

DISABILITY AND INCLUSION FORUM

Monday 11 March 2024

Present: Angela Clark (Chair), Lisa Hughes (Vice-Chair), Sharon Carrigan, Peter Haley, Dominic Manley, Jatinder Singh Rakhra and Councillors Helen Price and Geoff Hill.

Officers: Mikey Lloyd, Ellen McManus-Fry, Lynne Lidster, Rosanna Sansom, Dug Tremellen, Amanda Gregory and Jennifer Hardy

Officers in attendance virtually: Kiran Hunjan

Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed all to the Forum.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Sharon Bunce, Victoria Holt, Robin Pemberton and Councillor Del Campo.

Councillor Hill attended as substitute.

Minutes From the Last Forum

The Chair noted that the Forum had requested minutes be more reflective of what happened in the meeting and invited Peter Haley, Forum Member, to speak who had some comments on the previous meetings minutes.

Peter Haley had concerns that a lot of the discussion on the Broadway Car Park item from previous meeting had not been included in the minutes. Peter Haley explained that discussion surrounding Shop Mobility, Blue Badge parking and location of the car park had few details in the minutes, even citing a part of the video where Councillor Werner had offered to improve communications with community groups and People to Places and offered to meet with Forum Members, which was hoped to be arranged for the next week.

The Chair requested that the previous meetings minutes be updated and republished.

ACTION: Mikey Lloyd, Democratic Services Officer, to update Broadway Car Park item in previous meetings minutes and republish.

The Forum adjourned at 11:09am to allow a technical issue to be resolved.

The Forum reconvened at 11:14am.

AGREED: That the minutes be approved.

Pavements and Roads

Dug Tremellen, Transport Policy Manager, thanked the Forum for being able to attend and gave a brief overview on what they were doing on pavements and roads but added that it would be a useful opportunity for the Forum to ask questions as well.

Dug Tremellen explained that the approach to road and pavement maintenance could be demystified into three main parts. Firstly, there was a planned maintenance program, which involved larger maintenance projects planned well in advance and budgeted for, with details published ahead of time. Secondly, there was a planned upgrade program, including projects such as local cycling and walking infrastructure upgrades, which were developed and implemented over time following consultation with stakeholders. Examples included completed projects on Stovall Road and ongoing works on King Street in Maidenhead. Finally, there were reactive fixes, where a small budget and resources were allocated to address spot fixes and individual reported issues as they arose.

The Chair asked if there were any plans to upgrade the yellow bricks on the High Street and Queen Street due to their undulating contours, which posed trip hazards, especially for individuals in wheelchairs?

Dug Tremellen said there had been a study conducted on improving most of the streets in Maidenhead town centre, including those with outdated paving such as Queen Street. While the Maidenhead paving master plan, which was approximately 10 years old, had been applied to some streets already, such as the main pedestrianised High Street and around the Waterside quarter, there were still others in need of attention. Initial design work had been done for Queen Street, with some early ideas outlined. However, due to limited budget availability, there were currently no plans to proceed with upgrades for Queen Street or other streets requiring attention. Nonetheless, it remained on the agenda for future consideration.

Dominic Manley said the condition of the pavements on both sides of the road on the High Street, particularly between Market Street and the library, was a concern due to the narrow, sloping, and uneven surfaces. This presented challenges for individuals parking in that area and trying to navigate to other parts of the town centre. He hoped that these issues were also part of the program for future improvements.

Dug Tremellen confirmed that stretch of the High Street, along with Queen Street, was part of the long-term improvement program, however funding was currently unavailable. Dug Tremellen also said it was evident that parking arrangements in the area also needed consideration and combining improvements to both the High Street and Queen Street could involve reallocating parking spaces to widen footways. This approach aimed to avoid displacing disabled parking spots and required careful coordination. Nonetheless, addressing these concerns was part of the overall program based on the study conducted.

