



DISABILITY AND INCLUSION FORUM

Monday 9 March 2026, Maidenhead Town Hall

Present: Lizzie Jones (Vice-Chair), Sharon Bunce, Vicky Holt, Jatinder Singh Rakhra, Sandra Balogac and Councillors Helen Price and Catherine Del Campo

Present virtually: Sharon Bunce, David Coppinger, Peter Haley, Kirsty Northam, Robin Pemberton, Caroline Waites, Dennis Jeffrey, Tim Clare and Dominic Manley

Also in attendance: Lottie Barr

Officers: Ellen McManus-Fry, Sarah Collins, Neil Walter, Kate Concannon; Yasmeen Hussain and Ben Crampin.

Officers in attendance virtually: Saloni Radia

The meeting experienced technical difficulties with the sound and visuals needed for the hybrid meeting. These were resolved at 11.20 and the meeting proceeded.

Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and introduced those in person and online.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies received from Steve Sansom and Angela Clark.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

Minutes

AGREED: That the minutes of the meeting on Monday 9 December 2025 were approved as a true and accurate record.

Matters arising

Peter Haley discussed his concerns about the lack of certainty around where Shopmobility would relocate to once it has moved out of the Nicholsons Centre. Lizzie Jones stated that Peter Haley's concerns were acknowledged by the Forum. **[ACTION] Cllr del Campo offered to look into the issue after the meeting and Lizzie Jones asked Ellen to seek an urgent update on the situation.** Peter stated that an internal meeting was taking place on 17th March where a decision would be made but restated his concerns about the short timescales.

Election of Chair

Cllr Price suggested that the Forum elect a new Chair and nominated Lizzie. Jatinder Singh Rakhra seconded the nomination. No other nominations for Chair were made in the room or online and the Forum approved Lizzie's election as Chair.

Autism Strategy

Kate Concannon, Deputy Director for Adult Social Care, introduced the item on the new Autism Strategy, stating it was close to her heart due to family experience of neurodiversity and also being a member of the Neurodivergent Social Work Group, which is part of the British Association of Social Workers. This is the first of a number of strategies within Adult Social Care which is being updated. She thanked the members of the DIF who had been involved in the development of the strategy so far and acknowledged their patience while the project got off the ground.

Yasmeen Hussein, Policy, Research and Information Officer, is supporting the development of the strategy and provided an update. The Autism Act 2009 requires Local Authorities to have an All-Age Autism Plan and within social care the council is also bound by Care Act. Local data and evidence around autism and autistic residents, including the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, shows rising demand and increasing SEND needs. This is a very timely opportunity to do this work, considering the national context around SEND legislation.

Co-production has been an important part of the strategy, working with autistic people and their families. There have been 2 in person workshops with professionals and autistic residents across different age groups and a working group has also been

created. Yasmeen thanked people who had been involved in the engagement and the strategy so far, particular autistic residents. The workshops provided lots of ideas and lived experience which has contributed to and guided the strategy. The intention is that once the strategy is written, the coproduction will continue in some way.

Transitions, wellbeing and communication have come through as strong themes in the workshops and will underlie the strategy's 6 priority areas, which are:

- Education and lifelong learning – ensuring that autistic children and young people can access inclusive learning environments.
- Employment and skills – supporting autistic people to prepare for and stay in work with the right adjustments, pathways and employer confidence.
- Health and wellbeing – ensuring people receive timely diagnosis, with support available regardless of diagnostic status and ensuring services provided are sensory aware. This will look at mental health as well as physical health.
- Independent living and housing – looking at supported living environments and the role of adaptations for residents to live more independently.
- Community inclusion and safety – how we can build an autism aware and autism inclusive borough, including deploying autism champions across the 6 priorities.
- Support for families and carers – recognising the role that families and carers play in supporting residents.

The next steps which will include a public consultation on the draft strategy. Accessible versions of the strategy will be produced as part of this. Forum members were encouraged to contact Yasmeen if they wanted to share their views or join the working group.

Vicky Holt wanted to confirm whether Yasmeen had included the feedback from engagement with the cohort she supports – individuals with learning disabilities as well as autism. Vicky said she would pick up with Yasmeen after the meeting.

