

Item No. 25	Classification: Open	Date: 4 March 2003	MEETING NAME Community Support and Safety Scrutiny Sub-Committee
Report title:		Review of Disabilities	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:			

NOTE FOR MEMBERS

Subject: *Review of service provision and access rights for disabled users*

Project Brief: *To determine how well the Council is meeting its statutory requirements in the provision of opportunities and services for those with disabilities*

1. BACKGROUND

Members received an initial briefing from officers on the issues arising to do with disabilities at the Sub Committee meeting on Wednesday 5 February. The discussion included an outline of arrangements for a Mystery Shopper Exercise which the Sub Committee had previously requested.

Officers explained that provision for disabled users is one part of a much bigger agenda addressing equalities issues as a whole. A new strategy is being developed taking into account a complex tranche of legislation on race, gender, disabilities and human rights. The Council also has to achieve BVPI Level 2 of the Equalities Standard by March 2003. Disability Impact assessments are likely to be carried out, along the model of the race impact assessments currently ongoing, to determine how council practices affect disabled users and clients and the results will inform the new strategy and policies arising.

In addition, a vision document arising from a Best Value Review of Disabilities was considered by the Executive on 11th February, the minutes of which acknowledge that this Sub Committee's review of disabilities would have reference to the Best Value Review.

Equalities is a Corporate priority. The Community Strategy also enshrines values to do with the promotion of equality and responding to the needs of the borough's diverse communities to enable social inclusion and social cohesion.

Members were advised that, as well as reviewing the results of the mystery shopper exercise, they could have input to both a Disabilities Action Plan being developed and, if so wished, the Council's Corporate Equalities Plan in due course. This review therefore has the potential to broaden in scope.

ISSUES ARISING SINCE THE FEBRUARY MEETING

The views of the Sub Committee at the meeting on February 5th were recorded in a letter to Officers, following a commitment by officers that Member views would be taken into account by a challenge panel set up to progress Equalities issues across the Council. A copy of the letter is attached and a copy of the response from Officers to the issues arising in that letter.

Officers have now received the results of the Mystery Shopper exercise. These are attached to enable members to have prior sight of some of the results before a further discussion with Officers during a meeting of the Sub Committee on Tuesday 4 March. The survey was carried with the assistance of an organisation called Disability Matters. Peter Bailey, from Disability Matters, will also attend the Sub Committee meeting in March. The survey comprises two parts: eye witness accounts from the five mystery shoppers who took part and a summary of the exercise.

Review of the UDP

Members are reminded that they will also be beginning a review of the relevant supplementary planning guidance associated to the UDP (Southwark Plan) at their meeting on 4 March and that Members have devised questions for officers to address around planning policy and the needs of disabled users. Findings from the review of the UDP in this respect may also have relevance for the review of disabilities ongoing.

Maggie Sullivan
Corporate Strategy Assistant
21 February 03

12 February 03

Dear Nathalie

**Community Support and Safety Scrutiny Sub Committee:
Review of Disabilities**

I am writing to you following your attendance at the Community Support and Safety Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday 5 February, during which you outlined arrangements currently in hand across the Council to meet the needs of disabled users.

I thought it would be useful to summarise what the Sub Committee understood to be the strategic issues discussed as well as reflect back to you some key points made by members during this initial meeting.

Members were particularly interested to hear that disabilities issues generally, and the statutory requirements of the Disabilities Discrimination Act, now form one part of what is a substantial Equalities agenda, itself a part of the drive for greater social cohesion across the Council and the borough. The Sub Committee understood that the Council needs a new vision, framework, policy statement and action plan for disabilities, within the broader equalities agenda, to help the Council meet BVPI Level 2 of the Equalities Standard by March 2003.

The Sub Committee understood that a system of Disability Impact Assessments, along the model of the Race Equality Impact Assessments now ongoing, are proposed, depending to some degree on the success of the Race Equality Impact Assessments. That the needs of disabled users demands equal validity and attention in the new strategy for Equalities generally and that the Council needs to make key and speedy decisions about a budget to improve access for disabled users.

The following, more specific key issues were discussed:

1. That you will confirm whether the audit of 116 operational properties (section 28 of the report to the Sub Committee) did, in fact, include neighbourhood housing officers;
2. That the results of the imminent Mystery Shopping Exercise at the Peckham One Stop Shop will be reported back to this Sub Committee to inform its overall review;

3. That views from this Sub Committee will be fed to the External Challenge Panel comprising key community leaders and experts who will advise on the content of policy and practice etc and;

- That you will report to the Challenge Panel the point made by Kate Bettinelle, of the Pensioner's Forum, that disabled residents are frequently frustrated at not being able to access disabled parking bays because they are taken by non disabled drivers or otherwise blocked and that the Council needs to do what it can to resolve the issues arising speedily;
- That you will report to the Challenge Panel our concern that the issue of making all existing, as well as new, Pedestrian Crossings fully accessible to disabled users as quickly as possible does not appear to be properly budgeted for under the Best Value Review of Highways Infrastructure (4.11) and that accessibility of Pedestrian Crossings should be part of the Disabilities Action Plan.