Councillor Price said that in the case of residential streets, issues like paving sticking up were typically reported through the system. However, if action had not been taken despite a report being made many months previous, it suggested that the severity of the issue might not have been adequately assessed. Residents' concerns about such hazards were valid, especially considering the potential risk they posed. Councillor Price suggested that they may need to reevaluate the assessment process to ensure that reported issues were addressed promptly and appropriately.

Dug Tremellen said that for any location requiring attention, a site visit by one of the maintenance teams would be arranged. The assessment would be based on specific criteria, primarily focusing on safety concerns due to prioritisation of works. If there were further details about a specific location, the team was open to receiving them for further review by an engineer.

Councillor Price said the concerns were raised regarding the impact on elderly and disabled residents' quality of life due to safety hazards. Elderly residents expressed fears of falling, leading to isolation and physical inactivity, while disabled residents faced challenges navigating steep drop curbs and obstacles outdoors. Councillor Price suggested that exploring alternative funding sources, such as public health funds designated for accident prevention, could address these trip hazards, and improve accessibility for residents, thereby reducing isolation and promoting community engagement.

Dug Tremellen noted that street users often identify subtle yet impactful hazards that require attention and encouraged residents to report such concerns through various channels, including online forms, to ensure timely action. Regarding the integration of public health objectives into road maintenance, ongoing discussions were highlighted between the team and public health officials, aiming to align funding allocations with community health priorities. Dug Tremellen continued those investments in roads and transportation served not only functional purposes but also contributed to broader societal benefits, such as health, independence, and environmental sustainability, warranting clear communication of these multifaceted impacts in project proposals.

Lisa Hughes raised a question about the allocation of funding across motor vehicles, cycling, and pedestrian infrastructure, noting a perceived imbalance favouring motor vehicles and sought clarification on how priorities were set for maintenance, upgrades, and fixes across these modes, requesting insight into the funding distribution among them.

Dug Tremellen explained that whilst they didn't have specific funding figures available, funding allocation could be found in budget documents. Dug Tremellen emphasised the responsibility of the highway authority in maintaining roads and streets, which encompassed a substantial asset spanning approximately 600 miles. It was noted that due to the higher wear and tear on carriageways, a significant portion of maintenance funding naturally goes toward them. However, during upgrades, attention was given to the entire road width to address various needs efficiently. Planned upgrades currently prioritised initiatives outlined in three improvement plans: the local cycling and walking infrastructure plan, the bus service improvement plan, and the electric vehicle charge point implementation plan. Dug Tremellen finished by explaining that reactive fixes were addressed based on incoming priorities throughout the year.

Lisa Hughes wished to raise two specific concerns. Firstly, regarding pavement works near the railway bridge on the Maidenhead railway line, completed without a dropped curb despite tactile paving present on the other side, highlighting confusion over such oversight. Secondly, Lisa Hughes reiterated a long-standing issue in the Furze Platt Ward, spanning a stretch of 3/4 of a mile from Cookham Road to Maidenhead Road, where there were no safe crossings for residents from the Spencer Farm estate to access essential services like the chemist, post office, and grocery store, despite previous site visits and discussions with local authorities. Dug Tremellen said he was happy to have a conversation outside the meeting regarding these issues.

Sharon Carrigan mentioned their involvement in the Learning Disability Partnership Board and the Speaking Out group, which conducted a survey on pavement conditions. They expressed uncertainty about whether the Disability and Inclusion Forum was aware of this initiative and whether the presentation created from the survey had been shared or acted upon. Sharon Carrigan highlighted the importance of addressing lived experiences of individuals facing obstacles in navigating from point A to B due to issues like tree roots or uneven pavements and offered to follow up by providing the presentation if necessary. The Chair suggested this be shared with Dug Tremellen.

The Chair noted the absence of a timeframe for maintenance or upgrades, specifically around the High Street and Queen Street and requested clarification on the timeline for their upgrade.

Dug Tremellen clarified that the lack of a timeframe for maintenance or upgrades, such as those for the High Street and Queen Street, was primarily due to funding constraints. Dug Tremellen explained that historically, transportation funding often originated from central government through bidding opportunities. The approach involved preparing projects for bidding, but opportunities for funding bids were currently limited.

