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## **COUNCIL BUILDINGS – ACCESS FOR THE DISABLED**

### **1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This document provides Members with details of the Disability Access Audit of Council buildings carried out by consultants and seeks Members agreement to the way forward.

### **2 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 In order to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which needs to be implemented by October 2004, a full access audit of Council Buildings has been carried out by Consultants.
- 2.2 The buildings reviewed under the audit included the offices in South Street and Acacia House, Rochford, Freight House, Castle Hall, Civic Suite, Clements Hall, Great Wakering Sports Centre, the Dutch Cottage, Mill Hall, Rochford Day Centre, South Street Depot and the Council's sports changing pavilions.
- 2.3 Disabled access to 57 South Street was provided during the refurbishment in April 2000, prior to the building being leased to Essex County Council.
- 2.4 Rayleigh Windmill was not included in the survey as this is already under consideration for a Heritage Lottery Bid. This will provide disability access to the upper floors with alternative means, by providing an I.T. solution.
- 2.5 Public conveniences were not included in the survey. All Council Public Conveniences include disabled toilets.
- 2.6 It is envisaged that works to bring the Civic Suite up to full disability standard will be incorporated into the possible scheme under investigation for the extension of that building, although the details of that proposal in terms of accommodation, design and costs need to be finalised and reported to Members for consideration.

### **3 MAIN FINDINGS**

- 3.1 The indicative works identified in the audit report to bring all of the Council's buildings to full disability access standards would cost approximately £600,000. However, this total also includes both those general fund buildings remaining the responsibility of the Council and those handed over to Holmes Place.

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**Cost for Council Buildings**

- 3.2 The costs of Council buildings indicated in the audit report include all works to make the offices fully accessible, these are listed in the table below. However, the final cost of works to each of the buildings will be dependent on which of the works are considered to be reasonable during the design process.

	<b>£</b>
3 – 15 South Street, Rochford	83,000
Civic Suite*** ( see 3.4 below)	79,000
Grove Road Pavilion	32,000
19 South Street Rochford	28,000
Rawreth Pavilion	26,000
Acacia House	25,000
South Street Depot	17,000
Rochford Pavilion	16,000
Fairview Pavilion	16,000
St. John Fisher Pavilion	16,000
Hullbridge Pavilion	14,000
17 South Street Rochford	14,000
King Georges Pavilion, Ashingdon	13,000
Great Wakering Pavilion	9,000
Canewdon Pavilion	5,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>393,000</b>

- 3.3 The Dutch Cottage was included in the survey but as this is a Council House and a trust, although open to the public, no permanent works are recommended.
- 3.4 Works identified consist principally of providing signing to the building, alterations to provide pedestrian access including parking , internal alterations where appropriate and signing internal and external where necessary. The provision of a lift to provide access to upper floors is indicated for the Civic Suite. The estimate for the Civic Suite indicates a figure of £30,000 for a lift to the upper floors, but the cost from recent enquiries on lift costs would bring this figure up to an estimate of £102,000 instead of the £79,000 shown in the table.

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**Leisure Buildings**

- 3.5 The costs indicated by the Consultant in the audit report for Leisure Buildings are as follows:

	<b>£</b>
Clements Hall	73,000
Freight House	45,000
Mill Hall	38,000
Castle Hall	11,000
Great Wakering Sports Centre	33,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>200,000</b>

- 3.6 Works to leisure buildings will be carried out by the new Leisure Contractor as part of their refurbishment works under the new contract. All works will need to be to the required disabled accessibility standard.

**4 WHAT CAN BE DONE**

- 4.1 It is quite clear from the report that the Rochford District Council offices will not readily adapt to provide full disability access throughout. For example, providing a lift to 3 – 15 South Street would not provide access to the whole building. The frequent changes in level within this building cannot be provided with internal ramps due to corridors widths, location of doors etc. It is debatable at this stage whether it is even appropriate, given the potential difficulties with escape in an emergency.
- 4.2 Employment of staff with disabilities will need to be considered and alternative arrangements for location will need to be made at the time of employment. It may be more cost effective to move other staff around to allow such staff to be placed in locations that do have sufficient access provision.
- 4.3 In the medium term e.g. next 3-5 years, it is important for the Council to review its accommodation needs at Rochford to see whether these can be fully met given the developments in IT, the options for more flexible working arrangements and new service challenges. The Council is already committed to this task and certainly, it is important for the Council to recognise the potential changes in its accommodation needs in determining its access improvement programme.