4. That the Council needs to become more sophisticated in the ways and means by which it supplies its goods and services to disabled users, e.g. not making every Council Leaflet available as standard but ensuring that, through the e-government programme, all leaflets are held electronically and can be downloaded in the font required.

5. That the Sub Committee will have sight of, review and have input to the Disabilities Action Plan due in April and you will make an early draft copy of the Plan available to the Sub Committee by the end of March.

6. That the Sub Committee *may* wish to have sight of, review and have input to the Corporate Equalities Action Plan and you will make a copy of the Plan available to the Sub Committee as soon as possible.

7. That although access and service issues for disabled and special needs students is dealt with under a different piece of Education legislation, this should not preclude their needs being addressed, if possible, as part of the Disabilities Action Plan.

8. That responsibility for delivering services for disabled users should not reside so wholly with Social Service but should be a shared corporate responsibility, which can expect commitment and resources from every Council Department.

9. That Members of this Sub Committee recommend that one part of this Action Plan include periodic mystery shopping exercises to aid monitoring and ensure compliance.

ADDITIONAL ISSUES ARISING

Best Value Review of Disabilities

The Sub Committee will review the recommendations made by the Executive Body on the Best Value Review of Disabilities.

Unitary Development Plan (UDP)

This Sub Committee has just commenced a quick review of relevant parts of the Supplementary Planning Guidance informing the UDP. On 5 February, Members began to consider which aspects of the Planning Guidance will figure in the review following the discussions with you on disabilities. The Sub Committee *may* choose to pursue planning policy and how it affects those with disabilities as part of the review of the UDP and there may be some useful recommendations arising which the Sub Committee will feed back to you. I will keep you informed about this.

I hope this letter is useful. If you require any more context please contact Maggie Sullivan, Corporate Strategy Assistant, on 0207 525 7160 or by email.

Yours sincerely

Councillor Barrie Hargrove
Chair, Community Support and Safety Scrutiny Sub Committee

cc: All members of the Community Support and Safety Scrutiny Sub Committee
Councillor Richard Porter
Jules O'Mahoney, Head of Equalities
Ian Hughes, Head of Corporate Policy
Eleanor Rees

Councillor Barrie Hargrove,
Chair,
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Date: 20 February 2003

Dear Councillor Hargrove,

Community Support and Safety Sub-Committee: Review of Disabilities.

Thank you for your letter of 12 February to Nathalie Hadjifotiou, which I'm replying to on her behalf.



I will address the points you raised in the order you raised them.

1. The audit of 116 operational properties did not include Neighbourhood Housing Offices (NHOs). However, this was not an oversight. Housing separately commissioned a consultant to carry out an accessibility audit of 65 premises, including all the neighbourhood offices, sheltered housing units, cash offices and Bournemouth Road reception. They are currently acting on the recommendations for any adaptations arising from that report, to ensure their offices are compliant with DDA requirements. This is how they are taking the work forward:

- NHO's will organise work through their contractors.
- Housing Access/Advice reception is due to be refurbished in next month or so, all DDA recommendations will be carried out as part of this.
- Cash offices - Project board to be set up, 03/04 to commission DDA and refurbishment work.
- Work to Sheltered Housing Units and Tenants Managements Organisations to be tendered as one major contract.

Housing are confident that they will be DDA compliant by the October 2004 deadline.

In relation to the 116 properties, Southwark Building and Design Services will be proceeding with preparing tender specifications for the first tranche of works to be carried out. These will be based on the prioritization within the audit, which identified those works that need to be carried out to ensure compliance within the legal timeframe.

2. The mystery shopping has now taken place and results will be reported back to the Sub-Committee on 4 March in a written report. Peter Bailey from Disability Matters will be available to talk to the report and to answer any questions the Sub-Committee may have. At that meeting I will also update you on action we have taken to ensure that other front line services learn the lessons from the exercise and deliver some quick wins in remedying some of the immediately resolvable issues.

3. I met with the Equalities and Diversity Panel yesterday and fed back the Sub-Committee's views to them as requested. They had a number of comments and requested that I make the Sub-Committee aware of them. These are as follows:

- They requested that consideration be given to the appointment of a dedicated Disability Officer and that this post be adequately resourced, and not at the expense of any role that the voluntary sector has.
- Monitoring: the Council needs to get consistent monitoring across the board, to ensure compliance with Article 13 EU.
- They requested more robust action on the Council's role as an employer of people with disabilities, as they considered recruitment levels to date, to be low. They specifically stated that they wanted to see people with disabilities employed at all levels within the organization.
- They noted apparent inconsistencies within the Council's approach to disability: the closure of day centres, which support people into work, but the stated commitment of the Council to raise its performance in relation to the employment of people with disabilities.
- They commented on the lack of Educational Psychologists to assist in the statementing of children with special needs.
- They asked for the Sub-Committee's comments on how you are going to ensure effective communication, so that people with disabilities are aware of their rights and can enforce them, against the Council if need be.
- They welcomed the comments made by Kay Betinelli, of the Pensioners Forum, about the frustration experienced by drivers with disabilities whose parking spaces are blocked by non-disabled drivers. They did however ask that in enforcing this matter, Council officers are sympathetic to disabled drivers who do park within those bays but who fail to display their badge appropriately.