Update on Network Rail Lifts at Maidenhead Station

Lisa Hughes provided an update from the Network Rail sponsor on the ongoing works on platforms two and three at Maidenhead station, as part of the Great Western Railway accessibility panel, discussions were held at the September meeting. Network Rail sponsor and a colleague from Great Western Railway attended prior to or on the day of some closures. It was noted that due to overcrowding on platforms two and three, an additional staircase was being constructed, necessitating the closure of the lift serving these platforms from October 2023 to August 2024. Lisa Hughes said that this arrangement posed challenges for passengers unable to use stairs, who had to travel via another station, potentially adding significant time to their journey. Despite concerns raised, the project proceeded as planned.

Lisa Hughes discussed the ongoing works included the installation of mid-platform fencing to improve passenger flows and serve as a suicide mitigation measure. Progress had been made on the new staircase construction behind the station shuttering, with contractors Morgan Sindall expected to complete the main civil elements by the end of the March 2024. Additionally, the excavation of the new lift pit had been completed, with concrete poured to create the lift pit and base. Construction of the lift shaft would soon commence, with lift installation anticipated to begin in May. Lisa Hughes explained that no complaints had been received by Network Rail MTR, operators of the Elizabeth Line or Great Western Railway. Additional staff would continue to assist passengers on platforms two and three during peak times until the lifts were operational again. The project remained on track to complete the lift and new stairs by the end of August.

Lisa Hughes then shared a recent experience she had regarding booking assistance through the Passenger Assist app. After booking assistance, she received a call from a Passenger Assist representative within half an hour, informing her about ongoing works at the station and offering assistance tailored to her needs. Lisa Hughes said upon arrival someone met her, helped carry her mobility equipment and luggage upstairs, and assisted her onto the train. The return journey was equally smooth, with assistance provided at the carriage door. Overall, Lisa Hughes said the experience was highly positive, with responsive and helpful assistance throughout.

Non-mainstream housing

Lynne Lidster, Director of Commissioning, opened the item by explaining that Forum had posed a number of questions that covered adult social care, housing (including disabled facilities grants), and planning policy. Lynne Lidster explained she would address adult social care, while housing questions would be answered by Amanda Gregory, Assistant Director, Housing and Public Protection. It was noted that planning policy colleagues could not attend but had provided some answers.

Lynne Lidster explained that their strategic plan aimed for individuals to lead fulfilling lives at home, within their communities, and with their families. They prioritised support that enabled independent living and strived to minimise the need for specialist accommodation unless necessary. Key principles included prevention, community investment, choice, and treating everyone with compassion, respect, and dignity.

Lynne Lidster noted how a supported housing needs assessment had been conducted, commissioned by adult social care, covering sheltered housing for older adults, Extra Care facilities, residential and nursing homes, and accommodations for individuals with learning disabilities, mental health needs and or autism.

It was explained that the housing needs assessment projected a need for 420 units of retirement accommodation, with none in the affordable and social rented sector but all in the private sector by 2035. It was assumed that 50% of this need could be met through accessible mainstream housing, reflecting the aim for individuals to remain in their communities rather

than moving into specialist accommodation unnecessarily. Housing with care or Extra Care housing usually involved onsite carers, such as at Lady Elizabeth House, where dedicated carers were available round the clock. The estimated need for such housing by 2035 was 200 units, catering to both self-funded individuals and those eligible for care from the council.

Lynne Lidster continued that in terms of residential and nursing care provision, they had a significant number of care homes registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in the borough and when comparing to neighbouring boroughs, had double the amount of such facilities. It was noted that the need for additional bed spaces in residential care was minimal, with only five projected to be needed by 2035. Additionally, there was an estimated oversupply of 250 bed spaces in nursing care, with around 250 void spaces at any given time.

