

To: Council

On: 2 March 2023

Report by: Director of Environment & Infrastructure

Heading: Council Motion – Street Furniture, Towns and Villages

1. Summary

- 1.1 At the Council meeting of 24 June 2021, the following motion was agreed; ***Council acknowledges the difficulties encountered by blind, visually impaired and disabled people resulting from the proliferation of street furniture in Renfrewshire towns and villages. Council recognises that street furniture plays a large role in public life, which when well designed and appropriately placed can assist blind, visually impaired and disabled people to navigate pavements and pedestrian areas safely. Accordingly, council will work with the Health and Social Care Partnership, the Visual impairment Unit, local business organisations, and other partners including local community groups who work with the blind, visually impaired and disabled people, to assess what works best and what improvements can be made to current practice, with a report being brought to the December 2021 council meeting.***
- 1.2 As a result of the motion, officers from a range of Council Services including Environment & Infrastructure, Chief Executives Service and the Health & Social Care Partnership have worked together to attempt to identify areas of particular concern and more importantly focus on what options exist for improvements to how we engage with the blind, visually impaired and disabled community organisations better going forward.
- 1.3 It was agreed that the Health & Social Care Partnership would issue a survey to their regular identified forums to gauge the issues which are being experienced by these communities in relation to street furniture in our towns and villages. The summary of the survey and outcomes received are detailed in section 3 of the report.
- 1.4 The respondents to the survey provided feedback on street furniture, they also brought forward matters in relation to infrastructure across Renfrewshire and whilst the survey did not outline any single particular area within our town or village centres, it did highlight the need for focused engagement with people with physical disabilities and sensory

impairments on street furniture and public realm improvements, to provide a route to discuss matters within their community and across Renfrewshire.

- 1.5 It is proposed to create a strategic forum that brings together communities and existing forums to create a Strategic Town and Village Accessibility forum. The group would consist of officers from Environment & Infrastructure, the Health & Social Care Partnership, Chief Executives Service, Paisley First, Shopmobility, Renfrewshire Access Panel and Renfrewshire visual and hearing-impaired forums.
 - 1.6 It is proposed that initially this group would meet three times a year to discuss any community infrastructure matters as well as any upcoming infrastructure or public realm projects across Renfrewshire with the ongoing frequency of engagement and representation being agreed by the group going forward. The first meeting of the group is proposed for arrangement in Spring 2023
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2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Infrastructure, Land and Environment Policy Board:

- 2.1 Approves the creation of the Strategic Town and Village Centre Accessibility Forum and notes that updates to the Infrastructure Land and Environment Policy Board through operational reports.
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3. Background

- 3.1 Although the original motion called for a report to be submitted to the December 2021 Council meeting, Council services required to gather additional information to allow appropriate follow up actions to be taken to address the concerns highlighted in the motion.
- 3.2 The result was the development of a survey by the Renfrewshire Health & Social Care Partnership to engage with these community groups to try and gather as much information as possible to allow targeted interventions to be identified.

4. Engagement Survey

- 4.1 The Health & Social Care Partnership published a survey in January 2022 which remained open until the end of February 2022. The survey was sent to members of Renfrewshire Access Panel, Renfrewshire Visually Impaired Forum, Paisley Shopmobility, and visually impaired clients of the HSCP's Sensory Impairment Team. A summary of the survey results are detailed in Appendix 1 to this report.
- 4.2 There were 45 responses to the survey. 87% of respondents considered themselves to have a disability, 70% of those with a physical or visual impairment disability. The overwhelming majority of responses came from people who frequented Paisley Town Centre
- 4.3 As Council will know there was an increased volume of external street furniture to create outdoor social spaces during the pandemic. 57% of respondents said they had

found pavements more difficult to navigate in the last 18 months or so since the pandemic began, with 24% of those responding stating they had suffered injury or harm as a result of street furniture, although this was not necessarily relating to during the pandemic.

- 4.4 The majority of respondents highlighted that occasionally pavements can be problematic. Respondents were asked, if anything, would help to make pavements in our towns and villages more accessible for people with visual impairments, disabilities, or mobility issues. The key issues brought from this question were, the placement of advertising signs on pavements, parking in particular, cars parked on pavements and uneven pavements, particularly for those in mobility scooters.
- 4.5 There were also some positive comments that the respondents appreciated this engagement as a step in the right direction and looked forward to more engagement. It is intended that these topics would be picked up and discussed in detail with the proposed forum at the inaugural meeting.
- 4.6 Lastly, the survey asked if there was anything, businesses could do to make sure pavements outside their premises are fully accessible.
- 4.7 There were a broad range of issues highlighted by this question with many of the respondents not actually sure what role local businesses could play in this with regard to placement of refuse bins, outside table and chairs etc. The one key issue highlighted is that representation from the businesses as part of the proposed forum will be critical stakeholder.