4. I understand that some consideration is currently being given to a review of the Council's external communications. Again, I should know more about this by the 4th. If there is a review, I will ensure that the Sub-Committee's views and the views expressed in the mystery shopping exercise are fed into that.

5. Paragraphs 5-9 are action points for me, and are noted and will be acted upon.

Finally, I await any further comments the Sub-Committee might have on the UDP.

I hope this addresses fully all the points you raised. Please let me know if there is any further information you require.

Yours faithfully,

Jules O'Mahoney,
Social Policy Manager,
Social Inclusion Division.

Mystery Shopping Experiences Report by Disability Matters Ltd

Introduction

Disability Matters were commissioned to undertake a mystery shopping exercise from the perspective of disabled customers in accessing the services at the Peckham One Stop Shop, Peckham Hill Street.

Methodology

Five disabled associates of Disability Matters visited the Peckham One Stop Shop over a period of two weeks. The visited was unannounced to create as much reality as possible.

The five shoppers had the following impairments:

- **learning difficulties (cerebral palsy - clear speech, reads and writes well)**
- **mental health history (past anxiety and trauma)**
- **mobility impairment (uses two walking sticks)**
- **hearing impairment (very little hearing)**
- **visual impairment (blind)**

The shoppers brief

The shoppers were asked to evaluate:

- 1. Staff service in responding to a request for information or assistance. Shoppers to decide this for themselves.**
- 2. The general accessibility of the Peckham One Stop Shop in respect of their impairment.**

The shoppers reports

They are the shoppers own words.

The shoppers findings (Staff service)

1. Shopper with a hearing impairment

I visited One Stop Shop today, I saw the notice to "sit and wait to be called". When the Assistant was free she called me over and I informed her that I had a hearing loss. My first request was for information on Adult Education and the Assistant started speaking to me. I let her know that I needed her to speak slowly and clearly. She seemed a little nervous with this and started to write down the information, which was that I needed to go up to the 2nd floor to deal with Adult Education issues.

I then asked for information on Housing Benefit and said that I was moving to the area. The Assistant again wrote down that she would give me the Application Form and that if it was urgent and I was homeless I could go to

any “Neighbourhood Office” for urgent support. At the bottom she had written “she hoped I would excuse her writing”, as a way of being friendly.

At this point I asked if any of the three Assistants knew some sign language. She wrote to me that two of them are starting a Sign Language course in March. I asked if they had a loop there, and the Assistant then invited me to the next counter where there was a loop system. She had not invited me there when she first knew that I had a hearing loss.

The three Assistants then tried to make it work, as it was not working initially. The microphone was at the back of the desk near to the Customer, not near to the Assistant, and so although they were speaking towards the microphone it was too far away for good volume. When they picked up the microphone and spoke into it I could then hear what they were saying. They noted that it needed to be nearer to them and not nearest to the customer. The Assistant then wrote on the pad to me “they have also not yet had training on the loop system.”

As I left one Assistant wanted to connect with me and asked me the sign for ‘Thank You’ and told me that her son was learning sign language at school.

I thought the staff were friendly and helpful but were initially a little nervous to deal with my disability. I believe their lack of training left them lacking in confidence in how to best deal with the situation. I thought their attempt to make friendly communication towards the end of my time there showed a genuineness and willingness to learn. I found them supportive and welcoming in response to my requests.

I recommend:

- They learn about the installed loop and how to use it.
- They ensure the loop is working.
- They invite hearing impaired customers to the desk with the loop as soon as they know the person has a hearing loss.
- They have training to give them disability awareness and confidence in their communications.
- The notice to ‘sit and wait to be called’ is not appropriate for people with disabilities. I could not hear her calling me from across the room, and this could have been disempowering for me had the shop been full. I found this aspect not welcoming.

2. Shopper with a learning difficulty

I was confused when I first went in. I didn’t know what I was supposed to do to get help. There was a person behind the counter who wasn’t talking to anyone but she looked busy so I didn’t know whether she would help me. If she had asked if she could help me I wouldn’t have had to wait so long. If she was busy perhaps there could be a sign or a light to tell customers.

When I asked for the help, I was sent to another place in the building so I used the lift to go to the 2nd floor. Again, I wasn't sure what to do so I sat down for a while then asked my question again. The help I got in the end was fine.

I didn't feel very welcome, it seemed like someone's office.

3. Shopper with a mental health history

I deliberately looked as run down as possible, and dressed in old, not very clean clothes and shoes and with unwashed hair. I had no knowledge of the area or of the subject that I chose to ask them about. When I walked in the shop was almost empty. I approached the desk and then saw that notices in English typed on A4 paper taped to the workstations requested me to sit until called. The staff were busy with paperwork and looked up briefly. I sat down on the nearby bench and looked mostly at the ground. I felt mildly intimidated. I was called up almost immediately.

My request:

I told the staff that I have a sister who lives in Fulham with her husband and three children. A boy of 17 and twin girls of 12 her husband has just walked out and she has discovered that he has large debts. She was made redundant recently and has been looking for a job, but now she is hysterical and not coping well. She has been told that her house is going to be repossessed. What can she do?