It was explained that for people with mental health needs and those with learning disabilities, the estimated need up to 2030 was 100 units and 50 units respectively. Most of these needs could be accommodated in general needs housing that was adapted to provide appropriate support. Lynne Lidster explained that many individuals with learning disabilities in the borough resided in smaller, adapted general needs accommodations where they received 24-hour care and support, rather than in specifically purpose-built facilities.

Lynne Lidster noted that respite care offered family or unpaid caregivers a break from their caregiving responsibilities, ranging from a few hours to weeks. It could be provided in various settings, including at home through organisations like Crossroads or day centres like Boyne Grove. Care homes could offer respite stays regulated by the Care Quality Commission, and specialised respite options could be commissioned based on individual needs, either within or outside the borough.

Shared Lives offered accommodation and support, akin to fostering, for individuals with diverse care needs, primarily learning disabilities or autism. Families or individuals provided long-term support in their homes, with access to additional services. The council was aiming to expand Shared Lives provision beyond the identified need of 11 placements by 2030 to reduce reliance on residential care. Lynne Lidster noted that a contract with West Berkshire Council was underway to facilitate this expansion.

Lynne Lidster explained that transitioning to adulthood involved preparing young people supported by Children's Services for adult care and support needs, a process termed "approaching adulthood." This included individuals aged 18 to 25 with an EHCP (Education, Health, and Care Plan) who may remain under Children's Services. Collaboration between adult and children's services aimed to identify and plan for young people's needs earlier, ensuring accessible and affordable provisions closer to home.

Lynne Lidster noted that they were developing a supported accommodation strategy by year-end, focusing on good or outstanding care. Their independent living project reviewed and met care needs, while collaboration with children and adult commissioners was improving planning for young people. They were also exploring building on an Imperial Road site pending a business case. The proposal for the Imperial Road site included two blocks of supported living accommodation for people with learning disabilities. Each block would have 11 lifetime homes, with shared homes on the ground floor and self-contained flats upstairs. Lynne Lidster said they had submitted a pre-planning application and would develop a business case for member approval, followed by procuring a building partner.

Amanda Gregory gave an overview of the Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) which received around £1 million in funding, with approximately 69 grants done this year at an average of £8,000 each. Amanda Gregory explained that the maximum grant was £30,000, available for both adults and children, with means testing for adults but not for those under 19. The new DFG policy, to be implemented later this year, would allow grants to exceed £30,000 for specific cases. It was noted there was a good take up with around 30-40 more grants in the system. Amanda Gregory explained that landlords and tenants could apply for the grant, with

landlord permission required if the tenant applied. The new discretionary scheme would also not require means testing for tenants, providing more flexibility.

The Chair said it was important to note that there were young people in the borough with severe physical disabilities who also required sheltered and supported housing. While the focus was on older people during the discussion, it was crucial not to overlook the needs of younger individuals in the community who required similar forms of accommodation and support.

Councillor Price asked for clarification on residential nursing and if there was an oversupply or the need to provide more. Lynne Lidster explained that in the borough, there was an oversupply of nursing care provision, and they would often see people moving into the borough from other areas where nursing care was less available.

Councillor Price said that was the impression she had and that with all the nursing homes, could see how people might encourage their parents to sell up and move nearby so they could give support. Councillor Price said that the overall picture looked positive.

Lynne Lidster said the oversupply of nursing care in the borough did pose challenges because many people move in from outside and later run out of funds and that upon moving into the borough become residents, which leaves strained resources. In an ideal scenario, resources would match the population needs, but currently, there was an excess.

Councillor Price said that with the existing surplus, developers in Windsor were still pursuing new construction projects, including a significant site. Councillor Price raised questions about coordination in the planning process and if already there was excess capacity, why were new planning permissions being granted?

Lynne Lidster said there was a clear need for sheltered accommodation for older people, especially in the private rented market. However, developers' needs assessments often differed from those of local authorities. Developers typically based their assessments on broader geographical areas, which could inflate the perceived need. Additionally, developers may have specific criteria for care homes that may not align with existing facilities in the borough. Lynne Lidster said that local authorities consider various factors beyond just accommodation need when evaluating planning applications for care homes, including broader planning considerations and residents' personal preferences. While developers may conduct their own assessments, these are secondary considerations in the planning process. Ultimately, the choice of care home was often a matter of personal preference for individuals.

