being successful in achieving its goals for inclusivity. The recent delivery of projects like the Globe, the Ingleby Barwick Leisure Facility and the new Crematorium all provide inclusive facilities
- Quality Outcomes Framework learning disability register - All 26 Stockton-on-Tees general practices have Quality Outcomes Framework learning disability register. Two-thirds (18/26, 69%) of general practices have signed up to the learning disabilities directed enhanced service (DES) that requires practices to offer annual health checks to patients with learning disabilities who are known to Adult Social Care and Health services primarily due to their learning disability

### ***SBC: Library and Information Service***

#### *Communication and Consultation*

2.103 Stockton Library and Information Service, like all public library services in the UK, must provide a comprehensive and efficient offer for all those people who live or work in the borough.

2.104 Over the years, one focus has been to make as many changes or developments to the service in order to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse and ageing population.

2.105 There is always room for improvement and to this end, the views of people who have specific needs are sought wherever resources allow this. This is done in several ways.

2.106 The team always engage with customers in face-to-face conversations whilst delivering events and activities to groups, such as specialist story times, book groups, social events and local history gatherings.

2.107 For all events, evaluation forms are distributed, and these seek feedback on the planned activities as well as asking for any suggested improvements. Like all services, regular comments are received via the Stockton Library Service inbox and also through the Stockton Borough Council feedback procedure. The team engage in specifically focused consultation exercises with customers, groups and service areas to look at library space, environment and service delivery improvements. The following examples demonstrate this:

- Blind people and people with sight loss were consulted during the refurbishment of Stockton Central Library (2011), the new Billingham Library in 2014, and Ingleby Barwick Library most recently (although this was heavily affected by the lockdowns)
- The team worked with Daisy Chain, the charity supporting people living with autism, who visited two library sites and provided verbal feedback on being autism friendly (2017). This feedback was applied alongside national best practice to develop an autism friendly approach
- The team also worked with the Dementia LiveWell Hub to adapt the Stirling University 'Dementia Design Principles' toolkit to fit SBC libraries. Each library underwent an inspection and all relevant changes were made (2015)

2.108 All suggestions for improvement are considered by the Library Management Team and implemented where possible and practical. Where the team don't have specific knowledge, and solutions need to be found, specialist service providers are consulted for advice.

### *Improving and Developing Services*

2.109 At SBC, the team of specialist librarians seek to provide resources, activities and support for people who may need different ways of accessing services or who may not be able to use standard print materials. As the years have passed, new technologies have allowed services to become much more friendly to groups whose disabilities are not always apparent.

2.110 Awareness training for staff is provided as much as possible via organisations, such as Daisy Chain and CAMHS, covering a wide range of conditions and disabilities such as autism, dementia and dyspraxia. This training includes Libraries Connected training modules which cover Children Library Workforce (includes disability), Six Steps Promise – Helping People with Sight Loss (Now renamed Vision and Print Impaired People's Promise), and Reading Well Books On Prescription.

2.111 The team has also worked with specialist providers to identify need. For example, Autism Friendly training and advice was provided by Daisy Chain. As a result, some events introduced an autism friendly time and sensory equipment was purchased for each library. A breakout room/space is provided with a sensory tent and equipment at larger scale events.

2.112 As previously mentioned, work with the Dementia LiveWell Hub was undertaken to adapt the Stirling University 'Dementia Design Principles' toolkit to fit SBC libraries. Each library underwent an inspection and where possible, changes were made to make these more dementia friendly.



2.113 The Imagination Station, located within Thornaby Central Library, was built to provide immersive experiences. As well as the technology to project onto the walls of the room the equipment includes a freestanding projector which projects onto the floor. Library staff have created bespoke activities for groups with disabilities and learning difficulties such as interactive quizzes and games.

2.114 Perhaps the most dramatic change is in how libraries support reading for people with disabilities and lifestyle conditions. The Library and Information Service has always sought to provide book stock in a range of formats, including Large Print and audio. The onset of digital books has meant an increased range of access formats which can be tailored to people's needs. eBooks can be downloaded, for example, onto tablets which provide extra accessibility through screen readers. eAudio content, now available through online platforms, has meant that even during lockdowns, library stock is accessible to those who were not able to leave their homes. Most recently the Service have subscribed to online magazines and newspapers through Pressreader.

