

RBWM DISABILITY AND INCLUSION FORUM

Monday 8 June 2026, Maidenhead Town Hall

Present: Lizzie Jones (Chair), Sharon Bunce, Vicky Holt, Tim Clare, Peter Haley Jatinder Singh Rakhra, Sandra Balogac and Councillors Helen Price, Catherine Del Campo and Adam Bermange

Present virtually: Kirsty Northam (Vice Chair), Steve Sansom, Robin Pemberton, Caroline Waites, Dominic Manley, Danielle Welburn, Angela Clark, Louise Sugden

Officers: Ellen McManus-Fry, Sarah Collins, Roy Christie

Officers in attendance virtually: Yasmeen Hussein

Welcome and Opening Remarks

The Chair, Lizzie Jones, opened the meeting, apologising for her late arrival due to a family emergency and thanking attendees for their patience.

The Chair welcomed all participants attending both in person and online.

The Chair noted that June marks Pride Month and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month, and emphasised the importance of recognising and respecting the contributions and identities of diverse communities, including disabled people.

It was highlighted that:

- There are increasing concerns nationally around hate, prejudice and discrimination
- Disabled people continue to face intersectional barriers and disproportionately high levels of discrimination and hate crime

The Chair emphasised the importance of:

- Listening to diverse voices
- Standing in solidarity with affected communities
- Maintaining inclusive spaces such as the Disability and Inclusion Forum

Attendance

A round of introductions was undertaken.

The Chair noted the breadth of representation across organisations, residents, and service users.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Dennis Jeffrey, Marion Williams and David Coppinger.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were formally reviewed.

The Chair acknowledged the additional effort required due to absence of a recording and thanked Ellen McManus-Fry for producing a transcript-based record.

No amendments were raised.

AGREED: The minutes were approved as a true and accurate record.

Matters Arising

Wilderness Centre Parking

Angela Clark raised concerns regarding lack of implementation of previously discussed increase in Blue Badge parking spaces and an absence of clear updates in previous minutes.

Ellen McManus-Fry confirmed there had been delays in the proposed works and no updated information was currently available.

The Chair and Angela Clark emphasised significant accessibility issues at the site; difficulty for disabled patients and carers accessing services; the issue is worsening rather than improving.

Action: Matter to remain on the agenda

Cabinet Member Update – Adult Services (Cllr Adam Bermange)

Cllr Bermange introduced himself and outlined recent changes to Cabinet portfolios.

Following a Cabinet reshuffle, responsibility for Adult Services had transferred to Cllr Bermange. Cllr Del Campo was now focusing on Housing delivery, particularly affordable and social housing.

Cllr Bermange's personal background includes being a former trustee of Autism Berkshire, a parent of a child with SEND and having personal experience supporting a sibling with care needs and supporting older relatives. This was noted as informing his understanding of Adult Social Care across the life course.

He highlighted the strategic priorities within Adult Services, including providing access to support to residents to access the right services at the right time and focusing on maintaining independence. Cllr Bermange discussed the importance of community partnerships to deliver these priorities and provided the example of the HeadsUp programme and the work of the RBWM Communities team. Other projects focused on service transformation, neurodiversity and mental health and supported housing were also highlighted.

Kirsty Northam suggested stronger engagement with the armed forces community. Cllr Bermange acknowledged that there was current prioritisation in some services (e.g. housing) but further work needed to understand and respond to needs. Kirsty Northam offered to facilitate engagement with armed forces families. Sarah Collins also mentioned the potential to develop that engagement through the council's corporate engagement.

Autism Strategy Consultation (Yasmeen Hussein)

Yasmeen Hussein, Policy, Research and Information Officer in Adult Social Care, noted that the public consultation had been launched on RBWM Together and encouraged people to participate. The consultation approach includes easy-read materials developed, the option to submit feedback with email and partners packs for organisations. Yasmeen thanks Caroline Waites for the collaborative work with the Learning Disability Partnership Board in producing consultation materials.

There is ongoing work with the working groups, including the development of video-based engagement.

Consultation actively encourages challenge and critical feedback and all responses will be reviewed individually.

The timeline for the project was shared, with a target for approval of the strategy in the post-summer period. Yasmeen shared ways in which Forum members could be part of this work through promoting the consultation and facilitating engagement with networks.

Optalis Performance Update (Roy Christie)

Roy Christie, Head of Service for Optalis in RBWM provided an overview of Optalis' service and performance, noting that the annual report and business plan was yet to be presented at full council so some figures could not be presented here.

Optalis has been a local authority trading company delivering social care for the past 15 years and is jointly owned by Wokingham Borough Council and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. Optalis has 7 regulated services in RBWM (all rated Good). These support 172 regulated service users, with 152 day service users, and additional users of the supported employment service. Optalis supports 340 individuals overall.

In a workforce contact, there are approximately 450 staff in RBWM with a 96% staffing level and 159 recruits in the last year, reducing the need for agency staff. Roy Christie provided further details on the reablement figures with 469 people supported to discharge from hospital and 352 people supported to prevent admission. He discussed the Imperial Road site and ongoing work looking at future development of community lives in Windsor.