Councillor Price asked for clarification on the 250 unfilled spaces as the borough was in desperate need for those sleeping rough because there was not enough accommodation and asked if there were any creative ways to help those that have nowhere to go.

Lynne Lidster clarified that the 250 vacant units were dispersed across various newer care homes in the borough, primarily designated for older individuals. These vacancies were often found in the more expensive facilities. While she acknowledged the limited influence over these vacancies, Lynne Lidster affirmed the awareness of the availability of these accommodations.

Peter Haley asked for clarification over the figures in housing for older people where it was said that there was a net need for 420 units but none in the social and affordable rent sector. Whilst Peter Haley did not dispute the number, he wished to understand the figure better.

Lynne Lidster explained that there were currently 1017 units of that type available for rent in the borough and noted that housing associations had challenges filling them. Lynne said that there was a greater demand for and affordability in the private sector which explained the needs going up.

Lisa Hughes said that were individuals with learning difficulties and autism who were living with or supported by increasingly elderly parents and asked how this is captured in the needs analysis?

Lynne Lidster said the community team for people with learning disabilities was aware of individuals who may require support, whether they were currently under our care or living with family or friends providing assistance and maintained a detailed forward plan for those not formally supported by the borough, including individuals living with aging family members.

Lisa Hughes asked if, in the data, they delineated between people with autism and learning difficulties? Lynne Lidster said they assessed individuals based on their eligibility for adult social care, considering various factors such as Care Act needs, mental health issues, autism, or learning disabilities. The approach was personalised and aimed to determine the appropriate care and support for each individual's preferences and circumstances.

Lisa Hughes asked about the current applications that were discussed for the Disability Facilities Grant and the targets for the timeline of the process. For instance, how long does it typically take from the submission of an application to its completion?

Amanda Gregory explained that the timeline for processing a Disability Facilities Grant can vary depending on the individual's needs and the complexity of the required work. While there was typically a six-month period outlined in legislation, factors such as assessments, type of work needed, and potential need for planning permission could influence the duration. Additionally, since individuals were responsible for finding their own contractors, availability of the building trade could also impact the timeline.

Loneliness and Isolation

This item was moved up on the agenda due to the officer presenting the Broadway Car Park item not being ready.

Lynne Lidster and Amanda Gregory left the meeting at 12:15pm.

Jennifer Hardy, Transformation and Communities Partnership, opened the item and explained how the Campaign to End Loneliness defined loneliness as a subjective feeling of lacking companionship, resulting from a mismatch between desired and actual social relationships, while social isolation referred to the objective measure of contact quantity. Loneliness was considered a normal part of life, with fluctuations over time.

Jennifer Hardy gave some updates on some of the projects being undertaken by the communities' team. The first project involved a new carer's initiative in collaboration with Slough Borough Council and Bracknell Forest Council as part of an East Berkshire Consortium focused on innovative support for carers. RBWM's role was to examine community support for carers, addressing specific challenges they faced and promoting integration. This included raising awareness about carers, facilitating access to information and support, and preventing carers from experiencing loneliness and isolation. Collaboration with the wider community and local businesses was essential to address these challenges effectively.

Rosanna Sansom gave insight on the Community Information Hub project that aimed to revamp the existing events directory on the RBWM website and to serve as a central resource for community events and group information. Working closely with the libraries team, the project sought to provide accessible and up-to-date information for residents, with a planned release in April. It emphasised the importance of dynamic and easily navigable resources to promote community connectedness and support for various groups, including carers and domiciliary care recipients.

