

**The Highland Council**  
**Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities**  
**Committee (CPE)**  
**13 June 2013**

Agenda Item	15
Report No	CPE 28/13

**Report on actions from meeting Disability Actions Panels and members of the CPE Committee on 21.3.2013**

Report by Assistant Chief Executive

**Summary**

Following each CPE committee, Members have agreed to sessions to hear the testimonies of local equality groups. This report summarises the issues that arose from a meeting with some of the Disability Access Panels in Highland which took place after the CPE on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2013.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 The Equality Act 2010 places a positive duty on the Council to consider equality of opportunity in all its activities. The Act provides protection from discrimination for people on the grounds of the “protected Characteristics” of disability, race, gender reassignment, age, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
- 1.2 At the first meeting of the CPE committee in September 2012, Members agreed to private consultation sessions be held with local equalities groups to follow after each committee and that feedback on outcomes from previous private consultation sessions is provided. Groups attending these sessions are asked to highlight experiences of discrimination, prejudice and harassment, as well as examples of good practice in removing barriers, for example to accessing services or employment.
- 1.3 It has been noted that the stories behind the statistics, which are often very personal in nature, have helped Members to understand the complexities involved in delivering supportive solutions. These sessions have proved beneficial towards the Council developing equality outcomes based on evidence and involvement, and supporting the need to give due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality and foster good relations.
- 1.4 Following the CPE committee on 21 March, Members and key officers met with representatives of four of the Highland Disability Access Panels (Lochaber, Inverness, Skye and Lochalsh and Badenoch and Strathspey).

**2 Disability Access Panels in Highland**

- 2.1 There are eight Disability Access Panels (Panels) in Highland; some have been active since the early eighties; others have formed more recently. Most of the Highland Panels meet as an “Alliance” four times a year to share information and

good practice. Across Scotland, Panels receive support, training and networking opportunities from the Scottish Disability Equality Forum (SDEF).

- 2.2 Panels are groups of volunteers including disabled people, carers and people with a genuine interest in access and who work together to improve physical access and wider social inclusion in their local communities. Each panel is autonomous and the functions of each panel can vary but typical work is to:
- Review building standards/planning applications to ensure the best access to as many people as possible.
  - Be a first point of contact with local authorities on access issues.
  - Provide input to the decisions and policies of statutory and other organisations concerning access and equality for disabled people.
  - Promote 'best practice' on all issues of access and social inclusion.
  - Publish Access Guides, leaflets and posters to raise awareness.
  - Ensure that a holistic approach is taken to access for disabled persons.
- 2.3 The Highland Panels rely on volunteer members who have experience of the barriers faced in their local environment and community, either through their own disability, or that of someone close to them. Panels work closely with various Council Services including Planning and Development, Housing and Property, TECs and Chief Executive's.
- 2.4 The Council's Building Standards staff implement the Scottish Governments minimum standards for accessibility in new and altered buildings and as such work closely with local Access Panels, providing help and advice. In 2012, the Planning and Development Service agreed a protocol for working with the Panels - [Effective Engagement with Access Panels in Planning and Building Standards](#).
- 2.5 The Council provides annual support of £1250 to each Highland Panel through a Service contract to provide advice and comments on matters of disability and access. In addition, a number of Panels have accessed support through ward Discretionary budgets.

### **3 Issues arising from the meeting with Panels**

- 3.1 Panels were invited to tell Members about their experience of access to Council services, voting and elections, employment as well as any concerns about harassment and prejudice. As police and fire senior officers were to be in attendance, any community safety matters could also be brought up. Discussions took place on the following topics:
- Voting and elections
  - Accessible meetings, buildings and information
  - Transport and pavements
  - Fire Service
  - Disability Tourism
  - Financial support
- 3.2 The discussion resulted in a number of actions to be followed up. The issues raised and the proposed service responses are noted in Appendix 1.

## 4 Conclusion

- 4.1 The Council generally has a good working relationship with the Panels across Highland and has benefited from their involvement and advice on a regular basis.

## 5. Implications

- 5.1 Financial implications: There are no financial implications arising from this paper.

Risk implications: There are no risks to the Council arising from this paper.

Equalities implications: Continued engagement with the Disability Access Panels in Highland will positively contribute to the equality duties placed on the Council to eliminate unlawful discrimination and advance equality of opportunity. The Equality Act states that meeting different needs involves taking steps to take account of disabled people's disabilities. It states that compliance with the duty may involve treating some people more favourably than others.

Climate change implications: There are no climate change implications arising from this report.