2.115 Libraries also stock books (including eBooks) and information which aim to cover a range of disabilities for all age groups to help with understanding of conditions and to give support to families and individuals who may be challenged. Reading Well books on prescription collections are also provided at all libraries – these are specially selected resources covering mental health and long-term conditions and include a special selection for younger people.

2.116 Stockton Public Health Information Library provides a range of resources to support organisations working to promote health and wellbeing across the borough, including resources on disabilities. Library buildings are equipped with Hearing loops to assist those who use hearing aids. The Home Delivery Service and Mobile Library provide books and audio to those who live in residential care or who are isolated at home.

2.117 Staff try to make buildings and services as accessible as possible using local and national guidelines and expertise. The Libraries Connected Heads of Service and Innovation Network provides the service with the experience of 151 different services across England and SBC has links both to the Home Nations and internationally through the International Federation of Library Associations. The team monitor developments in other services and often implement ideas from elsewhere. Some of the approaches that have been adopted are below:

- “Universal Design Principles” is utilised where possible. In general, this entails designing spaces which take into account the needs of all customers rather than specifically targeted groups
- Library spaces are designed to provide good lighting and physical accessibility where this is possible within the confines of existing buildings
- Signage is clear and where possible at a height of no more than 4ft and shelves are positioned low enough to allow wheelchair users to reach the shelves
- Seating areas are plentiful and available for use (these have been removed during the pandemic in line with government advice) and accessible toilet facilities are provided
- SBC has signed up to local and national schemes which promote libraries as ‘Safe Places’ which are ‘Dementia Friendly’ and ‘Autism Friendly’
- Although Self-service technology is utilised, the option to change font and backgrounds on self-service machines is available in all libraries
- Good links have been established with local support groups and organisations, such as Vision 25, and they are encouraged to use the library for activities and story times. This is designed to support participants to build confidence that the library is a welcoming space
- SBC has signed up to and promoted key campaigns such as Hi-Vis Fortnight <https://readingsight.org.uk/hi-vis-2021/> , Autism Awareness Week, Dementia Action Week, Empathy Day, International Day of People with Disabilities

- In newer buildings, and where it is possible to do so, parking spaces for people with disabilities are provided

#### *Areas of best practice*

- SBC Autism Friendly events have featured in a paper delivered at the International Federation of Libraries Congress in Wroclaw, Poland in 2017 by Sarah Mears, Programme Manager for Libraries Connected
- SBC's approach to making Yarm Library more accessible to all was featured in a paper presented at the Congress in Kuala Lumpur in 2018
- SBC's Dementia Friendly Service has been commended within the library profession and has been successful in securing several sector awards
- The service has signed up to the Vision and Print Impaired People's Promise – a Libraries Connected Universal Offer <https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/universal-offers/vision-print-impaired-peoples-promise>
- Sites are audited to try to accommodate as many specific requirements as possible in terms of spaces, lighting, colours and ambience

#### *Awareness of Best Practice in other Local Authorities or Organisations*

2.118 Examples are listed below:

Essex Libraries worked alongside the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians to develop their Autism Friendly Video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJLbbJW1BpA>. [Their main Central Children's Library was refurbished as an Autism friendly space for families and children.](#)

[Warrington's Library Service have been developing Dementia Friendly libraries which are co-located with their Leisure Centres. These have special colour palettes, lighting and soft furnishings.](#)

The Arts Council's report on the role of public libraries in engaging with people who are in need of extra support is a helpful round up of the way in which services can enhance the lives of more vulnerable people in the community. This can be accessed via the following link: [https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/ACE\\_Libraries\\_welcome\\_everyone\\_report\\_July18.pdf](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/ACE_Libraries_welcome_everyone_report_July18.pdf)

The Reading Agency has led on a number of initiatives which aim to support people who are challenged by medical conditions or poor mental health. Details of their Books on Prescription collections can be found at: <https://reading-well.org.uk/> and their recent Reading Friends scheme has focused on the wellbeing of people who may be lonely through isolation or disability. Details of the scheme can be accessed via the following link: <https://readingfriends.org.uk>.