Rosanna Sansom explained another initiative, led by the adult social care front door teams, involved leveraging a software to refer individuals to community resources for support. This collaborative effort with community and voluntary groups aimed to ensure that support services were seamlessly integrated and accessible. Furthermore, the council offered volunteering opportunities for individuals and supported voluntary and community groups across the borough. Rosanna Sansom said the volunteering offer was being refreshed to ensure the availability of up-to-date information and support for residents and businesses alike, with a scheduled release in April. It was noted that questions or updates on these projects could be addressed in future meetings.

Jennifer Hardy said the RBWM Together project, in collaboration with Ellen McManus Fry, Equalities and Community Engagement Officer, and Councillor Moriarty, aimed to utilise RBWM Together as a platform to address loneliness and social isolation. Currently, efforts were underway to create a hub like the "Here to Help" pages, focusing on providing advice and support related to loneliness and social isolation, including personal stories to raise awareness and combat stigma. This ongoing project would be promoted by the communications team in the coming months, with opportunities for feedback once the site was live.

Jennifer Hardy summarised that these key projects linked to loneliness and social isolation were part of RBWM's efforts to support prevention in the borough. Utilising asset-based Community Development (ABCD) principles, the council aimed to co-produce solutions with communities and ensure projects met the needs of residents, council colleagues, and the voluntary sector. Addressing loneliness and social isolation required a multifaceted approach, involving various initiatives and collective efforts from the community, local businesses, and the council. Jennifer Hardy said that everyone could contribute, whether through small gestures like checking in with neighbours or participating in larger cross-council partnership projects.

Councillor Hill left the meeting at 12:23pm

The Chair asked how individuals who were lonely and isolated with no online facility would be able to access to directory? Rosanna Sansom said they were collaborating with the libraries and organisations supporting digital literacy to address this issue. However, they emphasised the ongoing need to reassess and adapt the project to reach all sections of society, indicating a commitment to inclusivity and continued improvement.

The Chair said the potential of the directory was huge and asked how it would be updated? Rosanna Sansom said that responsibility for maintaining the accuracy of information on the directory lied with the groups themselves. Events would be removed once their date had passed, while group information would be retained for a year as per data protection best practices. Groups would receive reminders to review and update their information annually, ensuring the directory remained current and reliable.

Councillor Price said that information about local organisations was also shared in the residents' newsletter, expanding awareness of available resources. Additionally, a paper-based directory of Windsor groups, supported by the Public Health Innovations Fund, was being launched to address the needs of those without digital access. This initiative complemented existing efforts and emphasised the role of the library as a resource hub. Councillor Price furthermore explained that the community champion, Councillor Jack Douglas, played a vital role in promoting volunteering opportunities and fostering community engagement. These interconnected initiatives contributed to a comprehensive approach in addressing loneliness and social isolation.

Rosanna Sansom explained that they had collaborated with the developer of the Windsor directory as part of the initiative and with volunteering efforts they had coordinated closely with Councillor Douglas. Rosanna Sansom said if there were other individuals or groups that should be included, they were open to expanding their collaboration network.

The Chair suggested that the communities' team could provide an update in six months time as it would be interesting to hear how things were going and being rolled out.

Broadway Car Park

The Chair opened the item by discussing the imminent demolition of the car park and its implications, particularly on Shop Mobility and Blue Badge car parking. The Chair raised concerns regarding potential disruptions and the need to integrate planning for adjacent areas affected by the demolition. The Chair emphasised that it should not become a demolition site, necessitating a coordinated approach to mitigate its impact on accessibility, especially for those with disabilities.

Kiran Hunjan, Senior Project Manager for RBWM Property Company, acknowledged the broader implications of the demolition including Blue Badge parking but explained it was outside of her remit and it would involve coordination with the highways team. Kiran Hunjan highlighted a recent delay in the demolition was attributed to the discovery of asbestos within the structure, which promoted immediate removal actions and proactive communication with businesses and residents in the surrounding area. Detailed adjustments to the project timeline were discussed, with a phased approach to road closures at the end of May and early June aimed at minimising disruptions while ensuring public safety. Closures would be between 9am and 3pm. Notable efforts were outlined such as liaising with bus companies and collaborating with retailers to mitigate potential inconveniences.

