

Equal Access Advisory Group

Meeting Minutes – In-person and Virtual 17th June 2025

Attendees – Dr Deborah Lawson, Cllr Kay Wesley (Chair), Alec Scaresbrook, Cathy Dean, Tom Stephans, Denis Murphy.

Apologies – Theresa Graystone, Diane Ritherdon, Angela Ward

1. Welcome from the chair – Deborah welcomed everyone to the meeting

2. Notes of the meeting of 8th April 2025 were accepted as a true record.

3. Actions from previous minutes

- **Action** - Kay and Theresa to check out routes from Able World to Readsmore Surgery – **carry forward**
- **Action** – Dropped kerbs – Denis is continuing to review dropped kerbs around the town centre. Footpath Morrisons no dropped kerb - Kay added to the action plan. Deborah to look at the route from an area where there is a high population of disabled residents into town/Tesco when the weather improves. **(Ongoing)**
- **Action** - Cathy & Kay are working on an accessibility leaflet for shops with Deborah's input – **Update below**
- **Action** – Cathy/Debbie design a social media campaign on improving attitudes to disabilities, and highlight it before big events. “Be Kind” or “Accessibility Benefits Everyone” campaign. **(Ongoing)**
- **Action** – ask Celeste to design business posters (use disability welcome logo) be kind/accessibility welcome. Deborah to send over a document, which includes good visuals for shops to use. **(Carry Forward)**
- **Action** – Email highways to reinstate the accessible parking space which should be the first space next to keep the clear area at the back of the TH but it's faded, should be blue badge holders only but anyone is parking in the space. **(Completed)**
- **Action** – Cathy to research the best e-learnings and disability-positive training for staff and councillors. **Assigned to Tom to research.**
- **Action** – Kay to write an article for ‘Disability Corner’ in the Chronicle on negative attitudes and the positive messaging from the careers fair. **(Completed)**
- **Action** – Contact CAB to see if they will come to Congleton so people can have face-to-face contact. – **Kay Contacted and passed to the Chief Officer, will follow up.**
- **Action** – Cathy/Kay to go through the leaflets that have been returned and make the awards for Gold and Silver. **(Completed)** – Update in the agenda
- **Action** – Vision for Transport consultation - Feedback comments to CTC so they can be included in the official response. **(Completed)**

- **Action** - Cathy to follow up with Mark (Town Hall Manager) regarding the ramp, accessible toilet sign and mirror in the accessible toilet (button also temperamental) – Permanent Ramp not possible, investigate a removable ramp and bell at the back door.

4. Events Feedback – Makers Market / Food & Drink Festival.

Deborah commented that the Makers Market is much improved, apart from when you get to the end by Wetherspoons, where wheelchair users have to go into the road and along Swanbank (still in the road) and up the next dropped curb to access the other side of the market, which is dangerous. This could be resolved if a clear gap, wide enough for mobility scooters and wheelchairs, were left between the stalls opposite Greg's. Also, tables at Crema can be obstructive.

Denis attended the Food & Drink Festival and commented that he was able to get through and visit all the stalls.

Cathy confirmed that event guidance was followed where possible, dropped curb access, extra toilets, bookable disabled parking spaces, quiet space at The Space. No issues or complaints were received on the day.

Action – Distribute the event guidance document to local event organisers.

5. Disability Welcome Scheme

The disability welcome scheme was launched, but after receiving the applications, it was considered that some amendments to the scoring may be required.

Documents shared before the meeting:

1. Revised Disability Welcome Award Criteria

2. Disability Welcome: Inclusive Service Award

After much discussion, we resolved that businesses will not receive any award if they do not meet the legal requirements. Communicate with businesses that do meet the legal requirements and educate on how to get the silver award (some businesses were very close). The Gold award should be awarded to businesses that have really thought about accessibility for all.

Action – Kay to follow up with businesses that have applied. Provide information on the website about the award criteria.

6. Recognition for businesses in Congleton that provide exemplary service for disabled people

This proposed new category of recognition supports the Disability Welcome scheme by acknowledging local businesses that do not operate a conventional public-facing premises but have demonstrated exceptional commitment to serving disabled customers in inclusive, flexible, and respectful ways.

The group felt the award had merit but was down to personal interpretation, difficult to create a set of standards to objectively measure. Most service businesses have reviews online which should allow people to recommend. We might revisit in the future.

7. Building Control (Cheshire East Council) – responsibility for accessibility standards

There has been a notable decline in accessibility standards and a lack of communication between departments.

Action – Arrange a meeting with the Cheshire East Officer - Sam Burnard - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer.

Deborah has followed up and also discovered that not all businesses are involving the building planning control team at CEC when they have made adjustments to their buildings for accessibility.

8. Deborah's Book Launch

The book about inclusion and kindness, will be released in July for Disability Pride Month, and many of the larger retailers are stocking the book.

The first CTC play day on July 29th, we plan to hold a colouring competition that children can enter to win a signed copy of the book, and each child will receive a bookmark for taking part.

Action – Discuss with Events Manager & Chief Officer regarding promotion of the book. The book is being developed as a social purpose project, with a significant portion of profits being used to donate free copies to schools, hospitals, and other charitable causes.

Deborah is donating books and educational packs to Congleton primary schools from mid-September, when schools return from the summer holidays.

9. AOB

The supermarket's mobility scooters appeared to be plugged in and available.

Disabled Parking – when the Fair visits and is in the Fairground carpark, 6 disabled parking spaces are lost. As far as we know, Cheshire East doesn't make any further provision or arrangements.

Sustainable Travel – Pleased to report Cheshire East has now confirmed that they can remove the barriers at Bromley Road going down to BVW.

Transport for All - <https://www.transportforall.org.uk>

Can You Help Street Designers Improve Accessibility?

Transport for All is working with partners to explore how features on streets, like crossings, kerbs, surfaces and street furniture, affect different disabled people.

We are looking for disabled people to be interviewed over a video call. £30 Amazon or John Lewis vouchers are available as a thank you for taking part.

The interview over video call will last 1-2 hours, at a time that suits you. It will involve talking about your experiences of navigating streets and how you are affected by different street features.

BSL interpretation and tactile models will be available if required.

If you are interested in taking part, please fill in this form:

<https://forms.office.com/e/Q9EBcHQ3KP>

Future Meeting Dates:

Tuesdays 11 am - 9th September / 18th November