

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Communities Housing and Infrastructure
DATE	27 August 2015
DIRECTOR	Pete Leonard
TITLE OF REPORT	Request for Recognition from Bon Accord Access Panel
REPORT NUMBER	CHI/15/230
CHECKLIST COMPLETED	Yes

1. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

This report updates on the development of a new access panel for Aberdeen. Officers have been working with the Scottish Disability Equality Forum (SDEF) and local interested parties so that a new access panel is fit for purpose, adds value and brings real and measurable benefits to local communities.

2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

That committee:

- (i) **Agree that Bon Accord Access Panel is recognised by Aberdeen City Council**

3. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

None

4. **OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

The city will benefit from an access panel, which works effectively in partnership with the council to offer advice on access issues. There will be positive impacts in terms of the environment, sustainability, health and well-being.

5. **BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES**

Access panels are groups of volunteers who work together to improve physical access and wider social inclusion in their local communities, advising public bodies, local councils and other agencies on matters relating to access to the built and general environment for people affected by disabilities.

Access panels also engage in community planning and advise on access in relation to: health; housing; employment; education; leisure and recreation; open space, and information.

The Scottish Disability Equality Forum (SDEF) is the umbrella body for Access Panels in Scotland and reports to the Scottish Government. SDEF offers support and training opportunities to help access panels to operate efficiently, link together as a network and learn from each other.

Although it is recognised that within Aberdeen, activity around improving access for people with disabilities continues, the city has been without a formal access panel recognised by the SDEF and the council since September 2013.

The council would benefit from having an effective access panel in place as a single point of contact so that building and local plans and proposals can be directed to one place and duplication reduced

Bon Accord Access Panel meets the requirements laid down by SDEF, as the umbrella body for access panels, in terms of structure, articles and representation. This has been confirmed by SDEF officers.

SDEF will have an active role in facilitating and supporting Bon Accord Access Panel. SDEF will provide training and will work with the council so that arrangements are in place to meet the council's expectations and offering to take a mediation role, if and when required.

The relationship between this new access panel and the new Aberdeen Disability Advisory Group will be considered as part of this process. Whilst recognising that access panels should be independent of councils, the council also needs to ensure that it is providing best value for money in terms of funding and support given to voluntary organisations and that, the groups funded are engaged positively and proactively with the tasks in hand to deliver outcomes for people with disabilities in the city.

The council has been given a degree of comfort in these proposed arrangements, given the assurances that SDEF will work with the panel to ensure the delivery of positive outcomes for people affected by disabilities. These outcomes will form evidence in the future for reports on Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming and contribute to the council meeting its statutory equality duties.

Appendix 1 is the submission from the proposed Bon Accord Access Panel received in response to the consultation on the draft report.

Appendix 2 contains the documents submitted by SDEF in relation to the Bon Accord Access Panel.

Appendix 3 contains the comments from members of DisAbility Positive.

The SDEF has given assurances that the Bon Accord Access Panel is not adverse to others joining and both the Bon Accord Access Panel and DisAbility Positive have said that they will work with others in the best interests of people with disabilities in the city. There are assurances from SDEF that they will have initial meetings with the interested parties to bring them around the table, with SDEF providing a strong and effective coaching/ mentoring and mediation role in the early stages so that this new access panel for the city is working collaboratively.

The council's position remains clear, that, If at any stage there is evidence through the monitoring mechanisms that the new access panel is not working and/or does not prove inclusive, then the access panel will be derecognised by the council.

6. **IMPACT**

Links to the Aberdeen – the Smarter City vision, Community Plan, the Single Outcome Agreement and the 5 year Business Plan.

Our Vision

Our Vision is for Aberdeen to be an ambitious, achieving, smart city. We will ensure all citizens are encouraged and supported appropriately to make their full contribution. In order to achieve this we will challenge inequalities wherever they exist and bring our communities closer together.

Proposals for a new access panel will fit neatly within the thematic priorities of the Single Outcome Agreement of Safer Communities, Health and Wellbeing, Older People and Children and Young People.

They can also provide evidence of translating into action the underlying principles of the Single Outcome Agreement which include “target those most in need, reduce the isolation of minority communities and provide services accessible to all citizens in the ways which meet their needs”.

Within the council's 5-year Business Plan, there are several outcomes with which the proposals for a new access panel are aligned. These are

- All citizens have enhanced physical and emotional well-being;
- Aberdeen is a fair and equal city;
- Our citizens are empowered to develop the knowledge, skills and attributes which allow them to fulfil their potential, contribute

to the economic, social and cultural wellbeing of our communities;

- The city has a clean, safe and attractive landscape;
- The city has accessible, well used green space in our streets, parks and countryside;
- The council's services are accessible to all customers in the ways which meet their needs, and;
- Citizens feel they can influence their communities through engagement in the development, design and decision making of services.

The proposals for a new access panel also offers opportunities for joint working with partner organisations on projects or contracts.

Public:

This report is highly relevant to ensuring that the council meets the General Equality Duty.

The EHRIA at Appendix 4 indicates that the proposal for a new access panel will contribute positively to all three parts of the General Duty; to eliminate discrimination, to advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations.

The EHRIA demonstrates a positive impact, particularly on people with disabilities, older people and families with young children. A pro-active access panel acting as a "critical friend" with constructive and courteous challenge can act as a catalyst for positive change. If life improves for people with disabilities, then it improves too for older people and parents/ carers pushing prams and buggies.

7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

Delivering on the published Equalities Outcomes will help public authorities comply with their legal duties under:

- a. Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (the public sector equality duty), and
- b. The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

N/A

9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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