

## **ANNUAL COUNCIL – 25 MAY 2021**

### **QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

#### **QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR S SHEAHAN TO COUNCILLOR A WOODMAN**

“In advance of the publication of the Government's new strategy on disability, it would be helpful to know what the Council's stance is in a number of areas where local government can have a positive influence on the lives of disabled people.

What role does this Council play in –

- a) Helping disabled persons into employment?
- b) Increasing the supply of accessible housing, through the Local Plan process?
- c) Improving the accessibility of public buildings through licensing?
- d) Ensuring that there enough wheelchair accessible taxis and private hire vehicles in the District?”

#### **RESPONSE FROM COUNCILLOR A WOODMAN TO COUNCILLOR S SHEAHAN**

“a)The Council is a recognised “Disability Confident” employer. We guarantee interviews for disabled people who meet the key criteria for our jobs and we provide support during our recruitment processes and to those who subsequently join us throughout their working lives. The Council's Equality and Access group is aware of the plans to publish a new strategy and we will amend our plans and arrangements as needed.

The Council remains committed to the Government's Disability Confident programme. We continue to work with the Department for Work and Pensions to engage and support local employers to become Disability Confident and encourage employers to think differently about disability and take action to improve how they recruit, retain and develop disabled people.

We also work with job centre to support employers to adopt more open recruitment policies to actively attract job seekers with disabilities as well as others who face barriers to employment such as ex-offenders, lone parents and carers.

Local companies such as XPO and Marks and Spencer actively recruit people who may require additional help and adaptations to the workplace with excellent results. M&S have a number of deaf employees and recently, working in partnership with The Prince's Trust have recruited a blind person, as well as staff with autism and Asperger's syndrome. We will continue to work with the DWP to encourage more employers to become disability confident and through jobs fairs and careers advice we will connect job seekers and employers together.

b) The Government has established optional technical housing standards. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-optional-technical-standards>. This provides local authorities with an option to set additional technical requirements exceeding the minimum standards required by Building Regulations in respect of (amongst other things) access and an optional nationally described space standard. However, evidence is required to determine whether there is a need for additional standards and to then justify setting appropriate policies in the local plan. This work will be assessed as part of the Local Plan review and a report will be taken to Local plan Committee in due course.

c) The council has no powers under licencing to influence the accessibility of public buildings but is committed to ensuring fair access to public services, both physically and virtually, ensuring that customers can access council services in the way in which they need too. Any significant works to council buildings always look at accessibility and are done in accordance with any appropriate standards. In certain circumstances involving new build and external alterations to buildings, these may be subject to planning and building regulation requirements. An example of the council's commitment to meeting the needs of people with disabilities is the new state of the art "Changing Rooms" facility which is a vital facility in the new Whitwick and Coalville Leisure Centre currently under construction.

d) There is not a legislative requirement to licence a specific number of wheelchair accessible taxis and private hire vehicles (WAV's). The council publishes a list of designated wheelchair accessible vehicles licensed by the council as required by s167 of the 2010 Equalities Act.

There are currently four wheelchair accessible vehicles licensed by the council designated for the purposes of section 165 of the Act. The council has not received any concerns relating to the availability of WAV in the district. If concerns were raised the council could consider introducing licensing policy to increase the number that are licensed."