Staff response.

I was called up by Adelina. Adelina looked efficient, tidy and nicely dressed.

I told her my problem, which was not even located in her borough and for a very short moment I wondered if she was going to be helpful. There was a moment when I thought I was going to be sent away.

I need not have worried because she could not have been more helpful. In fact the more questions I asked and the more ignorant I appeared the more helpful she became,

She went no end of trouble for me including found out that Fulham is in Hammersmith and Fulham and she told me to go the Citizens Advice Bureau and gave me their number. She found the number of the Town Hall. She found the number of the Shepherds Bush Advice Centre for housing problems and the number of the Hammersmith and Fulham Law Centre for legal problems.

Some of this information required making telephone calls or asking one of her colleagues. She was kind, caring and very efficient. She gave me a nice goodbye and wished the family well. It was a very positive experience. It would be hard to improve on the service that Adelina gave me. I was

genuinely very impressed by her attitude and by the quality of the information she gave.

I felt empowered as I left and helped in a very practical way. I felt that I could go back with any other problem.

Recommendations:

- I understand that the poster asking for information on the murder has to be in a prominent place but as it was the first thing I saw in the library it felt intimidating.

4. Shopper with a mobility impairment

There were two members of staff and they were both dealing with clients.

After a few minutes, a client left and the staff member made a follow up phone call. When this finished, I was called forward. I was greeted cheerfully and with a smile. I asked for information on Congestion Charging in Central London. I was offered a leaflet which was in a rack near the door. The woman immediately came round the counter and found it for me. It was a photocopy of the leaflet for blue badge holders. I asked where I had to return it and she said she was not sure. Her colleague then said there was an address at the back and I turned to that page and saw it said Coventry! The first woman said she had learnt something. I thanked them and left.

I felt that I had been treated pleasantly and effectively by both women. Although there were several more clients now waiting, I was not rushed out of the way.

Recommendations:

- Carry on welcoming and supporting clients in the same manner

5. Shopper with a visual impairment

The security man gave me his arm – I didn't expect this, it was good. I spoke to an African girl, she was very good. She asked me what I would like to do – discuss my enquiry there or go to a private room.

When I asked about leisure facilities for blind people she offered to take me there.

I asked about Housing Associations and she looked it up on the computer and when I asked if I could get information in Braille or on tape, she explained that it could be done by arrangement. I was just so impressed, definitely impressed.

The shoppers findings (General accessibility for this impairment)

1. Shopper with a hearing impairment

Firstly I could not find the Shop! I spent quite a long time driving up and down Peckham Hill Street, I then parked my car and asked at shops and no-one knew where it was. Frustrated, I text'd my friend and asked him to telephone Sue Trinder at Southwark Council. I was informed the 'shop' was in the Library.

In respect of my hearing loss and general accessibility I would have appreciated a bolder sign notifying which desk had the loop system.

2. Shopper with a learning difficulty

It was very difficult to find the actual place and I would never have found it without my Mum's help. They weren't very helpful when I first went in; I didn't know what to do so I sat down and waited even though there was someone behind the counter who wasn't talking to anyone.

Better signposts would help, it was difficult to read the long list of services. There is no sign outside to tell you where it is.

3. Shopper with a mental health history

Information received about Peckham from London friends was disheartening. I was told that it was a dangerous area "Like Brixton twenty years ago"

Parking. The car park next to Safeways was large, accessible, and felt safe at that time in the afternoon. Finding the library from the car park was easy. It is the largest landmark in the area.

It looked modern and well built. It was easy to find the front entrance and the signs to the One Stop Shop were instantly accessible.

Recommendations:

- The notices on the workstations asking one to wait are printed on A4 paper from the computer .They will get rather tatty soon. They would look better properly printed and possibly in other languages?
- The notices explaining the waiting system should be posted on the outside of the door because I did not see them until I was leaving. An anxious person would like to know the information before they came in. If there were many people waiting it would give them a chance to come back later. Do you operate a numbered ticket system? Or does it never get that busy?**

4. Shopper with a mobility impairment

I arrived at the top end of Peckham Hill Street and as I had no directions asked two local people separately whether they knew of the One Stop Shop. Neither was sure, but the second suggested I went to the local library. As I approached this, I saw a sign specifically naming and pointing to the One Stop Shop.

There were automatic sliding doors. The One Stop shop was indicated as being on the ground floor.

There was a glass-plated swing door with a large vertical chrome handle. I experienced no difficulty in entering the shop.

A large curved wooden counter was to the right and seating to the left. Signs stuck to the counter asked people to take a seat and wait to be called to the counter. The signs also indicated that there could be delays as information has to be put on the computer.

The seating for those waiting consisted of a broad wooden bench. This could be difficult for some people with impairments as there were no arms to assist lowering and rising from the seat.

Clients stand at the counter to talk to staff. This was fine for a short question and answer session. At the far end of the counter there were two seats, a swivel-chair on castors and a not substantially built office chair with small arms. This area may well be used for longer enquiries and for people needing to sit down while being helped.

The counter is quite high and had computers and other items on top. People using wheelchairs would be unable to easily see over.

