

Access for All – Closure

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Purpose of the Report

1. This report is to inform District Executive of the closure of Access for All, to seek alternative use of their grant and to consider options for obtaining specialist access advice in the future.

Forward Plan

2. This report appeared on the District Executive Forward Plan with an anticipated Committee date of May 2020.

Public Interest

3. The issues covered by this report helps ensure the Council's compliance with our Public Sector Equality Duties under the Equality Act 2010.

Recommendations

4. That District Executive -
 - a) Notes the wind down of Access for All which should be complete by the end of June 2020
 - b) Agree to a review of the outcomes required from specialist disability advice provision and to commission an appropriate solution.

Background

5. Access for All are a local voluntary sector organisation working to improve access to services and facilities for the benefit of all members of the community. Their aim is to increase the social inclusion of disabled people with limited mobility and other impairments, so they enjoy equality of opportunity.
6. They have been in receipt of a small core grant (currently £9,000 per annum) supported with a Service Level Agreement. Their current SLA expired on the 31st March 2020.
7. The majority of work they have undertaken for SSDC has been in the areas of:-
 - Providing Access audits/reviews of community buildings such as village halls, community centres and sports facilities, often as a condition of a community grant award.
 - Providing Disability Awareness training for Taxi Drivers
 - Monitoring and commenting on Planning Applications
 - Acting as 'access experts' on groups such as the Yeovil Refresh

8. In addition, one-off pieces of work have also been undertaken, such as an access review of Polling Station venues and advising on an access version of the Visit South Somerset guide.
9. Over the course of 2019 the demand for Access for All's services began to diminish, not only from SSDC but also from other categories of users. Access for All put this down to an increased awareness of the requirement to take into account the needs of mobility impaired residents, whether in the design of public buildings and open spaces or the services provided by local taxi firms. This has however, also reduced opportunities for earning income making Access for All increasingly unsustainable.
10. At the January 2020 District Executive Committee in the District-wide strategic grants report, members were asked to note that Access for All's future was uncertain, and that until further investigative work has been completed on future sustainability, no commitment to funding was being sought. Members also agreed to retain the £9,000 grant within the Strategy and Commissioning budget for 2020/21.
11. Since then an assessment has been undertaken to ascertain whether there is likely to be sufficient demand from SSDC services to justify continued grant funding of Access for All.
12. The outcome of this is that whilst the service provided by Access for All is valued, and that there are likely to be occasions when a service is needed in the future, it is unlikely to be of sufficient volume or regularity to justify ongoing funding.

Report

Closure

13. On the 26th February 2020, in a meeting with Access for All, it was confirmed that the organisation would be ceasing operation as of March 2020 and conducting an orderly close down of the charity including the redundancy of one part-time member of staff.
14. To this end the organisation have been written to acknowledging the closure, confirming that their grant will not be renewed and to thank them for the work undertaken.

Future

- I. Whilst the demand for Access for All services has diminished there are likely to be circumstances where the council will need specialist disability access advice, particularly to discharge its Public Sector Equality duties, including, for example, our town centre regeneration programmes or in support of community organisations.
15. This could be achieved in a number of ways including:-
- i. Buying in on an as needed basis
 - a) From specialist third sector providers e.g. The Shaw Trust or West of England Centre for Integrated Living (WECIL)
 - b) Specialist access auditors/consultants registered with the National Register of Access Consultants
 - ii. Train up an in-house resource
 - iii. Joint fund an Access resource with the other Somerset councils.

(With respect to i a) above, there is a possibility that the volunteer who conducts the majority of access audits with Access or All would remain available to offer this service on a paid-for freelance basis.)

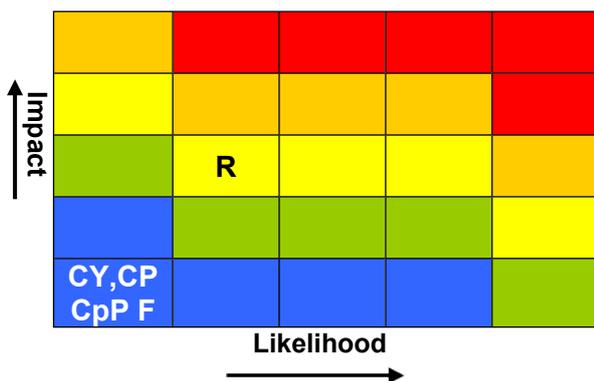
16. Services would need to budget individually for any specialist Access advice they need to buy-in, in any given financial year.
17. Alternatively a dedicated budget could be established to finance this type of work, particularly to help meet the costs of audits on community buildings such as Village Halls, Community Centres and Sports Pavilions that are required as a condition of a community grant.
18. If the option to train up an in-house resource were considered then this could be achieved within existing staff resources plus some additional training costs.
19. If an option to explore contributing to a joint resource between the Five Somerset Councils were supported, the £9,000 Access for All grant could be utilised for this purpose.

7. Financial Implications

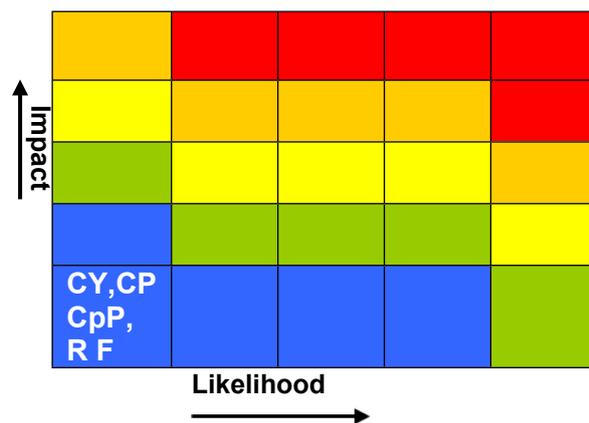
20. The Access for All £9,000 grant is included in the 2020/21 strategic grants budget of £326,190. Therefore, there are no additional financial implications included in this report.

8. Risk Matrix

Risk Profile before officer recommendations



Risk Profile after officer recommendations



Key

Categories	Colours (for further detail please refer to Risk management strategy)
R = Reputation	Red = High impact and high probability
CpP = Corporate Plan Priorities	Orange = Major impact and major probability
CP = Community Priorities	Yellow = Moderate impact and moderate probability
CY = Capacity	Green = Minor impact and minor probability
F = Financial	Blue = Insignificant impact and insignificant probability

Council Plan Implications

21. The consideration of the access needs of disabled members of our communities contributes to the fulfilment of the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy and successful

delivery of the Council's Equality Objectives and Action Plan. Equalities underpins all of the council's activities.

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

22. None

Equality and Diversity Implications

23. Addressing disabled access requirements in the discharge of our responsibilities is one way of ensuring that we comply with the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty. By being able to undertake disabled access reviews, or to seek specialist Disability Access advice in relation to physical developments, will enable us to avoid any potentially discriminatory practices and ensure our services are appropriate to users with the Protected Characteristic of Disability.

Privacy Impact Assessment

24. None

Background Papers

25. District-wide strategic grants – funding arrangements with CASS and SPARK 2020-2021 – January 2020 District Executive report
