

Agenda item 5: Disabled People’s Manifesto and Cambridge City Council’s support for disabled people (Helen Crowther, Equality & Anti-Poverty Officer)

On 23 May 2024 the Council passed the Disability Rights UK 2024 motion (see the [Agenda and minutes webpage from the Full Council meeting](#) for more context). At the meeting, councillors resolved to “refer the Disabled People’s Manifesto to the Council’s Equalities Panel for scrutiny and debate involving staff, resident representatives and councillors, and reporting back to the Environment and Community Scrutiny Committee on their discussions”.

For this item, Helen Crowther will present on key issues experienced by disabled people relating to the themes of the manifesto, and what the Council is currently doing to support disabled people relating to the themes. The Panel will then be asked to consider:

- what it would look like if the council was providing the best possible support to disabled people in relation to each of the four themes of the manifesto.
- what incremental steps the Council could take to move towards this.

Please note that the Deaf and disabled people’s organisations that developed the manifesto did so to influence the next government, so some of the recommendations would be for national government to implement, rather than local authorities. [Read the Disabled People’s Manifesto here.](#)

As the Equalities Panel meeting on 2 July takes place during the pre-election period for the general election, any requests of national government set out in the manifesto will not be discussed in the meeting.

In advance of the meeting, here is a short description of each theme in the manifesto and information on how Cambridge City Council supports disabled people relating to each theme:

Theme 1: Representation and Voice

This theme focuses on the removal of barriers for disabled people to participate in political and public life. The manifesto states “We want Disabled people to participate across all political and public roles, with the required adjustments put in place, so we can achieve real justice and equality. Disabled people’s led organisations (“Disabled People’s Organisations”) are accountable to our community and must be viewed as primary advocates for us and be funded accordingly. Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs) must have a seat at national and local

decision-making tables and all Disabled people to fully participate in democratic processes.”

Work undertaken by Cambridge City Council in relation to this theme includes:

- Providing adjustments for people with different disabilities voting at polling stations, by post or by proxy: [Accessibility at elections - Cambridge City Council](#). The elections team take expert advice from our Access Officer on reasonable adjustments that can be made at polling stations.
- Providing Community Grants funding to organisations that advocate for the rights of disabled people. In 2024/25 larger community grants went to 8 organisations specifically set up to support disabled people:
 - Arts and Minds
 - Cambridge Community Arts
 - Cambridge Online
 - Cambridge Gateway Club
 - Level Water
 - Rowan Humberstone
 - Disability Huntingdonshire for a part-time benefits caseworker in Cambridge City
- Employing a Community Development Officer (CDO) to work with local voluntary and community sector organisations that support equality groups, including disabled people, to support them with capacity building.
- Engaging with local Disabled People’s Organisations as part of many of the Council’s consultations on changes to plans, policies, or procedures to help ensure the Council pays due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty in its decision-making.

Theme 2: Rights

The manifesto states “We want to fully enjoy all rights guaranteed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Discrimination we face in all areas of life must stop. We want financial and legal support to enforce our rights and all public bodies to have a duty to advance and enforce our rights actively. We want greater accountability for when our rights have been breached.”

The manifesto mentions strengthening the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and ensuring the PSED and the Socio-Economic duties are fully embedded in all public bodies’ decision-making processes to protect disabled people’s rights. To demonstrate compliance with our legal obligation to pay due regard to the PSED,

Cambridge City Council undertakes equality impact assessments. These look at impacts of the Council's decisions to change policies, plans, procedures and around the development of strategy on protected characteristic groups, people with care experience and people experiencing poverty and/or low-income. (Note that councils are not legally required to undertake EqIAs to demonstrate compliance with the PSED or to consider impacts on people on low-income and/or in poverty.)

In addition, the Council works with partners in the Cambridge Community Safety Partnership to improve public safety, including to tackle hate crime that can be experienced by disabled people. One key priority of the partnership is to listen to community needs and responding together to reduce harm.

Theme 3: Independence

The manifesto states “We want the right to live independently with choice and control over the support we get. We want the right to live in our own fully accessible homes connected to our family, friends and community. We want major reform and investment across social security, social care, education, housing and employment, to provide Disabled people of all ages, genders, backgrounds or immigration status with a decent level of income and free at the point of use additional support that we need to fully enjoy our rights and to lead full and connected lives. We should not be forced to live in institutions or accept medical treatment we don't want.” The manifesto's “asks” relating to this theme consider three areas: finances (with asks relating to the benefits system), independent living, and housing. Work undertaken by Cambridge City Council in relation to these areas under the theme include the following:

Finances

- For 2024/25 the Council has provided funding to help set up an outreach advice service in Cambridge from Disability Huntingdonshire that provides specialist benefit advice, support, and advocacy for people of all ages with disabilities.
- The Council also provides Discretionary Housing Payments that can especially benefit disabled people due to extra living costs they face.