**5 PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE WORKS**

- 5.1 It is suggested that initially any improvement works undertaken should concentrate principally on the public access points to Council buildings, where services are provided, to ensure that these locations can fully meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act criteria prior to October 2004.
- 5.2 The areas to be recommended for improvement are therefore the main receptions, at Rochford and Rayleigh Civic Suite, where the public are most likely to seek council services. Acacia House will not be considered at this stage, as this is linked into the study around the Civic Suite extension. With regard to the main reception at Rochford, notwithstanding the review of office accommodation, it is felt that this area is likely to perform that function for a number of years yet and therefore investment in that facility to improve disabled access is required.
- 5.3 Following on from the main reception areas, it is recommended that the focus of the work should then concentrate on the Council's other buildings, which are mainly the changing pavilions.

**6 WHAT WOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE PROPOSALS**

- 6.1 Full disability access to the main reception areas would include the following items:
- Full wheelchair access.
  - An external means of summoning staff for people who are unable to enter the building, i.e. motorised buggies.
  - Public facilities at appropriate levels for wheelchair users.
  - That the access route is clearly signed visually and with tactile signs.
  - That there is disabled parking within a reasonable distance and an appropriate route to the building.
  - Doors have visibility panels at the appropriate height.
  - Door controls are easy to operate (preferably automatic).
  - Doors are at least 800mm wide.
  - Reception areas are fitted with hearing loops.

- Improved Levels of lighting are sufficient to assist people with visual disabilities.
  - Disabled toilets adjacent to receptions, where this is manageable.
- 6.2 Disabled improvements to the changing pavilions would include the following:
- Access paths, wider doorways, and provision of disabled toilets and showers. The identified works are not necessarily for those who are participating in sports but to provide adequate facilities for disabled parents/carers to attend for those participating in sport.

## **7 PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF WORKS**

- 7.1 In order to facilitate re-design of the reception areas, additional external resources will need to be employed, as the in-house design team is currently occupied on sheltered housing and other schemes. It is anticipated that detailed proposals for the Rochford reception area will be available by early 2003 to enable decisions to be taken with implementation from June/July 2003. Works to the Civic Suite will need to be examined within the context of the possible extension of that building, on which a detailed report will be submitted in the near future. Again it is envisaged that Members will be able to consider the way forward in connection with not just the reception area but also the Civic Suite as a whole, in the next cycle of meetings.
- 7.2 Once these two key aspects have been determined, members can then receive detailed costed reports relating to the other buildings to be addressed together with timetables for implementation.

## **8 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 It should be noted that the improvements required for full disability access to buildings will provide improved access for all people including those who are not disabled.

## **9 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The resources accessed through external consultancy to support in-house staff work up the detailed schemes will be funded from the overall budget for disabled access. The overall designs produced will also need agreement from the Disability Access Officer in Building Control.

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- 9.2 A sum of £125,000 for 2002/2003 and £125,000 for 2003/2004 has been set aside in the Council's Capital Programme to cover these works. Although the cost of the works identified by the survey exceeds this provision, officers in detailing up the specific schemes will identify potential other sources of funding e.g. Civic Suite project, to remain within the parameters set.

## **10 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 There is a legal obligation to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act by October 2004. The works being carried out under this programme and by the Leisure Contractor will ensure that the Council is able to meet this requirement. Adaptations being proposed are those that are practicable and reasonable provision within the context of the Council buildings.

## **11 RECOMMENDATION**

It is proposed that the Committee:-

- (1) Notes the outcome of the Disability Discrimination Act Audit and acknowledges the extent of the works now required to meet the obligations of this Act.
- (2) Agrees the programme to concentrate on the detailed design of the main public reception areas in the first instance to enable implementation from 2002/2003
- (3) Agrees that this be followed by further reports for associated works to the Council's changing pavilions in 2003/2004.

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### **Background Papers:**

Disability Discrimination Act 1995.  
The Disability Discrimination Act Audit Report

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