#### **Areas of Best Practice from other Local Authorities – Middlesbrough Council**

##### ***Middlesbrough Council "Changing Places Toilet Facilities"***

- Locations: Rainbow Centre, Bus Station, Orchard Resource Centre, Neptune Leisure Centre, Myplace (Customs House), Cumberland Resource Centre, Stewart Park, Middlesbrough Sports Village and Newham Grange Farm
- Access through either fob (Bus Station only), RADAR key or reception staff at the venue

### ***Middlesbrough Community Inclusion Service***

- The Middlesbrough Community Inclusion Service is a Middlesbrough Council service that has operated since 2005, mainly as an Adult day care provider across the Middlesbrough area for Adults with Learning Disabilities & Autism
- It currently provides the service for up to 90 service users (numbers can fluctuate), all of whom have varied needs
- Throughout the years the service has changed significantly from originally having 14 community resource groups to now having only three community resources, one of which is specifically for Adults with Autism
- Service to provide support and services to enrich the lives of Adults with Learning Disabilities and autism within the local community
- They help people to find voluntary work in the community, offering support to make sure the placement meets the person's needs and requirements
- They can offer advice on education and training opportunities. If they are unable to help, they can signpost you to other organisations that can
- In terms of education and training it is a key focus of the service to undertake this within the various support groups. Each group would co-ordinate this through an established Person-Centred PATH that helps outline individual and group interests around learning and development from which individual and group sessions would be established around personalised training plans
- The service is scrutinised through internal inspections and audits to ensure that it meets the expectations and qualitative control aspects within Middlesbrough Council

### ***Middlesbrough Learning Disability Partnership Board***

- Partnership Boards meet regularly to talk about opportunities and support for people with learning disabilities. The main aims are to:
  - Make services for people with learning disabilities better
  - Help people who have learning disabilities to have the same chance to use the services everyone uses
  - Help different people to take part in the Board
  - Work closely with council services, health trusts and other services and projects

### **Ayresome Industries, Middlesbrough (School for the Blind)**

2.119 In response to Members' queries, officers investigated what had happened to the Ayresome Industries building, a school for the blind in Middlesbrough, and what had replaced this service.

2.120 Middlesbrough Borough Council recently completed the sale of the Ayresome Industries premises (on 19th November 2020). The window frame and brush making by the disabled workforce ended prior to this and the building was then used as an operational Council depot before it was declared surplus and marketed for sale.

2.121 The school for the blind on Stockton Road was demolished many years ago as the building had been unused for a long time and had fallen into a dilapidated condition. They have relocated in the building next door and are operating under the Teesside & District Society for the Blind.

### **Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC): Pavement/Dropped Kerb Issues**

2.122 In response to Members' queries concerning dropped kerbs issues and a possible mapping exercise of dropped kerbs across the Borough, officers provided evidence to the Committee.

2.123 SBC adheres to government guidance entitled the 'Inclusive Mobility Document' to ensure the dropped kerbs to assist pedestrians to cross a road are installed in the correct location and to the correct specifications.

2.124 Where a footway is closed as part of a street works either by the Highway Authority or a utility company, in accordance with the Safety at Street Works and Road Works - A Code of Practice, pedestrian will be guided to existing dropped kerbs to avoid the closure or temporary plastic ramps will be set out to allow pedestrians to safely pass within a coned/barriered off area in the carriageway. This type of temporary ramp would not be suitable to use on a permanent basis, without the protection of being in a coned/barriered off area.

2.125 It would not be possible to conduct a mapping exercise for the whole Borough to identify where dropped kerbs are location and where there is a missing provision, due to the scale of the task and the officer capacity to undertake this exercise. However, officers can and have in the past carried out inspections of an area, with or without Ward Members and residents, to identify locations in order to develop a project for consideration for available and future funding.

2.126 Whenever a footway resurfacing scheme is to be carried out, where this intersects with a road junction, the installation of dropped kerbs will be installed as part of the scheme.

