

Edinburgh Accessibility Commission – Minutes

Tuesday 26 November 2024, 14.00 – 16.30, Microsoft Teams

Attendees

1. Accessibility Commission members

Zara Todd (Chair), Councillor Stephen Jenkinson (Vice Chair, CEC), Kevin Wood (Edinburgh Black Cabs rep), Robin Wickes (Edinburgh Access Panel), Nico Ferguson (Sustrans), Kirstie Henderson (RNIB), Amanda Whitfield (Sight Scotland), Colette Walker (Sight Scotland), Sandy Taylor (National Federation for the Blind), Olivia Sklenar (Lothian Buses), Alan Dudley (Equality and Rights Network), Michael Tornow (Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland), David French (Spokes Lothian), David Hunter (Living Streets Edinburgh Group), Michael Moore (The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association Scotland), Elizabeth Campbell (HCL Transport), Jack Bromly (The Scottish Assembly), Amy Bailey (The Scottish Assembly), Councillor Kayleigh O'Neill (CEC), Councillor Danny Aston (CEC), Ruth White (Secretariat, CEC), Rowan Simpson (Secretariat, CEC).

2. One-off guest attendees (specific to Leith Walk agenda item)

Vincent Stops (National Federation for the Blind), Michael Birch (New Town and Broughton Community Council), Councillor Jack Caldwell (CEC), George King (CEC), Deborah Paton (CEC), Chris Wilson (CEC), Robert Armstrong (CEC), Rurighd Ahluwalia-McMeddes (CEC).

Apologies

Jo Kyrtsi (People First Scotland), Councillor Iain Whyte (CEC), Matthew Freckelton (Uber UK), Chiquita Elvin (Sustrans), Councillor Christopher Cowdy (CEC), Councillor Kevin Lang (CEC), Euan Hamilton (Equality and Rights Network).

Summary of meeting and actions arising

1. Welcome and introductions

Zara Todd (ZT) welcomed everyone to the meeting and each member introduced themselves. Members shared any individual access needs relevant to the meeting.

2. Introducing the Commission's new Vice Chair

The new Vice Chair introduced himself. He is Councillor Stephen Jenkinson (SJ) who has replaced Councillor Scott Arthur as the convener of the Transport and Environment Committee.

3. Review/agree Minutes from the last meeting (12/6/24)

Ruth White (RW) clarified that the Council's Integrated Impact Assessments do include equality after a question from the Commission.

Previous actions

- Council to look at simplifying the wording in the Work Plan - completed
- Minutes of future meetings to put in Easy Read style – completed
- Accessible papers should be circulated before meetings – completed
- The Council is to explore possible KPIs and available baseline data on which measurements can be based to gauge whether accessibility is improving or not – in progress

- Council to invite relevant officers to present to future meetings to discuss their work area / key projects – ongoing as required
- The Minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

Actions

- Publish the minutes of the previous 2 meetings on the Council webpage.

4. Update on Council's Inclusive Communications work

RW gave an overview of the Council's Inclusive Communications project. The project is in its early stages and is reviewing the Council's communication practices.

- The working definition of 'Inclusive Communications':
'Inclusive communication means including as many people as possible in any communication. It means enabling people to understand and express themselves in ways they need to or prefer to through communication channels and in situations that work for them at every stage of a process or pathway (communication journey).'

Commission members were asked for feedback on 3 questions. The key points from the discussion are below:

- What tools work well for communicating and engaging with your members?
 - The Commission discussed the importance of not disregarding what people say – how communications are received is just as important as how people give communications

- A question was asked on what the Council can offer to support inclusive communications – it was clarified that this is the intended outcome of this piece of work
- Several members mentioned the need for physical tactile maps and models for consultations about street changes, especially for people with visual impairment.
- Members also mentioned that walk-about with Council officers are invaluable to understand the intended changes to a space.
- The Edinburgh Access Panel (EAP) expressed their support for the Council's face to face meetings. Drop-in sessions can be useful for understanding communication requirements (an example was given of the Meadows to George Street drop-in sessions).
- Other points were discussed on how the Commission itself operates:
 - Commission members were notified that all future meetings will have a telephone dial-in option available for those who cannot access the Microsoft Teams software.
 - ZT clarified that the Commission meetings are held online after previous consultation with members revealing a strong preference for this medium. This will be reviewed in 2025 to check the overall preference.
- How do you adapt your communication methods to be as equitable as possible?
 - Members emphasised the importance of organisations showing willingness to adapt communications when requested. The first step is the

organisation being open to offering alternative communication materials and the second step is providing them, if needed.

- Common alternative formats include large print, audio description, Easy Read and Braille.
- Lothian Buses stressed the importance of ensuring information is made available on how people can communicate back to an organisation. This is needed so that people can ask questions or given feedback.
- If individuals cannot communicate their complaints or feedback (positive or negative) then they are excluded from being able to contribute to change.
- Members mentioned Large Print and importance of captioning videos on social media and alt text on images.

Actions

- Council Officer from the Policy and Insight team to attend the next meeting of the Commission to further explore the inclusive communications work.

5. Finalising the Commission's Draft Work Plan and Indicators

Is the Commission happy to approve the Work Plan?

- RW gave an overview of the priorities in the Draft Work Plan with some minor proposed changes following feedback from and since the previous Commission meeting.
- This included removing the word 'meaningful' from priority 7. ('undertake meaningful engagement for projects

impacting the design of public streets and spaces). It was agreed that 'meaningful' is too subjective. This was replaced with the word 'equitable'.