Independent living

- The Council provides a Visiting Support service that is available for all Cambridge residents aged over 65, irrespective of what property they live in. The aim is to connect older people with services that help them remain independent and socially active, while making sure people have access to the care and support they need.

- The Council runs activities as part of the Preventative Health Programme to meet its objective to prevent ill-health for older people relating to frailty, which has an impact on older people's ability to live independently. These include a Strength and Balance class in Romsey, a weekly 'bat n chat' session for older adults at the Meadows community centre, and intergenerational 'microwalks'.

Housing

- 5% of Cambridge City Council homes that are built are wheelchair accessible from the outset. The rest of the stock is possible to convert for wheelchair users. During 2023/24, the Council built 12 new homes that are fully wheelchair accessible and 236 new homes that can be adapted to become wheelchair accessible.
- Cambridge City Council is the lead authority for the Home Improvement Agency that covers Cambridge, South Cambs and Huntingdonshire. As part of its work, it provides Disabled Facilities Grants of up to £30,000 to carry out adaptation works that will help a disabled person remain living independently in their own home. It completed 284 grants in 2023/24 (41 in Cambridge city worth £432,448 in total).
- The Council has an annual budget of over £800,000 to implement adaptations for disabled people in Cambridge City Council's housing stock. The spend in 2023/24 was £828,000 and 138 major adaptations were completed. This included wetrooms (including refurbishments), over-the-bath showers, ramps and stairlifts.

Theme 4: Inclusion

This theme refers to plans for every aspect of life to address specific needs of disabled people from the outset. The manifesto states "We want plans for every aspect of life including energy policy, climate change, digital and technological development, health, housing, transport, street environment and emergency planning, to address specific needs of Disabled people from the outset. Segregated settings and programmes should not be a default. Choice, control, and inclusion are vital. Disabled people should have support to live, learn and work in the community." In particular, the manifesto includes "asks" for this theme relating to three areas: education, access, and work. Work undertaken by Cambridge City Council in relation to these areas under the theme include the following:

Education

Cambridge City Council runs the Region of Learning programme to help people acquire skills for future learning and career opportunities. The programme has new funding arrangements which started in 2024 and is aimed at all age groups, but

under the former European Social Fund (ESF) funding the programme was aimed at young people. There was a target to reach 169 young people with disabilities over the two years. This target was exceeded as 370 young people with disabilities were supported. This was as a result of partnership working that the programme has developed with schools supporting pupils with Special Educational Needs.

Access

- The Council provides British Sign Language (BSL) interpretation to support people to access its services. For instance, the council uses SignLive services to support BSL users to get in touch with the Customer Service Contact Centre by phone.
- The Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service employs an Access Officer to give advice on disability access at all stages of any planning application. The Access Officer also gives advice on the Equality Act 2010 rights of and duties to disabled people relating to access (and more broadly) to the council itself, local businesses, and residents/visitors.
- Disability access has been incorporated as a consideration within the Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel that is run by the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service. A new group of disabled people will be recruited to the Panel to advise on wider disability issues on behalf of Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council. The Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel (GCDRP) offers multi-disciplinary, independent advice to developers, planning officers, planning committees, parish councils and members of public.
- The Council provides the Shopmobility service at the Grand Arcade and Grafton East car parks to support disabled people to access the city. The service was used 3,707 times in 2023/24.
- The Council runs the Taxicard scheme that helps disabled people who live in Cambridge and have a low income to pay for taxi journeys.
- The Council is currently completing works to provide a Changing Places facility at Cherry Hinton Hall and at Drummer Street toilets.

Work

- Cambridge City Council is a Disability Confident Employer, which includes commitments around 'actively looking to attract and recruit disabled people'. The council encourages other organisations to become Disability Confident – for instance, this year we attended a 'Be Inclusive' event hosted by the DWP, for other employers to help promote it to make a difference in closing the disability employment gap locally.

- Cambridge City Council is working with partners, including Abbey People, to run on a project in Abbey to support people with long-term health conditions or disabilities into employment. This is centred around asking people what support they might need to be able to enter into employment and what kind of opportunities will suit them.