

Thank you for allowing me to make this statement today.

I am taking a special interest in access for all our disabled residents across our BANES. We have almost 7,000 blue badge holders across the authority area and these badges are provided for several different reasons, but primarily they are for people that are unable to walk even short distances. A large proportion of these people have little option than to use a private car to do the simplest of things, such as shopping, hearing, and eye tests, collecting their prescriptions or meeting friends for a coffee, when lockdown is lifted obviously. This is often their only means of having any independence.

Which councillors here today know how many blue badge holders they even have in their own ward?

I am currently working with officers to look at the issues faced by not only our blue badge holders but also those residents that do not have a blue badge but still struggle to get out and about, whether it is through a visible or hidden disability. They are entitled to enjoy our wonderful parks, towns and villages the same as everyone else.

Whilst I understand the requirement for the social distancing measures that were put in place, these have often restricted the places our blue badge holders could easily access and although new disabled bays were created in the city centre, and efforts were made to ensure blue badge holders still had parking, many disabled people felt this did not go far enough, which has resulted in many of them being unable to go out. Asking them to do things on-line is sometimes not an option for them and just makes them feel like prisoners in their own homes. I would ask that as we hopefully come out of lockdown and these measures are removed, these residents' needs are prioritised.

I am aware that there is a pan disability study currently being developed in light of the city centre security project, and significant engagement has taken place already, however, there are a lot of ways we can help, for example, I have recently requested that dedicated disabled bays are put outside 2 of my local chemists to enable these individuals to do the small job of collecting their own medication once again. I have also made several suggestions about our parking provision in the centre of Bath, installing more on-street disabled bays around the edge of the centre as well as suggesting that at least half of the bays in the Guildhall car park are made available to blue badge holders and also requested a review of the locations of the disabled bays in all council owned car parks.

I would like to challenge every councillor to look more closely at their own wards to see what simple things could easily be put in place to ensure every resident has their independence and maybe use your ward empowerment funds for the coming year on putting in place something that would help these residents. Furthermore, I would request that all decisions and policies proposed by or adopted by the council are assessed on an equalities impact assessment relating to all forms of disability whether they are physical, sensory, mental impairments or mental health.

This should also relate to third parties seeking financial support or contracts with the council.

Thank you once again.