Connect to Work update

Saloni Radia attended the December meeting to introduce the Connect to Work programme. Connect to Work is a government funded supported employment programme for people experiencing barriers to the world of work, including disabled people, domestic abuse survivors, ex-offenders, and care experienced individuals. The programme is pan-Berkshire with Wokingham being the lead authority. Each council has an integration lead responsible for creating a local delivery plan. Saloni holds that role for RBWM.

The programme went live at the end of January and work has been ongoing to promote the programme and develop referral routes. There has been engagement with Abri and Housing Solutions as well as AfC, Adult Social Care, the Domestic Abuse Forum and

probation service, to understand how we are working with different eligible groups and how we can best reach them. Co-location opportunities are being explored with organisations that operate in this space and engagement has begun with local employers including Braywick Nurseries.

There has been good progress so far. RBWM's target for the first period of the programme was to recruit 12 starters. 9 have been recruited as of the end of February and 5 more are being onboarded so the current target will be exceeded. RBWM's target over the whole 5-year period is just over 200 individuals. Kirsty Northam asked how organisations can get involved to support families on their caseloads. Saloni stated the offer is live on web page for referrals and **the leaflet about the programme will be circulated with Forum members after the meeting [ACTION]**. Peter Haley asked whether RBWM could receive more funding if other local authorities struggled to meet their targets. Saloni Radia stated that despite slower starts elsewhere the level of demand in Reading and Slough makes it unlikely that they will not fill their quotas. Saloni Radia read a couple of positive case studies from individuals who have already engaged with the programme.

There was agreement from the Forum that this was a strong start and that the programme had the potential to have a very positive impact. Cllr Price asked about the relationship with the Berkshire Prosperity Board (BDP). The governance and partnership working sits under the BPD and is part of the employment and skills workstream. The programme also sits under the government's Get Britain Working strategy.

Town Centre parking

Neil Walter addressed a couple of issues which had been discussed in the last meeting. On the subject of the Wilderness Centre, an agreement was reached in late 2025 between the council and managers of the Wilderness Centre on a temporary way forwards. The car park in front of the centre will be remarked making it permit holders only 7am-7pm Monday to Friday. At all times outside of this it will become pay and display. The Centre will issue permits to staff and patients which will ensure that people who aren't using the Centre can't park there during its core times. This was intended to happen at the early part of this year but is now expected to be completed in early April 2026. The rear car parks (the old 10 pin bowling site) will remain in council use until the developer takes it back. When the front car park is relined, the rear car park will also become permit holders only for users of the Wilderness Centre. In the interim, Wilderness Centre permits are valid in Hines Meadow, which has been the arrangement since November 2025. It is not clear what will happen when the 10 pin bowling car park goes back to the developer. Further conversations will be needed on that.

Neil Walter also addressed the issue around limited waiting bays in town centres. Over the last couple of years, concerns had been raised with the council that the same

vehicles were parking all day, every day in disabled bays. That resulted in the introduction of a three-hour maximum stay in town centre bays. However, a number of those vehicles have now moved from the disabled bays to the limited waiting bays, where the time limit does not currently apply to blue badge holders. This can cause problems for people who need short term parking to access locations like the library. The council is considering how to ensure that all of these bays are available for those people who really need them. However, this problem has mostly subsided so no action is currently planned unless it becomes a significant issue again.

On the issue of the 3-hour limit imposed on disabled on-street bays, complaints were received that the majority of bays were already full from around 8:30 in the morning, since a number of disabled town centre workers (including RBWM employees) were taking up the majority of disabled bays. There was also misuse of these bays, such as the camper van left in a disabled bay on Park Street for 6-9 months in the disabled bay without being moved. Previously there was no way to restrict that.

Since the time limit came in, no complaints have been received by the Parking team about its introduction and there have been no further complaints about the inability to find a space. For those people who need to park for longer than three hours, there are 2 spaces in Grove Road car park, 4 spaces in West Street car park, and 12 spaces in Hines Meadow on the level of the travelator and the lifts that can be used for long stay parking.

Lizzie Jones stated she had received 2 complaints and asked where to direct them. Neil Walter confirmed that they should be directed to him.

Cllr Del Campo asked for clarification that the disabled spaces listed were unlimited. Neil Walter confirmed that spaces in car parks do not have a time limit. Time limits only apply to town centre spaces in Eton, Maidenhead and Windsor and spaces outside of those areas, even on the street, are unlimited for disabled users.