On leaving the One Stop Shop, I found an accessible unisex toilet in the building. It was not sign-posted at ground level. Although small in terms of wheelchair turning and transfer, it is the cleanest and best provisioned public toilet I have used.

Recommendations:

- Provide a range of seating some with backs and arms.
- Offer seated interviews when appropriate e.g. for people with mobility impairments or when the counter creates a barrier e.g. wheelchair users.
- Investigate ways to remove extended counter supports.
- Consider ways to screen direct sunlight.

5. Shopper with a visual impairment

I don't know how people find this place – even with sight. It was very difficult for me. The door especially needs some tactile and perhaps audible warning – like they have at the RNIB (Royal National Institute for Blind People).

~ End of Summary report ~

Access Survey
of
Peckham One Stop Shop

Survey carried out by Niall Tarrell

6th February 2003.

Executive Summary

The One Stop Shop is located on the Ground Floor of the Peckham Library. The Shop shares facilities, such as: parking, stairs, lifts, toilets and staff rest areas with the other users of the building.

Comments have been made on all these shared facilities, as well as the One Stop Shop, to give a complete picture of the access to the Shop's services.

The shop has level access from the areas outside the building but the signage is confusing, leading many people to use the entrance to the Library building by mistake. Parking is provided but this is not properly marked and it is difficult to locate.

The main entrance door to the One Stop Shop is not very easy to use and although access can be obtained through the Library entrance, this is not an obvious route and people can get confused.

The main problem inside the Shop is the reception counter. This is too high and too deep for many disabled people. It is appreciated that the appearance of this area is visually striking but some modifications to the counter, to make it accessible should be carried out if at all possible. The rear office area that is sometimes used for meetings is too small although space could be improved if some of the furniture in it is removed.

The stairs are not easy for people with visual problems and while recommendations have been made to improve them, it may be more sensible to put up signs encouraging people to use the lifts instead.

The lifts are reasonable for most disabled people but again some improvements are desirable. They are important as they are the only route for wheelchair users and others that cannot manage the stairs to reach the toilets.

There are a reasonable number of toilets that are fairly suitable for most wheelchair users but all need some improvements to bring them up to the expected standard. It is especially important that all have working alarm systems to summon assistance.

Access to the facilities would also be improved if additional and larger signs were provided. The route to the Shop is reasonably well signed but it could be improved for the shared facilities.

The actual delivery of the information to people that use the shop will be greatly enhanced by the use of alternative media. Also, training the staff when and how to provide it.

Level exits from the building are also reasonably good, although some improvement of the rear exit is necessary. However, an additional exit, from the rear of the staff areas behind the counter should also be provided as soon as possible.

Conclusion

General access to the Shop is possible but there are many areas of detail where good access to the services provided is limited. The use of additional equipment and alternative formats for information, combined with some physical alterations and improvements should allow the One Stop Shop to achieve an acceptable level of access for the majority of disabled people.

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Parking

This is located to the right of the Library building (Pic.1). It is reached by a short private road that leads off Peckham Hill Street. This road is also used by a Builder's Yard and vehicular access to the parking area can be restricted by this.

There is a small sign to indicate that this parking is only for disabled people and Library deliveries but this is poorly located and can only be seen once in the parking area. Also, there are no indications, from the public roads, of the existence of this parking facility.

Although this area is available for disabled people, there are no actual designated parking bays. The lack of marked out bays, with hatched sections to show the areas that need to be left clear to allow proper access to vehicles, limits the usefulness of these spaces for disabled people.

Approaches

The routes to the entrances to the building (Pic.1, 2 & 3) are level and in good repair. However, there is almost no visual distinction to any of the paths and there are rough cobbled areas in front of the building. As these are very similar in appearance to the smooth paths that lead to the entrances, it is easy for people with visual impairments to stray onto them.

The light levels of the areas outside the entrances is also patchy, with numerous areas of confusing shadow and the signs that are next to each entrance are difficult to distinguish at any distance, both being very similar in appearance and having small letters.

There are no other signs to indicate the routes to the entrances from either of the public roads that run to the front and side of the building. As public transport drop off points are located on both of these roads, clear and obvious routes are necessary.

Entrances

Manual Door to the One Stop Shop

This is a wide glass door, with a level threshold (Pic.3). However, although the closure spring is not too strong, the door is very heavy, making it very difficult for many disabled people to open. Also, it is set back from the front surface of the building and is very similar in appearance to the surrounding surface this makes it hard for people with visual or

concentration problems to identify. As it is at the far end of the building from the parking area, this lack of identification leads to many people using the main Library entrance instead.

The glass surface of this door is highly reflective, which is visually confusing and although there are some markings on the glass, these are not large enough to be effective. The visual problems are increased by the lack of adequate light levels around the immediate entrance area. Also, there are no signs to show in which direction the door opens.

There is no system for people to get assistance, such as a bell or intercom box, close to this entrance. As this door is not easy for many disabled people to use, such a system would be advisable.

The mat inside this door is worn and has sunk down a bit, making it more difficult for wheelchair, stick and crutch users to get over it.

