

Disabled access: the commercial and legal imperatives

The needs of disabled and sensory impaired people in Bromley were assessed by the PCT and LBB during 2010/11, and it emerged that what disabled people want more than anything is to be able to live as normal lives as possible. An important part of normal life is to be able to use local services – banks, shops, cinemas, restaurants and so on.

For every 20 customers in the UK, 6 are likely to be disabled, or close to someone who is, therefore businesses which have poor accessibility are missing out on a large number of potential customers. They are also missing out on the chance to build their business's reputation as a socially responsible organisation, as has been done, for example, by Waitrose and Marks and Spencer.

In addition to the commercial benefits of accessibility, the Equality Act 2010 obliges all organisations that provide a service to the public to take steps to ensure equality of access to people with protected characteristics, including those with disability. Failure to do so leaves an organisation open to prosecution.

LBB has responded to the public sector equality duty by making access to services a priority for 2011/12. The local health service has also committed to taking steps to improve access. It therefore remains for Bromley to take a look at the commercial sector, to see how well it caters for the 10-20% of the population who are disabled.

Attached is a briefing for businesses. What is sought from the Bromley Economic Partnership is support for the endeavour to make Bromley a place where disabled people feel welcome, and advice on how best to take it forward.

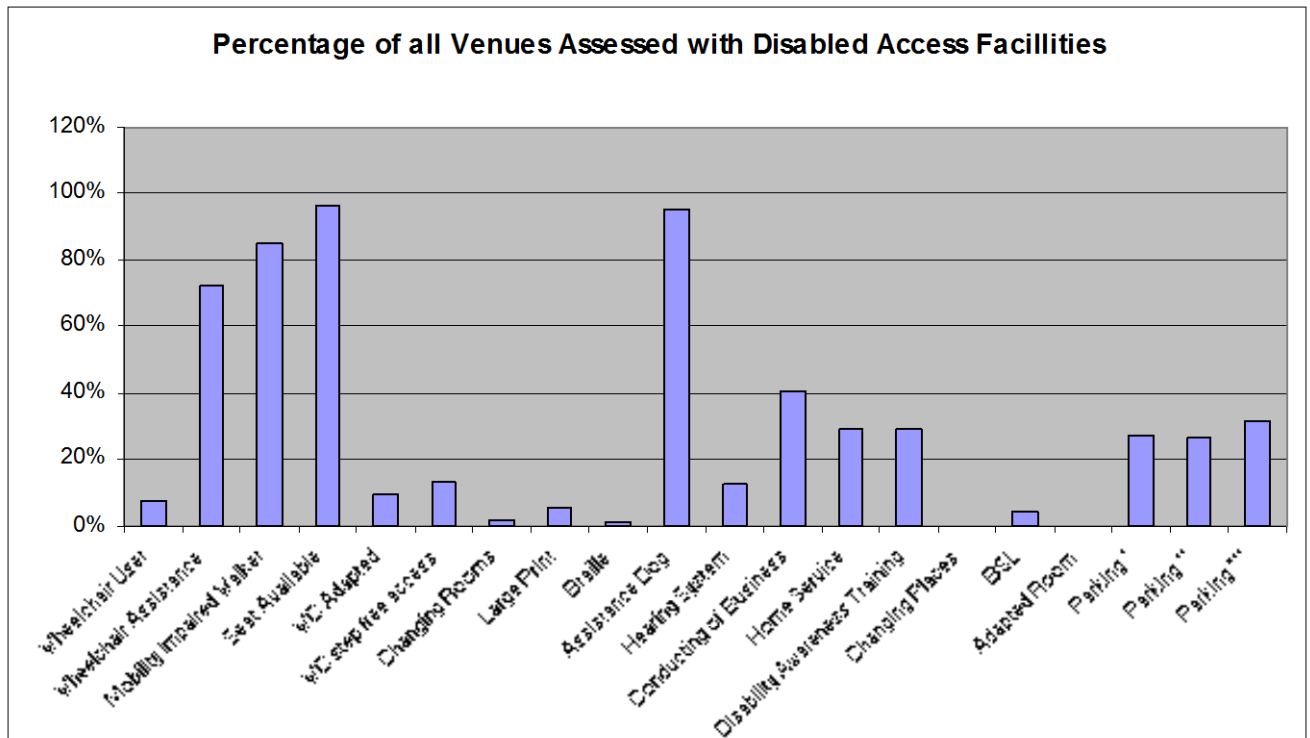
Is your business disabled-friendly?