[ACTION] Cllr del Campo suggested that some comms could be done by the Council to make sure people are aware of options for parking.

Lizzie Jones asked whether that included the temporary car park at Broadway, which is privately operated. There is a 3-hour limit for disabled users and blue badge holders needed to register their vehicle to be able to park for free. Neil Walter asked whether that was an issue that needed to be raised with the operator but Lizzie Jones stated that the system was satisfactory. However, she raised the issue of lack of affordable parking near the cinema for disabled people.

Neil Walter provided information about enforcement action that is currently taking place in partnership with Cotswold District Council to tackle blue badge misuse and fraud. The first one of those took place Wednesday 4 March in Maidenhead and

Windsor, and 6 blue badges were seized, three of which were RBWM issued badges and three of which were issued by other authorities. Those ranged from expired badges to misuse. In the majority of those cases, the misuse was due to the badge holder not being present at time of parking or returning. Those badges that have been seized will be returned to the issuing authorities for them to take whatever action they see fit. The officers from the Cotswold District Council are fraud investigation officers and did interviews under caution at the roadside with these individuals. These enforcement days will continue throughout the year.

Cllr del Campo asked for clarification around the rules for dropping off a blue badge holder. Neil Walter confirmed that blue badge bays can be used to drop blue badge holders off, but once the bay is not needed the driver must move from the blue badge bay and stop displaying the badge. If you are using the bay to pick a blue badge holder up, they must be being picked up imminently i.e. you can't park for 30-40 minutes waiting for someone to return. There have also been incidents of misuse, specifically in Windsor, with delivery drivers and collection drivers using family members' badges while they're doing pickups.

Councillor Price expressed that this enforcement action would be of interest to residents, but Neil Walter stated that they had not publicised the enforcement action so that those misusing blue badges were not forewarned. The main aim of the enforcement was to ensure that disabled bays are available for people who really need them, and not for people using someone else's badge for convenience. They will be publicised in the future, although the data will not be published.

Lizzie Jones expressed her appreciation of the enforcement action. She asked for clarification that, when people are picking a blue badge holder up, they can leave the car to collect them and bring them back to the car. Neil Walter confirmed that was fine and the vehicle could be parked with the badge on display, whether the driver is in the vehicle or has left it to collect the badge holder, as long as the blue badge holder is there when the driver returned to the vehicle.

He confirmed that the team are very well trained and understand different needs and requirements so there shouldn't be any issues around people doing what they need to do to legitimately make use of the blue badge.

Flood Risk Management Strategy

Ben Crampin introduced the item. Over the last 12-18 months the team has been working on a new Local flood risk management strategy, including working with a number of local forums to make sure that everything that needed to be incorporated has been considered.

Just to sort of give a bit of an introduction to the strategy itself. The council is what's known as the lead local flood authority which means it has a duty to develop, maintain, apply, and monitor a flood risk management strategy. The last one was published in 2014, and a new national strategy was published in 2020. There has been significant change since 2014 so the local strategy needs to be updated.

The local flood risk management strategy does not incorporate all sources of flood risk, but rather *local* sources of flood risk, those being surface water, ground water, and from smaller water courses. The Thames is a major source of flood risk for the borough, so while the Environment Agency is responsible for managing flood risk associated with the Thames, it has been incorporated into the strategy as appropriate.

One common misconception is that the Local Authority has a duty to prevent flooding – this is not the case. That is the responsibility of landowners or property owners, but the council can look at how to help residents know what to do to reduce flood risk and where to find information. The flood prevention strategy is intended to be multi-agency and there is partnership working internally within the council, for example with Highways, and also with other authorities such as Thames Water, the Environment Agency and Parish Councils.

This work is linking in with other existing strategies such as the environment and climate strategy, transport plans, the council plan and local nature recovery strategy.

