

Children. Adults, Health and Well being Panel 14 October 2024

I thought of calling this speech, 'The view from the wheelchair', because although there are a number of matters of concern to me in your papers, it is the attitude which underlies the questions of disabled access and disability rights in a recent planning application which need to be addressed. Consent was given for a block of 77 'co-living' studio flats, designed for 'young professionals'. There would be 77 bicycle stands, but only five car-parking spaces, one reserved for disabled people. The assumption would seem to be that those with mobility problems are not young professionals. Three of the units could be adapted for wheelchair users, we were told. Not all the five floors had community kitchens, either, necessitating carrying meals up and down the stairs....

Probably all councillors have encountered the situation where a housing association takes six months to make appropriate adaptations of incoming disabled tenants, and then when that tenant leaves, has stripped out the property, a huge waste of time and money while the Homesearch register grows ever longer. There are areas of the Council's estate where either a wheelchair cannot move, or there is no evacuation provision for the disabled in the event of fire. This even applies to the offices in Keynsham, a modern building.

The problem is that rights for the disabled are 'tacked on' at the end of reports, or, as in the case of the planning application, not considered at all. So the report on school exclusions does not tell us how many of those excluded have a disability, such as severe dyslexia, or autism. We do not know how many girls were pregnant, but more worrying, given the national statistics, we are not told how many children were withdrawn from school by their parents because their needs were not addressed.

So often it is merely a question of good practice. I was the faculty officer for disabilities at the University of Derby, and changed my teaching methods to assist the high number of profoundly deaf students. The other students complained, so I treated them all the same. A level playing field should be really level

It would also be good to know how many disabled students are survivors of abuse. The trouble is, with my own problems, I cannot read all the safeguarding report. I consider it very important, but fear it is an under estimate.

So where does that leave us?

First, I would like to know the answers to the questions Cllr Wright posed to Cllr May in the Minutes.pp6-7

I am concerned about the remarks on p9 about housing. I have already touched on the importance of suitable social housing for those in need.

I am sure you are aware of the health implications for people in unsuitable (and often expensive) housing.

Secondly, please remind the planning department of their obligations

What I can tell you from personal experience is that living with disability is difficult enough. One does not need additional bureaucratic struggles, or even denial of access. But that is a general comment, and not a criticism of officers.

Cllr Dr Eleanor Jackson.

PS As a member of the Knife Crime Working Party, I hope we are going to see the Action Plan very shortly.