2.127 In the past, a small budget was allocated to install additional dropped kerbs in response to requests from residents, with a scoring matrix used to prioritise the areas where dropped kerbs were installed, with the higher priority being given to areas of high pedestrian footfall. Following budget cuts and with the significant pressures on the maintenance budget to undertake highway repair (potholes), this budget was removed, with the opportunity for dropped kerb projects being eligible for funding through the Ward Members Community Participation Budget and Ward Transport Budget.

2.128 Parking over a dropped kerb is classed as an obstruction to the highway and could be reported to civic enforcement to investigate and take appropriate action. Officers are mindful when considering the locations of dropped kerbs to ensure surface water ponding does not occur at these locations which would impact on their usage. Officers are also aware of some older pedestrian dropped kerbs, historic property layout and driveway crossing constraints which cause level issues resulting in incidents of wheelchairs tipping. Such locations would be inspected and addressed where practicable.

### **Children's Play Parks**

2.129 The Equality Act 2010 requires reasonable provision to be made for equal opportunities for disabled people except where it affects the safety of others and requires that play area providers have an assessment of their play area for suitability by disabled users. The Act also applies to places where children play (play areas, games area etc).

2.130 It is illegal to treat disabled persons any less favourably than non-disabled persons. The Act does not compel providers to make all play areas suitable for disabled children as it is impossible to make a play area totally suitable for all forms of impairment however providers must take all reasonable measures, bearing in mind safety of other users, to make play areas as suitable for disabled children as possible.

2.131 PiPA (Plan Inclusive Play Areas) is a tool which helps Local Authorities, landscape architects, town planners and families with disabled children create an inclusive outdoor area.

2.132 Inclusive playground equipment enables children with all needs and abilities to enjoy playing with friends. Children with physical, cognitive, sensory and behavioural needs all benefit from inclusive playground equipment.

2.133 A rich mix of play opportunities can be created in the following ways:

- Physical: e.g. open space for running/wheeling, tree or logs for climbing and balance; a wall for ball games; open space for running/wheeling; markings for chalk games; play equipment for different physical challenges
- Creative: e.g. quiet spaces with natural materials for making things; weeping trees and sensory domes for dens; story telling space; sensory plantings to support activities
- Social: e.g. areas for chatting and reading; tables and chairs for card and board games; open spaces for group activities

2.134 The most common mistakes made on play equipment that relate to use by disabled children are:

- No way to the equipment. Raised edges which prevent wheelchair access or unsuitable surfacing
- Ramps on equipment that lead nowhere
- Once on the equipment, no way to get off
- Easy to get on but nothing to do
- Designs that assume all disabled children are in wheelchairs and cannot leave them
- The equipment does not provide any risk or challenge

2.135 There is a range of other legislation dealing with health and safety of play areas. In addition, British Standard BS 8300-1:2018 also references inclusive and accessible design and there are EU standards as well. Risk Benefit Analyses were introduced by Play England as part of the Playbuilder programme as a way of assessing the risk without designing out the benefits.

#### *Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Play Parks Strategy*

2.136 When Stockton Council commissions a new play area accessibility and inclusion are key criteria when considering a design, built into the design brief. Play area designs and equipment conform to appropriate EN standards for play. There are also the Council's duties under the Equalities Act of 2010.

2.137 With the upcoming refurbishment of the junior/toddlers play area at Preston Park officers are:

- Liaising with the Council's SEND and Inclusion team
- Are working with the Parent Carers Forum
- Will be networking with the Yorkshire Play Group regarding accessibility
- Will be working with the Activity Alliance, a national charity which helps organisations include disabled people in sport and activity

2.138 The lessons learnt from this exercise will help inform future play provision designs with respect to inclusion and accessibility.

2.139 In July 2021, SBC received a letter from Luke Hall MP (Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government) and Justin Tomlinson MP (Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work) regarding accessible and inclusive play areas. This correspondence highlighted that ensuring new and refurbished play areas was a government priority and a key area of focus in the National Disability Strategy. The letter also requested for any examples of best practice to be shared.

## Changing Places Toilet (CPT) Facilities Provision (Both SBC and Private)

2.140 CPT's are larger accessible toilets for severely disabled people, with equipment such as hoists, privacy screens, adult-sized changing benches and space for carers. Currently there are only two registered CPT facilities within the borough of Stockton, both of which are at the two Tesco supermarkets in North Stockton and Billingham. Although the Borough has a number of well-equipped disabled facilities, they fall short of meeting the requirements to be registered as a CPT facility. Based on the current lack of geographical coverage there is a clear need to deliver more facilities across the Borough in places of high footfall such as town centres, visitor attractions and retail parks.