## 6. Recommendation:

Members are asked to:

- Note the issues raised in the meeting with four Disability Access Panels and to consider the actions proposed by Services in response, as set out in the Appendix.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive

Author: Rosemary Mackinnon, Equal Opportunities Officer Tel (01463) 702094

Date: 4.6.13

Appendix 1

	<b>Issues raised at the meeting with four DAPs</b>	<b>Service response proposed</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Voting and elections – actions CEX</b>	
a)	B&S DAP is awaiting a reply or acknowledgment from the elections team on her feedback re accessibility for polling stations.	<i>The Elections team will contact access panel about the revised dates for the polling station review. Review to start in October.</i>
b)	General feeling (Lochaber, B&S) that polling staff don't know or don't advise blind or visually impaired voters of the supports they can get to vote, either in terms of alternative materials available or about carer attendance. Feel that the issue of secret ballot is confusing staff.	<i>All polling staff in the Highlands received the same training and it covers the use of tactile devices etc. The Elections team will raise this issue with the Employee Development Manager to ensure awareness is raised with elections staff.</i>
c)	Also suggestion from Cllr MacLean that if at a future committee item covered the supports for people with communication needs or disabilities then members would be aware and feel more assured.	<i>The Elections team will prepare a report for a future agenda item (currently scheduled for the September committee meeting).</i>
d)	All DAPS very happy to have been involved in polling station accessibility assessments and Skye DAP in particular praised the work of the Elections Manager.	<i>This has been passed to the Elections team.</i>

Appendix 1

2	<b>Accessible meetings, buildings and information – actions CEX, TECs, Finance, P&amp;D</b>	
a)	Council to review use of portable loop systems for its meeting rooms for hearing impaired people.	<p><i>In HQ, Infra Red loop system in Chamber and also loop systems in CR 1, 2 and 3. All have been checked (03/06/2013) - systems in CRs may need reviewed.</i></p> <p><i>Housing and Property staff are actively investigating how to put a maintenance contract on place to cover all hearing loop systems across the Council. This is likely to involve scoping of loop systems in all Council public meeting rooms to establish age and types of equipment, and whether there are maintenance contracts in place. Requires follow up by H&amp;P and Members will be advised of progress.</i></p> <p><i>Suggestion also made to Business Support to include loop systems in list of possible equipment requirements when staff book rooms.</i></p>
b)	Lochaber DAP and S&L DAP having to pay for accommodation rented by other third sector bodies. In Lochaber this costs £1500 per annum and rented from VAL. – Equal Opportunities Officer to ask local ward managers to see if there is accessible Council accommodation that could be used with no charge (in kind support) including scope for using schools. Ward Managers to liaise with the two local DAPs affected. Panels not in attendance to be asked if this is an issue elsewhere.	<p><i>Skye - the Panel could be offered use of meeting rooms at 'local rate' for non-profit making groups £5 – 10 per hour.</i></p> <p><i>Lochaber – Panel have been awarded £2500 discretionary fund towards running costs. Could look at availability of room but during office hours only and not able to provide admin support.</i></p> <p><i>Other Panels have been asked if this is an issue and awaiting responses.</i></p>
c)	Difficulties in taking part in public consultations were raised	<i>Procurement guidance refers to general equality duties and</i>

Appendix 1

	<p>because of inaccessible meetings. The example of the consultation for Inverness flood alleviation works was provided. In discussion it seemed that this might be a problem with contractor compliance. – TECs to review procedures, but this could be a wider issue and should be covered in procurement procedures, so also for Finance to raise with the Head of Procurement that specifications have to be clear about consultation methods to be fully accessible.</p>	<p><i>requirement to carry out equality impact assessments when tendering where relevant. Could consider including something specific about what to do when consultation/stakeholder engagement is required. This can be included as part of the wider procurement review.</i></p>
d)	<p>Streetscape works in Dingwall was raised by Cllr MacLean in terms of good practice in understanding people's needs in the design, but she said the agreement to have different coloured seats (not black) for people with visual impairment has not been implemented.</p>	<p><i>Issue is being taken forward at local level at WBM.</i></p>
e)	<p>Lessons have been learnt from earlier Streetscape works in Inverness, but still some issues outstanding, e.g. use of fluorescent strips to distinguish granite bollards.</p>	<p><i>TEC, Community Works - Work has started during May to apply fluorescent silver strips to granite bollards in Inverness.</i></p>