- Do your front line staff know how to approach and serve people who are deaf, blind, in a wheelchair, or have a learning difficulty?
- Can a wheelchair-user enter your premises without assistance? (ramps, wide automatic doors)
- Are any signs in and around your premises clear, colour coded and accessible to people who are visually impaired or who have difficulty reading?
- Are your toilets and changing rooms accessible to wheelchair users?
- Do you have alternative forms of communication for deaf people, such as Type Talk, Minicom, pen and pad?
- Do you provide written materials in easy read format, for profoundly deaf and learning disabled people?
- Do you have an induction loop system for people with hearing aids? If so, is it functioning, and are staff aware how to use it?
- Do you provide British Sign Language Interpretation?
- Do you have ways of communicating with people other than by post (eg email)?
- Do you provide alternative formats for visually impaired people (Braille, large print, audio cassette)?
- Is your website accessible: to people who are unable to use a keyboard; to visually impaired people; to people who have difficulty reading mainstream materials; and to British Sign Language users? See [‘Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\)’](#)
- Do you enable disabled people to apply for jobs in your business? Do you employ any disabled people?

If you have answered ‘no’ to one or more questions that are relevant to your business, then you:

- **Are missing out on a large number of potential customers.**
- **Are missing out on the opportunity to build your reputation as a socially responsible organization.**
- **Are at risk of being sued under the Equality Act 2011.**

Disabled Access in Bromley



Disabled Go is a charity that Bromley council has contracted to assess the accessibility of all premises in Bromley that are used by the general public, including shops and services, restaurants and cafes, leisure and entertainment outlets, and public transport. The above graph shows the accessibility of all venues assessed. While most premises are accessible to wheelchairs with assistance, few are accessible to independent users. Assistance dogs are welcome in most places, but hearing loops are only present and functioning in 12%, and a low proportion had trained their staff, installed hearing loops, or provided alternative formats for visually impaired people.

What support is available for local businesses?

A resource pack will shortly be available on the Bromley council website. Meanwhile, please contact anita.houghton@bromleypct.nhs.uk for information.

How many customers are you missing out on?

For every 20 customers in the UK, 6 are likely to be disabled, or close to someone who is. The most common disabilities are hearing impairment (15%), visual impairment (3%), and using a wheelchair (2%).

The Employers Forum on Disability undertook a survey in 2006 into the opinions and shopping habits of disabled people. They found:

- 83% of disabled people had 'walked away' from an inaccessible service in the previous 12 months.
- 78% had been unable to purchase a product or service at least once.
- 63% made most of their purchases in store, 23% online.
- 66% deliberately chose disabled-friendly businesses.
- 58% said the way businesses treated them affected the shopping habits of friends and family, both positively and negatively, but especially when experience had been poor.
- 67% sought out businesses whose customer service had a good reputation.

Example of good practice: John Lewis accessibility statement

The John Lewis Partnership welcomes all customers: we are committed to ensuring that everyone can access our products and services. We treat our customers as individuals, responding to their particular needs. Shopping can be difficult for disabled customers if their needs aren't catered for: we aim to make the experience as easy and as pleasurable for them as for anyone else, and take all reasonable steps to ensure every customer receives the same high level of service.

The Partnership is committed to meeting the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). We have integrated the principles of accessibility into the design, construction and operation of all our shops and continually strive to improve access and respond to customer feedback.

All our customer-facing Partners are trained to meet customer access needs and to help customers with their shopping. Our multi-channel approach shops, internet shopping, call centres and home delivery means everyone can access our goods and services in whichever way is easiest for them.

What disabled people in Bromley have said

'If a member of staff can indicate that my presence has been observed, and that I will receive attention within a reasonable timeframe, I will feel less anxious.' A blind person talking about approaching a shop counter.

'I do not want everyone I pass (staff or customers) to put out their hands or coo at her without asking. It's like interrupting a conversation in which he/she is not involved.' A blind person talking about her assistance dog.

'Attitudes are much better today than they were twenty years ago, but people still pat you on the head and treat you as if you're simple'

'The greatest challenge to a deaf/hard of hearing person is the general lack of understanding of the challenges involved and the need for good communication tactics.'

'I love the theatre, but the equipment available at venues to aid those who are deaf is very basic and often not in the best working order.'

'I don't go to restaurants where they play background music because I just can't hear to talk.'

'Lots of places say they have hearing loops, but often they're not working and the staff know nothing about them.'

'I once conducted a survey of shops – one shop owner told me he didn't care if wheelchair users (like me) couldn't get into his shop.'

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June 2012**