2.141 To support the provision of new Changing Places Facilities, the government has launched a Changing Places Fund which seeks to deliver £30m worth on investment in new CP facilities across the UK. The aim of the funding is to increase the number of Changing Places Toilets in publicly accessible places, however, the funding is for the provision of new and additional Changing Places toilets rather than the upgrade and expansion of existing facilities. Therefore, as part of an Expression of Interest (EOI) into this fund, SBC has submitted two schemes located in both Stockton North and Thornaby but there are no guarantees that these schemes will meet the funding criteria.

2.142 Other sites were considered as part of the EOI, including the town centres, however, because of the timing around some of the town centre regeneration initiatives and proposed development plans, it was challenging to put schemes forward as part of this round of funding.

2.143 Private sector organisations in the area are also looking to provide Changing Places Facilities but this is still to be confirmed.

## Signing Posters

2.144 During the review, a Member commented on the use of a "signing poster/ card" in a local supermarket café and the potential for wider application to customer service centres and receptions. Select Committee Members supported this suggestion to assist communication with the deaf community.



## Feedback from Disability Groups and Organisations

2.145 The following section highlights the key themes which have emerged from feedback received from disability groups and organisations following informal consultations.

2.146 The Select Committee reviewed the detailed feedback from the contributors and the recurring themes from the feedback are summarised below followed by a summary of the issues raised in relation to specific disabilities.

## **Common Themes**

- It is essential to understand the needs of the Borough
- There is a need for improved communication and consultation including direct contact with service users
- Better information about support should be available
- Raising awareness, acceptance and understanding of all disabilities and hidden disabilities among Council staff and the wider community is vital
- Staff should be educated and trained using specialist organisations and people with disabilities
- Professionals should be supported to understand each need
- There should be a Council commitment for the co-production of services
- A progression model should be established for continuous steps to promote inclusion
- Increase a range of opportunities so individuals have the ability to become active local citizens

## **SEND, Learning Differences and Disabilities Horizons Specialist Academy Trust**

- More information should be available through schools, libraries, paediatric wards and social media
- Increasing the number of places accessible to wheelchair users
- Ensuring that Council staff are fully trained to assist disabled children and young adults with getting on and off transport
- Increased provision for social opportunities and in particular sporting opportunities to support healthier, active lifestyles
- Improved access to community therapies

## **Stockton Parent Carer Forum**

- Provision of hydro pool facilities within Stockton so that families do not have to travel out of area
- Need for improved access to children's play areas and equipment
- Need for improved provision of changing places

## **Autism - Daisy Chain**

- Access to health care, in particular mental health care, was the biggest barrier for neurodiverse individuals
- More flexibility on the number of support sessions. Individuals with autism may struggle in social situations or have high levels of anxiety, therefore making it difficult for them to open-up to a healthcare professional quickly
- Awareness, acceptance and understanding in Community Spaces and Public Services
- Community based opportunities for neurodiverse individuals to connect, socialise and reduce loneliness and isolation
- Neurodiversity specific support – housing, benefits and employment
- Access to neurodiverse specific support within mental health and social care services.

## **Deaf Community - RNID**

- More services are needed for the deaf community
- Ability to contact the Local Authority, Police and other agencies via text
- During the pandemic, face coverings have caused problems. Smile shields facilitate lip reading but many places (including care homes) refuse to use these

## **Guide Dogs for the Blind**

- Equality impact assessments were highlighted as one of most importance tools for the Local Authority however it was felt that these were often an afterthought and did not include sufficient mitigating measures
- Inclusive building regeneration projects were essential to address the needs of visually impaired individuals
- Removal of kerbs was highlighted as the main barrier. The removal of the kerb to make a level surface can be confusing to the dog as it is not able to differentiate between the pathway and road
- Access refusals for shops, business premises and taxis was highlighted as a potential issue and a zero tolerance approach by the Local Authorities was advocated
- Internal layout changes during the COVID-19 pandemic had also been a problem; one-way systems, floor stickers and main entrance traffic lights were not accessible to visually impaired people or their guide dogs.