5. Proposed Follow Up Action

- 5.1 From the feedback to the survey, in addition to matters regarding street furniture, there were wider matters raised around infrastructure across Renfrewshire that respondents would like to engage on. It is therefore proposed to create a strategic accessibility forum that will cover street furniture and wider infrastructure development across Renfrewshire's communities.
- 5.2 The proposed forum would develop a strategic plan and it would be viewed as a continuing body of work not a one-off action plan.
- 5.3 The forum will also look at emerging issues such as the upcoming pavement parking ban and discuss how these issues will be implemented across Renfrewshire.
- 5.4 The Town Centre taskforce being established by the economic development service will also provide support the proposed forum.
- 5.5 The Health & Social Care Partnership also has an Independent Living Care Planning Group made up of people working in the fields of, or with living experience of, the likes of visual impairments, hearing impairments, physical disabilities and head injuries. The HSCP have invited officers from the Council to attend the forum and hear and contribute to discussions and plans around independent living and this can only improve collaborative working opportunities going forward.

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – There are no financial implications with this report

2. **HR & Organisational Development** – None

3. **Community & Council Planning**

Our Renfrewshire is thriving / Reshaping our place, our economy and our future – making our town and village centres more accessible for all can only help to support economic growth ambitions for Renfrewshire.

4. **Legal** – None

5. **Property/Assets** – The Council's roads infrastructure is maintained and enhanced.

6. **Information Technology** – None

7. **Equality & Human Rights** - The recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website

8. **Health & Safety** – None

9. **Procurement** – None

10. **Risk** – None.

11. **Privacy Impact** – None

12. **CoSLA Policy Position** – None

13. **Climate Risk** – None.

List of Background Papers: none

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Appendix 1 – Engagement Survey

The Health & Social Care Partnership published a survey in January 2022 which remained open until the end of February 2022. The survey was sent to members of Renfrewshire Access Panel, Renfrewshire Visually Impaired Forum, Paisley Shopmobility and visually impaired clients of the HSCP's Sensory Impairment Team.

The survey asked 4 questions that were yes/no answers and another 4 which were free text responses and there were 45 responses to the survey in total. The summary of responses to the questions are outlined in the sections below.

Closed Questions

Q1: Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

Yes 87%, No 9%, No response 4%

Q2: If yes, is it:

Physical disability or mobility issue 52%, Visual impairment 20%, Other 11%, No response 17%

Q4: Have you found pavements more difficult to navigate in the last 18 months or so since the pandemic began?

Yes 57%, No 33%, No response 10%

Q6: Have you suffered any injury or harm as a result of street furniture?

Yes 24%, No 63%, No response 13%

Open Questions

Q3: Please tell us where you normally spend time walking, shopping or socialising. Include any town / village in Renfrewshire.

The overwhelming majority of responses came from people who frequented Paisley Town Centre

Q5: Please tell us a little more as to why you have found pavements more difficult to navigate over the last 18 months (up to January 2022)?

The question was specifically asked to identify whether the rise in outdoor socializing in cafes or restaurants had an impact on these groups in that time.

The majority of respondents highlighted that occasionally pavements can be problematic, however they did not provide any examples of locations that were causing concern.

The placement of advertising signs on pavements was highlighted as an issue and this is something we would like to pick up with the group going forward.

Q7: What, if anything, would help to make pavements in our towns and villages more accessible for people with visual impairments, disabilities or mobility issues?

A few different suggestions were raised here, particularly around the use of mobility scooters is impacted by uneven pavements. This is something we will review with the group and identify

problematic locations.

A couple of respondents highlighted careless parking by drivers in the town centre created issues for access when they park on pavements, and others highlighted the placement of litter bins as being an issue.

There were also some positive comments that the respondents appreciated this engagement as a step in the right direction and looked forward to more of this.

Q8: What, do you think if anything, businesses could do to make sure pavements outside their premises are fully accessible?

There were a broad range of issues highlighted by this question with many of the respondents not actually sure what role local businesses could play in this with regard to placement of refuse bins, outside table and chairs etc. The one key issue highlighted is that engagement of businesses as part of this processes will be critical to ensure all key stakeholders are represented on the proposed group.