There are 4 principles within the strategy:

- Longer-term approach. It's a 15-year strategy so if it is adopted this year it will run until 2041. National policies and programmes can be quite a long running so it allows us to build those pipelines and how we can invest. Unfortunately, like a lot of things, these schemes aren't quick to happen what's happened, and therefore, having a long-term strategy means that we're able to more confidently be able to achieve these actions without things changing in the middle of those work.
- Be adaptable to changing climate. This involves looking at the practices that are appropriate now and considering things that might be more appropriate in 10 years' time. We need to be able to adapt how we have to take this strategy throughout its lifespan as well.
- Taking a catchment approach. This principle requires us to look at flooding throughout a catchment area rather than just focusing on the areas where the flooding happens such as the road system. To help is asking us to look at it throughout. Working throughout the catchment makes it much easier to manage, allows for the incorporation of different ideas, is cheaper and reduces the amount of flood water likely to arrive at the flooding location.

- Community resilience and responsibility - how can our community help to achieve the aims of the strategy.

There are 8 objectives in the strategy:

- Data and information - how we collect, store, use and share information. There is a dataset of property flood risk data. This is treated as sensitive information which is not publicly available and is only shared with partner organisations upon request. It is not shared with mortgage companies or insurers so residents should feel confident that they can report flooding to their land or property and that the information will not be shared unnecessarily.
- Planning, place-making and sustainable drainage. Council is a statutory consultee for major planning applications and looking at sustainable drainage scheme such as rain gardens.
- Building resilience for communities. How to help residents know what they can do to reduce flood risk, how we share information about drainage measures.
- Watercourse responsibilities - encouraging landowners to maintain the water courses that are on their land. The council has enforcement powers to require work, but engagement and active work by communities is the best way for resilience.
- Maintenance of authority owned assets - how we maintain our assets, such as roadside gullies, and ensure plans are in place for that maintenance.
- Partnership working across risk management authorities – how we work with our partners and neighbouring authorities so that our plans are delivered together.
- Investment to mitigate flood risk – it costs a significant amount of money for the council to mitigate flood risk so this is about how we bring in sources of external funding such as DEFRA funding, local levy funding and other grants to build a funding pipeline throughout the life of the strategy.
- Section 19 investigations – the council has a duty to investigate instances of flooding on the highway or in properties. It sets out the investigations policy and reports are published on significant flooding events.

Each of those objectives has an action plan underneath it to help achieve the objectives. The strategy and its action plans will be reviewed yearly, in case things aren't working or need to be added. The Forum's views on the strategy or suggestions of anything which is missing, would be appreciated. Any comments or suggestions can be emailed to flooding.enquiries@rbwm.gov.uk.

The document is being presented to Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 9 March 2026 and more detail on the strategy can be found on that agenda. There will still be a lot of development between now and the strategy's implementation. There will be a

consultation in the summer so plenty of time for people to feed in their views. Adoption is hoped to happen around September or October.

The Equality Impact Assessment for the strategy is underway. 2 key groups have been identified within those equality impacts – the first is people with disabilities who may have issues around mobility if an area is flooded. Also, people in low-income households who may find it harder to take steps themselves to reduce flood risk.

Cllr Price asked about when localised flooding occurs because of Thames Waters burst pipes and leaks. Ben Crampin stated that the council would be responsible for going out and investigating it and understanding what's happened, but that it doesn't have any powers of enforcement over Thames Water. Cllr Price also raised the issue of people building extensions and driveways which reduce drainage and increase flood risk. Ben Crampin said that the council has no powers to prevent that type of work, as it is permitted development, but its role is in trying to inform the public about the impacts of actions like that, about what their responsibilities are and information about what alternative options are out there to incorporate drainage features. He gave an example of a road in Maidenhead where houses at the bottom of a hill are flooded by water that runs down the road. Guidance on sustainable drainage systems and requirements associated with applications for development can be found here on the council website - <https://www.rbwm.gov.uk/environment-and-waste/flood-risk-management/sustainable-drainage-systems-design-guidance>.

60 Maidenhead High Street development

Lizzie Jones raised the issue of proposed changes to existing disabled parking on Market Street and West Street and potential impacts to public transport, and access to West Street. Ellen McManus-Fry offered that anyone who had not had a chance to read the pre-application document before the meeting and wanted to share feedback after the meeting was welcome to email her.

DIF meeting arrangements

The agenda pack included comments and feedback that people had shared on the changes to the meeting arrangements. There was broad agreement on several points including the formality of the meeting and the frequency of the meetings. However, issues with the technology and sound in this meeting indicated that this set up and venue was not working well, especially for people joining online.