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## Key Findings

- In the UK, approximately 1 in 5 people have a disability. If disabled people face less barriers, the social and economic well-being of the area is likely to improve
- Disabled people have been one of the most disproportionately affected groups by Covid-19 and it is important they are no longer marginalized and have equal opportunities to participate in the social, cultural, and economic activities within the Borough
- The Equality Act 2010 defines disability as a protected characteristic. Therefore, an individual with a mental or physical impairment which has 'a substantial or long-term adverse effect' on their daily activities is protected from discrimination
- The Public Sector Equality Duty requires organisations, such as Local Authorities, "to consider how they could positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations. It requires equality considerations to be reflected into the design of policies and the delivery of services, including internal policies, and for these issues to be kept under review"
- As a Local Authority, and a service provider, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council has a duty to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and reasonable adjustments must be made to enable disabled people to access services and functions
- Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council is committed to putting every person who needs support at the heart of all that they do and for people with disabilities and mental health needs this means being flexible and offering everyone who is eligible for social care services the opportunity to direct their own support
- SBC is committed to providing appropriate support and services to employees and residents across the Borough with disabilities. This review has demonstrated that each directorate strives to incorporate the needs of disabled people into the delivery of their services. As part of the review, a vast amount of evidence has been collated highlighting best practice across the Council
- SBC also work with external organizations and charities, such as Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust and Middlesbrough and Stockton Mind, to provide services and support to residents and employees
- Children and young people (0-25) with special educational needs and disabilities, and their parents and carers, are supported through a variety of strategies and services, including The Stockton-on-Tees SEND Joint Commissioning Strategy 2018-2021, the Local Offer, and The Educational Psychology Service
- The needs of disabled people are also considered when new projects or schemes are devised and implemented
- The SBC Local Plan states that, for new dwellings, 50% are required to meet Category 2 standard (accessible and adaptable dwellings) and 8% are required to meet Category 3 standard (wheelchair user dwellings)
- The Council is dedicated to engaging positively with residents and values their input on planning, developing and managing the built environment. The Council's 'street charter' sets out a list of actions and commitments, which everyone involved agrees to abide by. These

have been formed under different headings, which represent the main issues that pedestrians, particularly those that are blind or partially sighted people face when negotiating the built environment in Stockton-on-Tees:

- Advertising boards and street and café furniture
  - Wheelie bins and recycling bags
  - Overhanging shrubbery and branches
  - Parking on pavements
  - Crossings
  - New Council developments: shared space
  - Consultation
- There have been reported problems with dropped kerbs for disabled people across the Borough. SBC follow government guidance, contained in the 'Inclusivity Mobility Document', to ensure that dropped kerbs are installed in the correct location and to the correct specifications. Funding for dropped kerbs currently sits within the wider budget for all Highways Asset Maintenance. Dropped kerb projects are also eligible for funding through the Ward Members Community Participation Budget and the Ward Transport Budget. Inspections have been, and can be, carried out where there are issues with dropped kerbs to identify areas for consideration if potential funding opportunities arose
  - Changing Places Toilet (CPT) are larger accessible toilets for severely disabled people, with equipment such as hoists, privacy screens, adult-sized changing benches and space for carers. Currently there are only two registered CPT facilities within the Borough. Based on the current lack of geographical coverage, there is a clear need to deliver more facilities across the Borough in places of high footfall such as town centres, visitor attractions and retail parks
  - The Council has a strong workforce culture and environment that supports employee wellbeing. The Council aims to attract, retain, and develop an inclusive workforce with the right values and behaviours that reflects the diversity of the community. The Council provides an accessible and inclusive recruitment process by making reasonable adjustments where required, offering flexible approaches when assessing people so disabled job applicants have the best opportunity to demonstrate they can do the job, and guaranteeing an interview to those applicants who declare a disability and meet the essential criteria for the role. SBC works alongside the VCSE to promote job vacancies with the aim of attracting and recruiting people with disabilities
  - The Disability Staff Forum provides a peer support network for employees with a disability. The forum is a platform for sharing information about disability issues. Forum members are also able to champion issues affecting employees with a disability. Through the forum there is an opportunity to make recommendations regarding service delivery. The forum serves to encourage and influence better organisational support for employees with a disability and to support individuals in the workplace
  - Whilst recognising the positive work across the Borough and the examples of best practice, feedback from disability groups and organisations has shown that there is no room for complacency and highlighted the need for:
    - Better understanding of the needs of the Borough
    - Improved communication and consultation including direct contact with service users
    - Better information about support
    - Increasing opportunities for individuals to become active local citizens