Cllr Price raised concerns regarding the lack of provision for young adults (16–25) with physical disabilities and their need for social spaces, opportunities for peer interaction and independence without over-supervision.

It was acknowledged that current services are limited in this area and that provision is stronger for learning disabilities than physical disabilities. A suggestion was made to work with the Youth Council to discuss improving engagement with young people with disabilities. Kirsty Northam drew attention to her work with Neurodiverse Community CIC and their Employability programme.

Equality Objectives Progress Update (Ellen McManus-Fry)

Ellen McManus-Fry, Equalities and Community Engagement Officer, provided a verbal update on the council's equality objectives (2023–2027), which are part of the council's responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty. The equality objectives and the

annual progress update are all available on the council's website. The current set of objectives run until 2027 and the process to develop a refreshed set of objectives, including through community engagement, is expected to begin in the autumn.

The council has five higher level objectives around improving insights and understanding of inequality; strengthen equality impact (EQIA) processes; embedding equality considerations in planning and procurement process; reducing inequalities in the borough and developing inclusive workforce.

Ellen shared the priorities which sit under each of the objectives and summarised some of the activities and projects which had been highlighted in the most recent annual progress update. It was acknowledged that members would need more time to share comments on this item as there was a technical difficulty in showing the slides. Ellen invited any comments and questions from Forum via email and also invited ideas about how the Forum could be engaged in the development of the refreshed objective.

Action: all Forum members to share any feedback on equality objectives and the process to refresh them.

Cllr Del Campo made an observation about the growing negative rhetoric around equalities, including around disability and neurodiversity, and the importance of defending existing, hard-won rights. Lizzie Jones agreed with that observation, noting that it makes it more important for the Forum to use their online presence. She shared a document from Disability Rights UK and requested for it to be circulated after the meeting.

Action: Ellen to share Disability Rights UK document

Cllr Price noted that the negative rhetoric also affects people of different faiths and different origins and backgrounds. She also highlighted the positive work being done in the space and the improvements made to the EQIA process at RBWM while she has been a councillor. Ellen stressed the importance of undertaking community engagement as part of the development of the next set of equality objectives so that the diversity of challenge and experiences of borough residents can be reflected. Ellen also highlighted the good work and positivity of groups like the Disability and Inclusion Forum and the value of celebrating people who are working to make things better.

SEND Voices Update

This item was deferred due to absence of presenter.

Shopmobility Relocation (Peter Haley)

After the imminent closure of the Nicholsons Centre, Shopmobility will temporarily operate from the Town Hall, with Scooter delivery via minibus. It was acknowledged that this was not an ideal arrangement but that it would enable Shopmobility to continue its services. This system will be in place until the end of August, when Shopmobility will move to the former Café Nero site. They will stay at this location until the new premises is built (in 3-5 years) and they can move into the car park, which is part of the planning permission that has been granted. Peter highlighted the problem of not having dedicated parking while in their temporary locations and the wider issues of accessible parking within the town centre. He expressed concerns about the impact this would have on people with mobility needs accessing Maidenhead town centre. The lack of accessible toilets near the locations was also highlighted as a concern, particularly while based in the Town Hall.

Forum Accessibility Improvements

The improvements to the sound and video set up for the hybrid meeting were acknowledged, with the new microphone system improving the audio quality online and in the Council Chamber.

Ellen made a request for any concerns or feedback about meeting accessibility to be shared with her, including physical accessibility, accessibility of the online meeting and accessibility of related documents.

Some proposals had been discussed by the Chair, Vice Chair and Equalities Officer prior to the meeting and were presented for comment:

- A survey of all Forum members to better understand accessibility needs and ensure that appropriate adjustments could be put in place where needed.
- The development of a guide for Forum members, clarifying what to expect, how to participate etc.
- A session to support members who are less familiar with MS Teams

Cllr Price also suggested making it clear whether water would be provided and advising attendees to bring water bottles if not. She also recognised that more written reports were being shared for consideration before the meeting but that it would be helpful if the papers could be numbered with the agenda item.

Action: Ellen to update format for next agenda

Consultations Update

Ellen McManus-Fry drew attention to recent and current council consultations:

- Play park refurbishment survey (closed)
- Autism Strategy Consultation
- Information, Advice and Guidance Service survey
- Flood Risk Management Strategy Consultation

A concern was noted in relation to the flood risk management strategy, that surface water flooding can have greater impacts on disabled pedestrians. Kirsty Northam also noted that SEND Voices RBWM had submitted responses to the national SEND reform consultation and for RBWM's Ofsted inspection.

Any Other Business

Events Noted:

- Carers Expo (10:00–14:00, Braywick)
- Carers Week events
- Learning Disability Week activities
- Parallel Windsor (5 July)
- Windsor Day (17 July)

Close of Meeting

The Chair thanked attendees and closed the meeting.