

<b>MEETING:</b>	Democratic Services Committee
<b>DATE:</b>	18 March, 2014
<b>TITLE:</b>	Accessibility of the Council's Headquarters
<b>AUTHOR:</b>	Dafydd Gibbard, Senior Manager - Corporate Property
<b>RECOMMENDATION:</b>	Adopt the programme of further improvements to improve access to the Council's Headquarters .

## **1.0 BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 For many years the Council has invested in its buildings to improve accessibility and to conform with the requirements of the Equalities Act 2010.
- 1.2 Our main public buildings have already seen improvements such as automatic doors, accessible toilets etc.
- 1.3 Recently a substantial investment was made to establish a new One Stop Shop which not only offers better provision generally for our customers but also to be an integral part of our access strategy for visitors. It offers an accessible entrance, appropriate welcome desk, accessible interview rooms and an accessible toilet.
- 1.4 However, it has been obvious for some time that further work will be needed to improve accessibility in other areas in the main offices in Caernarfon for the benefit of staff, Members and the public.

## **2.0 CURRENT SITUATION**

- 2.1 A detailed survey was commissioned into every aspect of accessibility in the main offices, concentrating mainly on all the areas that visitors would use i.e. One Stop Shop, Dafydd Orwig Chamber, Hywel Dda Chamber, the meeting rooms on the first floor of the Headquarters and the two present Members' Lounges.
- 2.2 A specialist company was appointed to assist with this work. Access All Areas is a company which advises public and private institutions throughout the Country on how to conform with the statutory accessibility requirements. They have extensive experience in the field and they have personal experience of the accessibility challenges that face people with disabilities.
- 2.3 After receiving their comprehensive report, their recommendations were discussed on with Councillor Peter Read who gave advice and direction on some of the matters noted. Following the consultation a final list of improvements were agreed as seen in Appendix A.
- 2.4 Finance has already been identified in the Asset Management Plan for programming these improvements over a period of two years.
- 2.5 The report has also identified one area that needs specific attention. At present there are two Members' Lounges near the Dafydd Orwig Chamber. The Lounge on the first floor is accessible as there is a lift nearby. The Lounge on the lower floor is not accessible at all. Substantial adaptations would need to be made in order to allow accessible access which would cost around £40,000.
- 2.6 Use of both Lounges is comparatively rare, especially the lower floor lounge. The Members' post boxes are in this Lounge and it has better tea and coffee facilities.
- 2.7 Because there is not accessible access to these facilities at present, the Council is discriminating against any Member with disabilities.

- 2.8 This can be remedied either by identifying revenue to fund the adaptations at a cost of £40,000 or by designating the Lounge on the first floor as the main Members' room and relocating the post boxes to it together with the better tea and coffee facilities.
- 2.9 As this Lounge is a much more pleasant room than the one on the lower floor, it would seem that this change would be a much better use of resources than searching for revenue for the adaptations.
- 2.10 This would not mean that the room on the lower floor would be lost. It would continue to be available for Members' use. On days when there aren't any committee meetings, the space is used occasionally by staff for informal meetings. There is likely to be an opportunity to formalise this if Members make more use of the lounge on the first floor in its new form. This would not be possible on committee days, of course.

### **3.0 CONCLUSIONS**

- 3.1 As a public body, the Council has a statutory and moral duty to ensure that we make our buildings as accessible as possible and that we do not discriminate against disabled people.
- 3.2 The Council has recognised its responsibility in this field over the years by investing in its main buildings.
- 3.3 By adopting the programme of improvements and adaptations in Appendix A, the Council can be confident that the Headquarters is accessible to visitors and Members.
- 3.4 Redesignating the Members' Lounge on the first floor as the main Lounge would also ensure accessible access to the facilities we should be providing for each Member and we would not be discriminating on the basis of disability.

### **4.0 RECOMMENDATION**

- 4.1 That the Council adopts the programme of recommendations in Appendix A in order to ensure that our Headquarters is accessible to visitors.
- 4.2 That the Council redesignates the Lounge on the first floor as the main Members' Lounge which will ensure that every Member will be able to access its' provisions.