- Raising awareness, acceptance and understanding of all disabilities and hidden disabilities among Council staff and the wider community
- Educating and training staff
- Supporting professionals to understand each need
- Commitment to co-production of services
- Creating a progression model for continuous steps to promote inclusion

## **Conclusion**

The review has demonstrated that Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council is committed to putting every person who needs support at the heart of all that they do and providing appropriate support and services to employees and residents across the Borough with disabilities. The Council also works with other organisations, the VCSE and local businesses to deliver this and each directorate strives to incorporate the needs of disabled people into the delivery of their services. As part of the review a vast amount of evidence has been collated highlighting the services and support available and best practice across the Council.

However, whilst recognising this commitment and positive work, feedback from disability groups and organisations has highlighted the need for greater understanding and awareness of all disabilities and hidden disabilities as part of a continuous journey to make Stockton a disability inclusive Borough.

The review has also shown that it is only possible to ensure that equality considerations are fully reflected in the design of policies and the delivery of services where there is genuine dialogue and co-production takes place with people with disabilities.

## **Recommendations**

1. That opportunities to share and promote good practice across the Council and wider community are identified.
2. That all Directorates be asked to review and demonstrate how disability inclusivity and co-production of services is embedded within their areas.
3. That a Disability Inclusion Charter is published to evidence the Council's commitment to being a Disability Inclusive Borough.
4. That an Equality Statement is produced setting out the Council's approach and commitment to equality and diversity.
5. That an external Equality Information Directory is developed to better inform the public and assist with signposting of services.
6. That improvements are made to the Council's website to support easy navigation to up to date information about current services and future plans.
7. That a programme of staff awareness raising is put in place to highlight the different types of disability and how to best serve those with physical and hidden disabilities in order to improve communication and customer service.
8. That additional disability training modules be incorporated in the proposed E-learning management system, due to go live in February 2022 and consideration be given as to how to make disability training procured directly by services more widely available.

9. That a publicity campaign is developed to continue to highlight the problems caused by parking over dropped kerbs with opportunities for improvements investigated subject to funding.
10. That engagement of disability groups in the VCSE Adults Forum/ Disability Task and Finish Group, facilitated by Catalyst, be kept under review to ensure that it provides a representative and effective voice for disabled people of the Borough.
11. That lessons learnt from the upcoming refurbishment of the junior/toddlers play area at Preston Park be used to inform future play provision designs with respect to inclusion and accessibility.
12. That the provision of changing places toilet facilities be progressed, where practicable, as part the Town Centre Development Programme, subject to funding through the Changing Places Fund.
13. That posters/ cards promoting simple sign phrases are adopted across customer services centres and receptions to assist communication with the deaf community.

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## Glossary

BMBF	Bright Minds Big Futures
RNID	Royal National Institute for the Deaf
SBC	Stockton Borough Council
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disability
CPT	Changing Places Toilet
VSCE	Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise
ME	Myalgic Encephalitis
CFS	Chronic Fatigue Syndrome
SLE	Systemic Lupus Erythematosus
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
MS	Multiple Sclerosis
MDS	Multidisciplinary Service
EIP	Early Intervention and Prevention
TEWV	Tees Esk and Wear Valley
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
EP's	Educational Psychologists
DFGs	Disabled Facilities Grants
DWP	Department for Work and Pension
SEN	Special Educational Needs
RNIB	Royal National Institute for the Blind
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act
DfT	Department for Transport
GDS	Government Digital Service
UES	User Experience survey
PBS	Positive Behavioural Support
CAMHS	Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services
PIPA	Plan Inclusive Play Areas
EOI	Expression of Interest