- Commission members approved the Work Plan.

Action

- Publish approved Work Plan on website.

Will the suggested Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) help measure progress against meeting Work Plan priorities?

- RW outlined some of the data challenges faced by the Council when trying to determine KPIs for the Work Plan. Not all the KPIs fall within the Placemaking & Mobility teams' remits, and there is a lack of readily available data and resource to help measure some of the priorities.
- The KPIs are still a work in progress but there are some good metrics available. This includes data on:
 - Enforcement against pavement parking and parking next to dropped crossings
 - Misuse of blue badge parking bays
 - New or upgraded pedestrian crossings
 - Installing new dropped kerbs Advertising board obstruction complaints
 - A suggested survey to all Commission members for qualitative feedback on satisfaction with the accessibility of Edinburgh's streets and spaces
- Points from discussion for further exploration in developing the KPIs:
 - Transport for London looked at the accessibility of their bus stops. 95% of the bus stops are step-free.

- Café furniture takes blind people away from building lines – can this be monitored?
- Pavement parking - it might be better to use the number of reports received instead of fines. The enforcement could go down or up, but it doesn't mean it is happening less or more.

Actions:

- Commission members to email RW with any suggestions/feedback for KPIs.
- Council to return to the next meeting of commission with further work on the KPIs.

6. Leith Walk – presentation from Council Officers on Lessons Learnt

Robert Armstrong (RA) and Chris Wilson (CW) from the Council gave a presentation on lessons learnt from Trams to Newhaven and the Leith Walk construction. This included mention of tactiles, floating bus stops, space constraints and cracked paving.

Rurigdh Ahluwalia-McMeddes (RAM) presented on a recent monitoring and evaluation exercise which looked at continuous footways. These included several locations along the newly constructed City Centre West to East Link (CCWEL) and some locations on Leith Walk.

Guidance states that continuous footways should generally be used where side street traffic flow is less than 120 vehicles per peak hour.

Key points of discussion following the presentations:

- Members expressed frustration with limited pavement widths and lack of distinction between footway and cycleways on Leith Walk.
- Members discussed the lack of step change between the cycleway and footpath. Officers explained there were challenges with shallow utilities encased in foam concrete which restricted depths for construction. There is corduroy tactile paving installed either side of the cycleway. This was discussed with the technical group at the time which included EAP and community councils.
- Members queried whether there were different types of visual impairment included in the monitoring and evaluation exercise of continuous footways. Officers clarified that both long cane users and guide dogs were included.
- Members queried the traffic volume criteria for continuous footway junctions in the Edinburgh Street Design Guidance. Officers clarified that the traffic volume was only one criterion, another focus is on streets where you expect to have high pedestrian numbers with a high pedestrian to vehicle ratio.
- The preferred limit of 60 vehicles per peak hour and upper limit of 120 vehicles per peak hour came from research in London carried out by Urban Movement – the best available data at the time. These numbers coincide with one vehicle per minute, and two vehicles per minute.
- Members queried the 140 recommendations from the Leith Walk Stage 3 Road Safety Audit – Stage 3. RA clarified that these are not outstanding items as has been widely reported but are instead recommendations which

the Council are evaluating and have rectified several of these.

- The next stage is a Stage 4 Road Safety Audit in spring 2025. Elected council members will be briefed on the outcome in summer 2025. There will then be a Tram final close out report to the Transport and Environment Committee in autumn/winter 2025.
- Council officers are looking at the interaction of blister, tactile and corduroy paving and the confusion this may cause close to pedestrian crossings.

Due to time constraints, ZT requested that outstanding questions were put to the Officers in an email after the meeting.

Action

- Share the Officer answers with all Commission members.

7. Transforming Mobility – learnings from a trip to Belgium

The Council is involved in a 'Transforming Mobility' project in partnership with Transport for All and Sustrans, funded by the Motability Foundation.

The project focuses on accessibility and experiences of mobility in UK and Belgian cities.

This involved a recent trip to Belgium which was attended by a Council Officer, the Commission Chair (ZT) and Councillor Kayleigh O'Neill along with Council members from Bath and Oxford.

George King (GK) and ZT shared some of their observations and learnings:

- Dropped kerbs were steeper than the UK.
- Ghent and Leuven are historic cities like Edinburgh and share the challenge of lack of space.
- Accessibility needs to be at the heart of everything. Where space is constrained, general traffic management should be used to reduce conflict between modes. This includes the use of bollards and traffic filters.
- There were some challenges around sporadic tactile paving and decorative, non-standardised paving.
- The cities have a KPI of % of accessible bus stops.

8. Focus of next Commission meeting – Spring 2025

Julia Sproul from the Council will attend to discuss the Inclusive Communications work in item 4.

There will be further discussion of the Key Performance Indicators incorporating the feedback from Commission members today.

Action

- Commission members to email RW with other topics to cover in meeting

9. Any other business

A question was asked on before and after footfall data on Leith Walk.

Action

- This question will be answered alongside other outstanding questions from item 7 in an email to all Commission members.

EAP raised awareness that the Disability Equality Network are offering Easy Read training at a cost – further details can be found on the webpage <https://disabilityequality.scot/easy-read-training/>

10. Meeting Close

ZT thanked everyone for their time and energy and reminded everyone to email RW with any feedback on KPIs or suggestions for future topics. The date for the next meeting will be communicated as soon as possible.