Cllr del Campo pointed out that the poor acoustics in the Council Chamber was the reason the AV system and microphones were brought in. She suggested looking into the possibility of whether the microphones could be used independently of the AV system and asked Ellen McManus-Fry to follow up on that. Ellen McManus-Fry stated that

conversations with Democratic Services had not suggested that would be an option but that **she would check [ACTION]**.

Cllr Price picked up the suggestion made at the previous meeting to use York House as an alternative venue. She expressed concerns that that would not be an appropriate venue, highlighting lack of parking and the accessibility of the room. Lizzie Jones agreed and recommended ensuring the meetings are running smoothly with the other changes before we consider changing venues. She raised the problem of timing of the changing of the guard potentially clashing with the meeting but stated that there was potential for the disabled spaces at York House to be reserved for Forum members. Ellen McManus-Fry highlighted that if hybrid meetings proved too difficult to arrange then a fully online meeting may be preferable, but if the Forum's preference was to continue with hybrid meetings then solutions to that would be considered in the first instance.

Lizzie Jones suggested taking away the learnings from this meeting and considering what works best for future meetings. The next meeting will be pencilled in for the Town Hall Council Chamber. Ellen McManus-Fry confirmed that the Council Chamber was booked for all DIF meetings currently in the diary. Sharon mentioned difficulties of getting into the chamber while in a wheelchair. She offered to be part of any site visit to alternative venues. It was felt important to keep the hybrid meetings and agreed that Teams worked fine.

Ellen McManus-Fry raised the point that a new webpage would be needed to host the agendas and other meeting materials for the Disability and Inclusion Forum, now that they were not being administered by Democratic Services. She suggested having a page linked to the Equalities page of the RBWM website and asked for feedback from the Forum on what materials they would want published and what the retention period would be for those materials online. Lizzie Jones suggested that the minutes and agendas should be published and Cllr Price suggested a retention period of 5 years and raised the need to make sure that any presentations published would need to be accessible. Kirsty Northam suggested that a page could also be linked to the Communities Team page. Ellen will take those points into consideration and suggested that there would be potential for posting more information about the Forum and that would be subject of future conversations. Lizzie Jones suggested keeping this discussion going and revisiting at the next meeting.

Engagement with the Disability and Inclusion Forum

Cllr del Campo has shared the link to the Cabinet Forward Plan with Lizzie Jones, which will be useful in directing activities and topics for the DIF and highlighting opportunities for the Forum to input into council decision-making.

Lizzie Jones expressed concern that DIF was not being engaged with early enough in the decision-making process. She highlighted the work on the autism strategy as a really

good example of engagement working well. She expressed dissatisfaction with the removal of Democratic Services' support and that there was insufficient consultation on the decision. Kirsty Northam affirmed the importance of the DIF as a way for disabled people to be active in civic life and said that she believed that the Forum was moving in a positive direction.

Kirsty Northam, also a member of SEND Voices RBWM parent carer forum, said that they had been disappointed not to be included in the decision about the SEND school. She highlighted the impact that such decisions can have on families already under a lot of stress and requested that they be more included in future decisions like that. Lizzie Jones pointed to the email sent by Cllr Tisi saying she was keen to work the SEND Voices going forward.

Sarah Collins introduced herself as Service Lead for Policy, Performance and Delivery, with equalities and consultation falling within her team's remit. She had attended today to listen and make sure that the council's engagement and consultation activities were involving the right people at the right time. The consultation policy adopted last year was developed by her team and there is other work ongoing to help the council develop strategy in a collaborative way. She acknowledged a point raised by Cllr Price at Corporate Overview and Scrutiny about how the DIF was engaged around the budget consultation and invited any feedback on how to improve that process next year. Sarah Collins also pointed out that there are occasions when a decision is more operational and there are very limited opportunities for engagement, as much as councillors or officers might want to.

AOB

Cllr Price expressed her appreciation for having brief reports for the majority of the items discussed on the agenda.

Nomination for Vice Chair

Peter Haley nominated Kirsty Northam as Vice Chair of the Forum (via email), seconded by Steve Sansom. Lizzie Jones confirmed with Kirsty that she was happy to accept the nomination. No other nominations were made and the Forum members agreed to elect Kirsty as Vice Chair.

The meeting came to an end at 13.09.