Appendix 1

3	<b>Transport and pavements – actions TECs, CEX</b>	
a)	<p>Generally a difficulty for all people in the Highlands with a physical disability. For older people with disabilities in rural areas this means they cannot use their bus pass and are being doubly disadvantaged. General frustration that the Highlands is lagging well behind other areas of Scotland and Europe as provision for people with disabilities is so poor – lack of suitable buses and some issues with driver attitudes to help or use ramps. Other issues include lack of integrated accessible transport, e.g. may be able to make part of a journey but can't guarantee return journey or use of more than one means of transport, accessible buses are not always on journeys advertised and timetables often in accessible format – TECs staff attending to look at funding requirements.</p>	<p><i>Services in the Highlands remote areas are often provided as part of a school service, this almost always results in coaches which are not accessible being used. The DDA (now the Equality Act) does not require accessibility for coaches until 2020. Driver attitude can be an issue which has to be dealt with by the operators and any instances raised with the Public Transport Unit will be thoroughly investigated. Integration of different modes and services is difficult as the providers operate in a commercial environment effectively in competition with each other. Work is being undertaken on an information strategy which will start to address the accessibility of timetables. Most operators will provide them in large print however. Every tender for a bus service includes an opportunity to offer an accessible vehicle.</i></p>
b)	<p>Acknowledgement that there have been some helpful discussions recently with Stagecoach in particular. Stagecoach have agreed to regular meetings which could be opened out to other transport providers (e.g. rail, ferries) and to hold open sessions to promote accessibility. DAPs suggest they could have a role to offer training to bus providers so their drivers know how to assist people with disabilities. Could we make this part of the Council's contracts/subsidy arrangements we have with bus operators?</p>	<p><i>Driver training in Disability Awareness is a module available as part of the Driver Certificate of Professional Competence. The suggestion that the DAP could assist with driver training is one which could be explored with operators. It would be difficult to write into the Council Contract Terms and Conditions as we would then be required to provide the resources to carry out the training. This may prove to be very difficult if not impossible for the Council to comply with in some areas.</i></p>
c)	<p>Local members are to be invited to Highland Alliance of DAPs meetings. – Dates to be circulated to local members.</p>	<p><i>Dates only set in advance of next meeting. Following up whether one Member could attend Alliance meetings.</i></p>
d)	<p>Some concerns about dropped kerbs and whether they are</p>	<p><i>The Head of Community Works, TECs to provide a paragraph</i></p>

Appendix 1

	<p>properly sited and carried out according to specifications. Some people using wheelchairs have found these to be too steep or in dangerous places. Robin from TECs confirmed there were design standards to use, but DAPS asked if there could be better checking that the work was being done according to the Council's specification.</p>	<p><i>for circulation to all Panels about guidelines used for dropped kerbs.</i></p>
<p>e)</p>	<p>Issue of patchy availability of taxis suitable for people with disabilities. Panels also organised a meeting to discuss a recent Scottish Government consultation on changes to taxi licensing. Also attended by representatives of SG, local taxi services, Community Transport, HC (Licensing staff, transport and EO officers and one elected member). Some progress noted in terms of MSP contact (Rhoda Grant) and taxi operators agreeing to run a referral process. But is there any action that can be taken through licensing?</p>	<p><i>Work is already underway - Licensing staff are preparing a survey of wheelchair accessible vehicles in relation to taxis and private hire cars.</i></p> <p><i>Separate questionnaires are prepared and are to be sent to licensed operators and to Access Panels and other groups with an interest in disability. Questionnaire for wheelchair users has been reviewed by member of Lochaber disability access panel (Arthur Cowie).</i></p>
<p>f)</p>	<p>Issue of patient transport</p>	<p><i>SAS representative confirmed the appeals procedure at the meeting.</i></p>



Appendix 1

4	<b>Fire Service – Fire Service, CEX</b>	
a)	Fire service to be invited to the Highland Alliance meetings too – dates to be given to Scott Hay.	<i>Date of next meeting in June and contact for B&amp;S Panel sent to Scott 07/05/2013</i>
b)	Scott to forward any home safety assessments promotional material to DAPs for onward distribution to their members – contacts be given to Scott Hay.	<i>Contact details for Panels and other disability related groups sent to Scott 07/05/2013</i>
5	<b>Disability Tourism – P&amp;D</b>	
a)	Raised by Cllr Baxter and queried whether there was more the Council could do to encourage more accessible accommodation and attractions given the value of disability tourism. Noted the Disabled Go initiative will shortly be underway in Inverness supported by the Common Good Fund. Is there anything else the Council can do to raise this issue with Tourism partners?	<p><i>Response from Tourism co-ordinator, P&amp;D: Regarding tourism there is a fair amount already in place or under way through VisitScotland as it is they rather than the Council who have direct dealings with most tourism businesses. Quality assurance inspections are undertaken by VisitScotland (in accommodation, visitor attractions etc.) – this is done free of although it is the businesses choice as to whether they opt in or not. This scheme has been around for a number of years and is currently being reviewed by VisitScotland so as to ensure the criteria are kept up to date. VisitScotland also recently hosted a major national conference for tourism operators on the subject of accessible tourism.</i></p> <p><i>The promotion of individual businesses and their facilities is probably fairly well covered by VisitScotland’s existing guides, websites etc. but to date there has to the best of my knowledge been little marketing directed specifically at this market. Tourism Co-ordinator can raise this in discussions with VisitScotland.</i></p>

Appendix 1

b)	Noted that the B&S website new website will have an updated on-line version of their local accessibility guide and that this will be incorporated into the Cairngorm National Park website.	<a href="http://basap.org/">http://basap.org/</a>
6	<b>Financial support - CEX</b>	
a)	All DAPs to be reminded of the option of applying for the discretionary ward budget. Rosemary to send them the link to the website (single grants information) as a follow up to the meeting at the start of the new financial year. Acknowledged that the Council pays each DAP £1250 per annum for advice services, including checking accessibility to buildings.	<i>Panels have been advised of the option of applying for ward discretionary funds and many have been successful in previous applications. Link to Discretionary Grants <a href="#">here</a>.</i>