

COMMITTEE REPORTS AND UPDATES

COMMITTEE:	Community Committee		
MEETING DATE AND TIME	26th October 2023	LOCATION	Town Hall
REPORT FROM	Jackie MacArthur, Deputy Chief Officer on behalf of the Health and Wellbeing Working Group		
AGENDA ITEM REPORT TITLE	Item 12 Disability Positive Steps for Congleton Town Council and the Town		
Background	<p>Following item 11 of the Community Committee on the 29th June 2023 into making Congleton Town Centre more accessible, officers and members of the Health and Wellbeing Working Group have engaged with more people about the issues facing people with disabilities in Congleton and actions that the Town Council could consider.</p> <p>The Health and Wellbeing Working Group is seeking to develop initiatives to raise awareness amongst staff, councillors and the public about disability issues.</p> <p>Disability awareness involves recognising the rights and needs of disabled people and treating them with respect and equality. This includes understanding the challenges and barriers that disabled people may face and taking steps to create a more inclusive and accessible environment.</p> <p>There are many ways to promote disability awareness, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming educated about disability-related issues and the experiences of disabled people. • Using inclusive language and the correct etiquette when interacting with disabled people. • Advocating for disabled people’s rights. • Actively working to create more inclusive and accessible spaces (including removing physical and social barriers). • Supporting organisations that promote the rights and inclusion of disabled people. • Collaborating and learning from disabled people. <p>This matters because it helps to promote the rights and equality of disabled people. By understanding and acknowledging the challenges and barriers that disabled people may face, a more inclusive, supportive, and accessible society can be created.</p> <p>This includes ensuring public spaces are wheelchair accessible, providing accommodations in the workplace, and promoting the use of assistive</p>		

	<p>technologies. Becoming educated about disability issues and treating disabled people with respect and kindness, can also help to reduce stigma and discrimination against disabled people.</p> <p>Finally, disability awareness is important because it allows us to recognise the strengths and contributions of everyone, and helps create a more diverse and inclusive society.</p> <p><i>(with thanks to Disability Positive advocate Deborah Lawson for support with the wording in this section)</i></p> <p>The Health and Wellbeing group is looking to focus on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People with visual or hearing impairments • People with a physical disability • People who are Neurodiverse • People who are living with Dementia (with Congleton Partnership's Dementia Friends Group)
<p>Updates</p>	<p>Since the last meeting Cllrs Robert Douglas, Suzy Firkin, Amanda Martin, Susan Mead, Richard Walton and Kay Wesley along with six members of staff attended an awareness session on visual impairment. This was led by the East Cheshire Eye Society and Congleton Lion. Slides from the meeting can be viewed by clicking on this link.</p> <p>This was the first in a series of awareness sessions and raised awareness of the types of sight loss, the support available in Congleton and some of the potential barriers and obstacles that the 1000+ people in Congleton with sight loss (vision that can't be corrected with glasses or contact lens to an acceptable level).</p> <p>Steps recommended by the participants following the Visually Impaired Awareness Session:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take time to consider the points raised • Meet local visually impaired people to learn first-hand of their experiences in Congleton • Another organised visit with East Cheshire Eye Society to conducted guided walks using Sim Specs and blindfolds • Develop a Town Accessibility Plan <p>Actions taken/needed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of issues were raised around communications. The Town Hall has now ordered matt laminating pouches and will use matt paper where possible. • Issues were raised about clutter in the Town centre – and town council to look at how we can work with shops and others to help keep a clear way through town.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues raised around making black street furniture and kerb edges more visible to avoid accidents.
<p>Next Steps</p>	<p>The Health and Wellbeing Group is recommending that the Community Committee delegates responsibility to this group and officers to lead on these ‘quick-wins’ for the visually-impaired:</p> <p>A. Working with local businesses to de-clutter the town centre and make it more accessible for the visually impaired.</p> <p>B. Actions to make street furniture more visible to support people with visual impairment.</p> <p>Plus on the wider Disability Positive Agenda, develop the following 7 projects.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A Survey of Congleton people with a disability to learn more the issues that they are facing in Congleton and what they believe the Town Council or other groups could do to make their lives easier. 2. Continue to develop and offer awareness-raising sessions for Councillors and staff to help build appreciation of the issues. The first visually impaired awareness session has happened and more are in the planning stage. 3. Set up a Consultation Group of experts representing different disabilities e.g. visual impaired, hearing impaired, neurodiversity, dementia, wheelchair users etc. and work with them to compile priority areas to work on for Congleton. 4. Create a disability Guide to Congleton – on paper and online- showing disability-friendly accessible buildings and facilities. 5. Investigate becoming a Disability Confident Council/Employer 6. Apply for funding (if possible) to progress these areas of work and consider providing a Changing Places Toilet within the town centre. 7. Plan further action based on input from the survey, the experience days, and the consultation group. <p>Feedback to the main Committee on actions and prepare plans where additional budget or resources are required.</p>
<p>Financial Implications</p>	<p>Items A and B can be completed and items 1-7 can be explored and initial work carried out within current community and marketing budgets. Requests for any physical changes are likely to involve substantial budgets or match funding and this would automatically be referred back to the appropriate committee.</p>

Environmental Implications	All the measures are looking to improve the environment for those who need the most support. The carbon footprint of projects would need to be considered on a project-by-project basis but it is anticipated that the recommendations will only have a small carbon footprint.
Equality and Diversity Impact	These measures are designed to help some of the more vulnerable in our community, but should help the whole community by creating a greater understanding of the needs of others.
PROPOSALS	That the Committee authorises the Health and Wellbeing Group to progress with recommendations A, B and 1-7 and report back to the committee on its progress.