Automatic Doors to the Main Library building

These are wide glass doors with a level threshold (Pic.4). These doors are also set back from the front surface of the building, and very similar in appearance to the surrounding surfaces, making it difficult for people with visual or concentration problems to identify this as an entrance. Although these doors have more markings on them, these markings are still not large enough to be truly distinctive. Also, the lighting levels outside these doors are not adequate.

Reception Areas

Main Reception Area in One Stop Shop

This is a reasonably sized area (Pic.5), immediately inside the separate entrance to the shop. It can also be approached through an internal door from the entrance area of the Library (Pic.8). The appearance of this space is very striking, with a long, curving, wooden reception counter (Pic.6) and a large egg shaped structure at the far end of the room. This structure has some office spaces on the upper level and a single office space and meeting room on the ground floor level. This is discussed later in the report.

The wooden counter is not suitable for use by many disabled people. It is very high and although there is a lower section at the left hand end of the counter (Pic.7), this still too high and there is not enough depth under the lower section. This prevents wheelchair users from getting close enough to the working surfaces of the counter. Also, the reach distance across

the top of the counter is too great to allow the staff to easily pass things directly to clients on the other side. These problems, combined with the generally cluttered appearance of the counter surface, create a physical and emotional barrier to the services of the Shop.

This counter has an induction loop fitted. It was not working at the time of the visit but has since been repaired. However, none of the staff have received any training in its use. Also, the only sign to show that a loop is available is stuck on the flat top of the counter, making it almost impossible to see when entering the reception area, especially for those at a lower sight level. An induction loop is only of any real use if it is obvious that it exists and is used. Many people that need to use it may assume that a loop is not available and leave before they can be helped. Also, no tests, with a hearing aid user, have been carried out to check that it is functioning correctly.

The provision of seating in the reception area is not suitable for many ambulant disabled people. There is a single wooden bench opposite the counter. This is too high, has no arms and has a rather slippery and curving surface. There is a single freestanding chair but this is too low. There is also a rotating, height adjustable chair but this does not have arms and cannot be fixed to prevent movement.

The light levels in the reception area are reasonably good but there are some areas of shadow, which can be confusing for those with visual impairments.

There is some echo in the reception area but this is not excessive

The information that is offered to the public is mainly in the form of leaflets and verbal communications. The Shop has a Fax machine but most of the clients will not have access to such a machine. There are no alternative formats, such as Audio Tapes, Braille and Large Print, for the information that is being provided. Also, the Shop does not have a text phone. This is a considerable barrier to the services that the Shop offers.

Outer Reception Area

This is a reception area (Pic.7) that is occasionally used by the One Stop Shop. It is located to the left of the entrance to the Library. The counter is lower although the clear counter depth is not adequate for wheelchair users. This counter is also fitted with an induction loop but there are no signs to indicate this and the staff members are not trained in its use.

The seating in this area consists of a single wooden bench, identical to the one in the Shop. This is too high, has no arms and has a rather slippery and curving surface.

The light levels are good but there are a few confusing shadows. There is a greater level of echo in this outer area, which is made worse by the greater number of people that pass through this area.

Internal Doors

The main internal door that concerns Shop users gives access to the Shop from the entrance area of the Library (Pic.7). This is heavy and difficult for many disabled people to open. The appearance of the door is very similar to the glass panels next to it, making it difficult for those with visual or concentration problems to identify it as a door.

The glass panel of this door and the adjacent panels are not properly marked, with posters and notices helping to identify the glass. As some of them may be removed, it would be advisable to provide permanent markings on the glass.

The doors that lead to the stairs, on all floors, are similar to the above door, with similar problems.

Circulation

Although the facilities of the One Stop Shop are located on the ground floor, other facilities that may be used by the Shop clients and staff, are located on the upper floors. These are the Toilets and a shared staff room. The only route to these is by the use of the stairs or the lifts.

Stairs

These are located to the right of the lifts, opposite the entrance to the Library. These stairs (Pic.8 & 9) are not really suitable for use by many ambulant disabled people. The steps are open, which causes problems for people that cannot feel or see their feet. The nosing strips are in the wrong place. This gives a wrong impression of where the edge of each step is, for people with poor vision or those that cannot look down. Also, there are no visual or tactile indications of the start of each flight of steps.

The handrails are slightly too large for some people with limited grip and do not contrast visually well with the walls. The light levels are reasonable but there are some areas of shadow and the glass inserts in the steps and landings reflect light in a visually confusing way.

There is also a gap running the length of the landings (Pic.9) that is a potential hazard for people using sticks or crutches.

Lifts

There are two identical lifts (Pic.10 & 11) located in the centre of the building.

Although the lift call buttons are located at a good height, they are visually very indistinct, as are the lift doors. There are also no signs in the Library building to indicate the route to these lifts.

The lifts are a good size and have a voice indication of the floor level, although it is difficult to see the floor level signs from inside the lift as the signs on the upper floors are too small. The internal controls are at a good height but the tactile markings are on the buttons, rather than alongside them. This leads to people who are trying to feel the button for their floor activating the controls for every floor. These buttons also do not contrast well with the side walls of the lift. The glass panel at the rear of each lift is also not marked to show the glass.

