

REPORT TO: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GROUP 28 JANUARY 2014

SUBJECT: ACCESS TO STREETS

BY: EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES OFFICER

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1. The Community Engagement Group is asked to support the activities of the Moray Equality Forum by identifying appropriate community groups who could assist with their project.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Community Engagement Group
- (i) supports the proposals by the Moray Equalities Forum to work with community groups on street audits aimed at improving access to streets, raising awareness of accessibility issues in Moray and producing a visual network of fully accessible streets in Moray.
 - (ii) identifies community groups that can work in partnership with the Moray Equalities Forum on those proposals.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. The Moray Council's Equal Opportunities Officer has over the years received regular complaints from people who, for various reasons have difficulties in accessing streets in Moray. Following discussions with the Moray Disabilities Forum and the Moray Equalities Forum it was agreed to look at a more systematic approach to dealing with accessibility issues in Moray. As a result, access to streets was highlighted as a priority under the Moray Council's equality outcomes for 2013 – 2017 which were published in April 2013.
- 3.2. At its meeting on 29 November 2013 the Moray Equalities Forum expressed a wish to engage with wider community groups to promote equal opportunities in Moray. Access to Streets was chosen as the focus for this wider engagement. It was thought that the theme is of special interest to elderly people, people with a disability and families with pushchairs but also has wider benefits to the communities. Improved access to streets can enhance the perception of safety within a community. The safer communities surveys of 2006 and 2009 found that the perception of safety was more related to physical features of

and familiarity with neighbourhoods than with actual crime figures. Increased footfall within certain areas can also benefit local businesses.

- 3.3. Feedback from and discussions with disabled people in Moray highlighted that people with disabilities face many obstacles that prevent them from making full use of our streets. Some of these are a result of the historic development of our streets and may not be easy to remove. There are, however, many that can be removed relatively easily and open up substantial routes for people with disabilities. Other, temporary, obstacles result from a lack of understanding or consideration of the needs of the elderly, of people with a disability or of families with pushchairs. Examples of these are inappropriate parking (vehicles covering the pavement) or wheelie bins blocking passage.
- 3.4. Living Streets Scotland is part of the national charity Living Streets which has been campaigning to create better streets and public spaces for people on foot since 1929. Its Walkable Communities Project is aimed at empowering community groups to deliver improvements to their walking environment. It has produced a toolkit for carrying out street audits and delivers training to community groups on the subject. One of its latest campaigns, in partnership with the Responsible Parking Alliance, is aimed at tackling inconsiderate parking which causes major barriers for people with visual or mobility impairments, wheelchair or mobility scooter users, families with pushchairs and cyclists.
- 3.5. The street audits promoted by Living Streets Scotland can offer a systematic approach to improving access to streets. Street audits help to identify problems, identify actions for improvement, resources needed, and to distinguish between quick fixes from long-term solutions. Street audits would consist of small groups of people, representing different groups, following targeted routes and noting any obstructions. This can be done in blocks of 1 to 1 and a half hour excursions.
- 3.6. Moray Equalities forum agreed the following activities to improve access to streets. This is a three year programme which will include:
 - A systematic programme of street audits aimed at identifying accessible routes and barriers to accessible routes. This can help in building a local knowledge base of accessibility issues which could help in the design of future developments.
 - Prioritising actions to be taken to improve accessibility.
 - Raising awareness of how the general public can contribute to improving accessibility. This can be done through a video showing how barriers affect people with visual or mobility impairments or families with pushchairs. Another possibility can be to invite people to take part in a wheelchair obstacle course during community events.

- Produce a map of accessible routes in Moray, possibly using different grading of accessibility.

3.7. The first steps suggested by the Forum were:

- The Community Engagement Group would identify community groups in Moray (for example community councils or associations) that could work in partnership with the Moray Equalities Forum on the activities outlined in 3.6.
- The Equal Opportunities Officer would send an invitation on behalf of the Moray Equalities Forum to community groups identified by the Community Engagement Group, asking if they would like to be involved in street audits and to target priority locations (for example centres of the major towns in Moray).
- The Equal Opportunities Officer would contact Living Streets Scotland to enquire about the costs of training on street audits.
- The Equal Opportunities Officer would negotiate staff support time from the councils Community Support Unit if capacity building was identified as an issue to progress the initiative.

3.8. The proposals can provide an opportunity for supporting and promoting community capacity building which can result in meaningful engagement between community groups and partners and which can support informed, joint decision making among community groups and partners. Recommendations arising from the street audits will have to be prioritised. The first audits should focus on areas where they are likely to benefit most people. Extra care should be taken to manage expectations, given budget restraints.

4. **CONCLUSION**

4.1. The Community Engagement Group is asked to support the activities on access to streets proposed by the Moray Equalities Forum by identifying community groups who could assist with their project.

Author of Report: Equal Opportunities Officer
 Background Papers: With author
 Ref:

Signature _____

Date: _____

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