The Chair asked how the site would be left following demolition? Kiran Hunjan explained that the current approval was only for the demolition of the Broadway Car Park, with no plans confirmed for its post-demolition use, such as a surface car park. It was noted that the site would be cleared to the ramped ground level, maintaining access to an on-site substation, and be boarded, inaccessible to the public with any decisions on future land use made separately.

Dominic Manley expressed disappointment over the absence of information regarding future plans for Broadway Car Park and asked Kiran Hunjan if questions could be asked about a timetable for the future plans. Kiran Hunjan confirmed she was also looking for those answers and would provide an update upon any answers she received.

The Chair brought up that in the December meeting it was recalled that they had requested a meeting between councillors and members of the forum and that the meeting would be happening on Friday 22 March, the Chair apologised that the meeting had not taken place before this forum meeting.

Lisa Hughes said it was a shame that Councillor Hill had to leave before this item due to it being within his remit. Lisa Hughes continued that there appeared to be a lack of creative thinking regarding the loss of 31 parking spaces, comprising 14 Shop Mobility and 17 Blue Badge spaces. Lisa Hughes said that whilst it might not be feasible to replace all 31 spaces immediately, the absence of any proactive consideration or willingness to explore alternatives felt unreasonable in the context of the 21st century.

The Chair wished to conclude the item with a quote from the People to Place Spring Newsletter 'Accessibility is not just a privilege but a right for all.'

Any other business

The Chair spoke of how Sharon Bunce brought up a question about individuals with learning disabilities not being represented in the latest electoral registration campaigns. The Chair

noted that this was something Channel 4 News had picked up on and ran a short film which was very good. The Chair noted that Sharon Bunce was asking what RBWM does to reach out to these individuals. The Chair also noted that Victoria Holt, Community Development Manager, said she would share this with different groups and suggested that Ellen McManus-Fry could liaise on this.

Ellen McManus-Fry wished to raise two additional matters for discussion. Firstly, a consultation had been launched by Achieving for Children regarding new provisions for children with special educational needs. This consultation, open until April 26th, focused on proposals for new facilities and could be accessed on the council website or through AfC's website. Secondly, a resident raised concerns about signage related to blue badge holders in Vicus Way, particularly regarding exemptions from parking fees. In response, new signage had been installed in the car park, but concerns remained about its clarity, prompting discussion at the Forum to gather opinions.

Ellen McManus-Fry showed the Forum the new sign, which was positioned on the pedestrian ramp exiting the car park near the Ringo sign. Its purpose was to clarify that blue badge holders parking in the car park were exempt from paying via the Ringo app. Concerns were raised about the length of the wording and clarity regarding the exemption for all blue badge holders, not just those issued by RBWM. Feedback from Forum members was sought to assess whether the signage was sufficient or required further clarification.

Lisa Hughes noted that the new sign differed in appearance from other signs indicating free parking for blue badge holders and raised concerns about its placement, as well as the readability of the font. Lisa Hughes suggested that the sign may not be easily readable and offered to provide a picture from another location with clearer signage for comparison. Ellen McManus-Fry said she would look at the sign herself and check back with parking colleagues.

Dominic Manley mentioned that about a year ago, the group gathered in Windsor for the launch of the Access Able Guide for Windsor. At that time, it was planned that the Maidenhead guide would be completed in 2023 and requested to receive an update on the progress of this guide at the next meeting.

Peter Haley suggested that having a sign near each parking payment machine may be more effective at Vicus Way carpark. He explained this would ensure that drivers are informed about the exemption from parking fees before reaching the exit point and emphasised that placing signage at the payment machines could be more proactive in communicating the information to drivers. Ellen McManus-Fry confirmed she would take the feedback to parking colleagues.

Councillor Price raised concerns about the Forum's effectiveness in translating discussions into actionable outcomes to improve accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities. Councillor Price continued that despite efforts to enhance the Forum's operations, such as requesting advance papers and introducing relevant topics, progress had been limited. Councillor Price suggested a reevaluation of the Forum's structure and approach to better serve residents and promote equality.