It was noticed that the right hand lift does not always stop level with the floor. This creates a small step up or down, which is a potential tripping hazard and makes its use more difficult for wheelchair users.

Toilets

There are designated accessible toilets on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th floors. Two of them, towards the rear of the building are larger (Pic.12, 13 & 14) but have some other problems. The doors to them have closure springs, which makes them difficult for many disabled people to use and they do not have fold down support bars. The alarm cord in each has been cut off, the soap dispensers are not over the sinks and the paper towel dispenser is even further away (Pic.14) and there are no paper towels close to the WC. Also, there is no lower coat hook.

The route to all the toilets is rather obscure, without proper signage (Pic.15) and restricted space outside some of the toilet doors (Pic.16). Even the space outside the larger toilets (Pic.12) is limited. There is enough space to approach the door and open it but if the cubicle is occupied then there is not enough space to turn a wheelchair around, leaving people that cannot reverse a wheelchair stranded.

There are also two smaller cubicles, the one on the 4th floor being the smallest. These have similar problems in terms of drop down support bars, position of soap and paper towel dispensers but the one on the 3rd floor (Pic.17) does have a proper alarm cord, although it has been tied up to the support bar.

Telephone

This is located on the ground floor, off the entrance area to the Library building, to the immediate right of the stairs (Pic.18). The area around this telephone is large enough and the height of the equipment is suitable, although a bit high for the latest standards. It is fitted with an induction coupler but the sign to show this is too small. Also, there is no shelf to put books or a bag and there is no suitable seating close to it. There are no signs to show the location of the telephone.

Signage

The signs used throughout the building are similar in design and appearance (Pic.19). Although the font used is reasonable, with upper and lower case and dark letters on a pale background, the signs are rather cluttered and not well located to show the routes to all the facilities. Also, the ones on the upper floors are too small. None of the signs have tactile markings.

Other Areas

Some additional comments included on the staff areas in the One Stop Shop and the shared staff rest room on the 3rd floor, as well as shared vending machines.

There is a ground floor office area (Pic.20). This is also used as a meeting room for members of the public if a confidential area is required. The route to this is rather narrow and there is limited space inside the actual area. This restricts entry by wheelchair users and the seating is not suitable for many disabled people.

The vending machines (Pic.21) are located opposite the public telephone. All of them have controls that are too high for wheelchair users and those with limited reach. Also, none have tactile signs on them. Also, there are no signs in the building to show the location of the machines.

The area behind the main reception counter in the Shop (Pic.22, 23 & 24) is fairly crowded and although there is one lower section to the counter (Pic.24) this has limited depth for the knee clearance space needed by wheelchair users and the depth of the counter is also too deep for many disabled people.

The stairs that lead to the upper office level are a single flight, with no landings and would be difficult for those with limited strength. Also, the handrails do not extend beyond the bottom step (Pic.22).

The shared staff room on the 3rd floor is difficult for many disabled people to reach. The door into the room has a security lock that has very small buttons that are also visually distinct. The seating in the room is not suitable for the majority of disabled people and the controls of much of the equipment are difficult to reach.

Emergency Egress.

There are three ground floor exits from the building, two being the entrances and an additional emergency exit at the bottom of the stairs. All of these are level, with clear routes away from the building. However, the opening bar on the emergency exit is very stiff and difficult to operate. Although these exits are generally suitable, there is one area in the Shop that gives cause for concern. The area behind the counter has no clear exit routes except past the front of the counter. In the event of a fire, or other emergency, in that area, there would be no safe way to leave the staff areas behind the counter.

Evacuation chairs are provided on the upper floors. However, none of the staff are trained in the use of these and they are also not suitable for all disabled people. The landings of the stairs are designated as refuge areas for disabled people but they are only really large enough for a single wheelchair user on each landing, due to the need to leave enough space for other people to evacuate past any obstruction.

Also, none of the break fire alarms are located at a lower height and there are no emergency evacuation instructions in alternative formats.

Problem Areas and Recommended Action

The explanation of the priority for the Recommended Actions is provided at the end of this table.

Problem Areas	Recommended Action	Priority
Parking		
Poor signage showing location and route to disabled parking.	Provide suitable signs on the public roads and by the designated bays, visible from both sides of the parking area.	MT
No designated spaces.	Provide at least 2 suitable bays, with markings on the ground to show the necessary space around each bay.	MT
Approaches		
No obvious routes to the entrances.	Provide clear and large signs from the parking and drop off points.	Q
	Provide fencing along the edge of the suitable routes to assist way finding.	LT
Confusing signage by entrances.	Larger signs by the entrance to the One Stop Shop.	MT
Main Entrance Door to One Stop Shop		
Door difficult to open.	Reduce spring closure strength as much as possible.	Q
	Provide a power operated door.	LT
Entrance visually indistinct.	Paint outer frame of door to give a contrasting appearance.	MT
Glass door not marked enough.	Provide larger markings on the door, at 1500mm and 900mm height.	MT
No signs to show direction of door opening.	Provide push and pull signs on door.	Q
No system to summon assistance.	Provide a suitable intercom and bell system, on the outer edge of the entrance to the door.	MT
Mat inside door difficult to get over.	Replace mat.	Q
Automatic Doors to Library Building		
Entrance visually indistinct.	Paint outer frame of door to give a contrasting appearance.	MT
Light levels poor outside entrance.	Provide additional lights to reduce areas of shadow.	MT
Markings on doors difficult to distinguish.	Provide larger markings.	MT
Main Reception		
Counter unsuitable for most disabled people.	Provide a separate suitable table, as a temporary measure.	Q
	Remodel counter to provide sections that are suitable for disabled people.	LT
Counter space restricted by leaflets and equipment.	Remove as many leaflets to separate stands as soon as possible.	Q
Poor signage for Induction Loop.	Provide vertical signs that are visible from both of the possible entrance doors.	Q
Staff not trained in the use of the Induction Loop.	Train staff as soon as possible.	Q
Seating not suitable.	Provide higher fixed seating with arms.	Q
Some areas of shadow.	Provide additional lights in the reception area.	MT

No alternative formats for information.	Provide information in Audio Tape, Large Print and Braille.	Q
Outer Reception Area		
Lack of suitable space under the outer edge of the counter.	Provide separate suitable table.	Q
	Remodel counter to provide suitable space.	LT
No signs to show presence of Induction Loop.	Provide vertical signs that are visible from the possible entrance doors.	Q
Unsuitable seating.	Provide some suitable seats with arms.	Q
Some echo in reception area.	Provide some sound absorbing panels.	MT
Internal Doors		
Closure springs too strong.	Reduce spring strength to a minimum.	Q
Visually indistinct.	Paint door frames to give a contrasting appearance.	MT
Glass areas not marked properly.	Clear permanent markings on the glass.	MT
Stairs		
Open steps.	Provide back plates on the risers.	LT
Nosings in wrong place.	Provide correct nosings that go over the edge of each step	LT
No visual or tactile indication at the start of each flight.	Provide tactile strips at the top of each flight.	MT
Gap between blocks on landings a tripping hazard.	Provide covers to gaps.	LT
Some shadows on stairs.	Provide additional lights on stairs to reduce shadows.	MT
Lifts		
Call buttons visually indistinct.	Provide contrasting buttons.	MT
No signs to show route to lifts.	Provide additional signs to show the route to the lifts.	MT
Internal control buttons only have tactile on the buttons.	Provide tactile markings alongside the buttons.	MT
Internal control buttons are visually indistinct.	Provide contrasting colours to the buttons.	LT
Floor level signs difficult to see from the lifts.	Provide larger signs.	MT
Glass panels in lift not marked.	Provide suitable markings on the glass.	MT
Right hand lift does not always stop level with the floor.	Carry out maintenance as soon as possible.	Q
Toilets		
Closure springs on the doors.	Remove closure springs from all accessible toilets.	Q
Missing drop down support bars.	Provide suitable drop down bars.	MT
Alarm cords missing.	Provide suitable alarm cords, which reach to the floor, in all accessible toilets.	Q
Soap dispenser not over sinks.	Move dispensers.	MT
Paper towel dispensers not suitable.	Move paper towel dispensers closer to the sink and by the WCs.	MT
Poor signage to toilets.	Additional suitable signage to show location of the toilets.	MT
Limited space outside toilets.	Provide large engaged signs on the doors so that people do not enter the area unless they can gain access to the cubicle.	MT
Small cubicle not suitable for all wheelchair users.	Remove the symbol on the door that indicates that it is suitable for wheelchair users.	Q

Telephone		
Poor signage to the telephone.	Additional signs.	MT
No shelf by the phone.	Provide a suitable shelf next to the telephone.	MT
No seating by the phone.	Provide a suitable seat close to the telephone.	Q
Signage		
Some signs too small and poorly located.	Additional larger signs, located to be visible when approaching from various directions.	MT
No tactile element to signs.	Provide tactile signs in locations where people will expect to find them, such as by lift doors and to the toilets.	MT
Other Areas		
Route to private office narrow.	Ensure that it is kept clear.	Q
Limited space in office.	Remove as much furniture as possible.	MT
Vending machines unsuitable.	Contact suppliers to obtain more suitable machines.	Q
Staff areas difficult.	Consult with any disabled employees to identify necessary alterations to their working environment.	LT
Emergency Egress		
Stiff opening bar to emergency exit.	Lubricate on a regular basis.	Q
No emergency exit from the rear of the staff areas behind the counter.	Provide an additional exit as soon as possible.	Q
Refuge areas rather small.	Consult with the local Fire Officer.	Q
Break fire alarms too high.	Provide some lower fire alarms.	MT
No emergency instructions in alternative formats.	Provide alternative instructions.	Q
	Ensure that staff check all the areas in the building where disabled users of the shop may be.	Q

Explanation of the Priority Rating

Q - Quick. Action should be carried out within 6 to 9 months. Either because the action is fairly simple or this is something that should already have been provided.

MT - Medium Term. Action should be completed by October 2004.

LT – Longer Term. Action should aim to be completed by October 2004 but it may be suitable to carry out the work after this date if it would be reasonable to do so. An example would be as part of other work that was planned after this time.