Peter Haley expressed frustration with the recurring nature of discussions in the Forum and the lack of tangible progress. He raised concerns about the absence of paperwork and limited follow-up on proposed actions, noting that behind the committed participants are thousands of individuals relying on them to advocate for their causes. Peter Haley emphasised the feeling of being ignored rather than receiving outright rejection as particularly frustrating and expressed a desire for constructive feedback and collaborative action to address these issues effectively.

Dominic Manley pointed out that in the past, the forum had the attention of the CEO of the RBWM Property Company, who used to attend meetings and provide updates in person. Dominic Manley argued that it illustrated how their inability to engage with key individuals was

impeding progress. Dominic Manley also mentioned Neil Walter, Parking and Enforcement Manager, used to attend regularly.

Lisa Hughes said that despite efforts to improve engagement by holding additional meetings and requesting written reports, they had faced challenges in involving senior officers. Instead, they often interacted with junior or mid-tier officers who may lack the authority to drive change. Lisa Hughes noted they had scheduled a meeting next week to discuss parking with councillors and officers as there was still room for improvement. Lisa Hughes asked if anyone believed they could contribute more effectively to engagement than the Chair and themselves, they would welcome their input.

Peter Haley built on Lisa Hughes' remarks, saying he liked to add that the officers he had spoken to outside of the forum demonstrated integrity and goodwill. However, they lacked the influence to drive change. Despite assurances of follow-up and constant questioning, there was a sense of silence in the response. Peter Haley reflected on the minutes of the last meeting and was incredulous at how much was missed, particularly upon reviewing the meeting again on YouTube.

Dominic Manley wanted to acknowledge the tremendous amount of work both the Chair and Lisa Hughes did and was not directing any criticism toward them. He also noted that the presence of the Councillor Werner at the last meeting in December seemed promising and asked if it was feasible to attempt to directly engage with top members for a discussion and to explain frustrations.

The Chair said that whilst good intentions and meetings were valuable, what truly needed were decisions and that they would do their best to push for action and see what progress could be made. Dominic Manley said it seemed there was positive interest from Councillor Werner in receiving feedback and if he could then share it from the top down, alleviating the need for the forum to push upward from the bottom.

Ellen McManus-Fry said she appreciated the feedback regarding the agenda and the need to push certain issues forward. They had begun scheduling meetings earlier to set the agenda, allowing more time for preparation. Ellen McManus-Fry said obtaining written reports ahead of time remained a priority and was optimistic about seeing improvement on the next agenda. Additionally, Ellen McManus-Fry noted that Councillor Reynolds had recently taken on responsibilities for equality matters, and she planned to have regular meetings with him to discuss the Forum's concerns. Noting it could be a valuable mechanism for enhancing engagement and decision-making within the Forum.

The Chair emphasised the crucial role of the Forum, which had been active for many years. The topics discussed were fundamental and carried significant importance, as they advocated for inclusion for people with disabilities in the borough. The Chair said it was imperative that they made their voices heard and drive decisions on these vital matters, which had been ongoing for months and must strive to find answers to their recurring questions during each meeting.

Peter Haley shared a quick update that he had attended a recent cabinet meeting focused on the budget and was allotted three minutes to speak and said whilst the councillors were sympathetic, he didn't receive responses to his questions, leaving him no further forward. Despite assurances from Councillor Werner that they were heard, there had not been any action taken yet.

Councillor Price believed suggestion of a meeting with Councillor Werner was excellent. However, would strongly recommend requesting a joint meeting with the chief executive as well. This would encompass both the political and officer sides, ultimately aiming for a discussion at the highest level.

The Chair closed the meeting, noting that they would be unable to attend the next meeting in June, and that Lisa Hughes would be chairing the meeting.

The meeting, which began at 11.02 am, finished at 1.01 pm

Chair.....

Date.....