

Jane Hutt AS/MS
Y Dirprwy Weinidog a'r Prif Chwip
Deputy Minister and Chief Whip



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

John Griffiths MS
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15 January 2021

Dear John,

Thank you for your letter of 10 December 2020 in response to correspondence from an individual highlighting some of the accessibility difficulties experienced by her daughter as a wheelchair user and the wider problems that can be caused as a consequence of access issues, such as reduced independence and confidence.

The Welsh Government wants to ameliorate the negative impacts of the accessibility difficulties faced by this young disabled person and others. We are working with local authorities and our partners to improve the lives of disabled people living and working in Wales, but there is more that we must do.

In your letter, you ask for an update on how Welsh Government is working with local authorities and other parties to improve the accessibility of existing infrastructure to ensure inclusivity. You also ask how the Welsh Government is ensuring the voices of disabled people are heard, including routes to challenge local authorities' decisions.

We have made a commitment in our Framework - *Action on Disability: The Right to Independent Living* – to take forward recommendations arising from the recent petition (separate to the one referred to by your correspondent) to explore how a 'Scores on the Doors' accessibility rating scheme for the retail and hospitality sectors could be developed on a Wales wide basis. Due to the current Covid restrictions, it would be difficult to engage with premises in these sectors sufficiently at present. Therefore we will revisit the proposals, when the appropriate restrictions are eased, as a key part of the recovery plan. We plan to work with Disability Wales and the Bridgend Coalition of Disabled People (who initiated the 'Scores on the Doors' petition) to do so.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

In relation to new development, our national land use planning policy statement, [Planning Policy Wales](#) (PPW), places the concept of 'placemaking' at the heart of national planning policy.

Placemaking requires an integrated approach to development which ensures that communities have all the services they need within easy reach and that development is of high design quality. PPW gives guidance to local planning authorities that they should think about the quality and accessibility factors of places and the outcomes for all people.

Planning legislation stipulates that planning applications should be determined in accordance with policies in the adopted local development plan. I understand that reasonable adjustments made to accord with duties under the Equality Act 2010 have been taken into account by local planning authorities in making decisions. However, the extent to which those duties outweigh the planning policy requirements would be a matter for the local planning authority to decide on a case-by-case basis. The planning system should not weaken any statutory duties on equalities with which public bodies or other organisations will need to comply.

The Welsh Government core funds an organisation, Tai Pawb, whose purpose is to work with housing agencies, equality organisations and government to reduce prejudice, discrimination, disadvantage and poverty related to housing. One of Tai Pawb's strategic objectives is to contribute to securing more accessible housing in Wales, with a focus on disabled and older people, including increasing and improving the provision of accessible housing registers and building more accessible homes. Further information about this charity may be found at the following link: <https://www.taipawb.org/about/who-we-are/>

The Transforming Towns programme was launched in January 2020 to address the decline in town centres and the reduced demand for high street retail. The focus of the Programme is sustainable growth of our towns, through interventions that include improved biodiversity and green infrastructure; reuse of derelict buildings; increasing the variety of services on offer in towns with an emphasis on flexible working and living space; and access to services and leisure. In addition, our work to transform towns collaborates across Government to build on existing investments such as public transport improvements and enhanced active travel routes.

Accessibility for all citizens is hugely important, and the improvements made through this programme reflect our desire for town centres to be inclusive and able to be used by all. A £90 million budget was announced at the launch of Transforming Towns to support measures that would address specific town centre issues, including tackling empty properties, support for the introduction of green infrastructure, improvements to the public realm and the adoption of a 'Town Centre First' principle as Government policy.

Last July we published our guidance document for [Creating safer public places: coronavirus](#). The guidance focuses on the design principles for safer urban centres and green spaces in the context of the coronavirus pandemic and also providing [safer toilets for public use: coronavirus](#).

The 'Creating Safer Public Places' guidance emphasises the legal obligations on owners and operators of public places to ensure that policies and practices support the equality and well-being of disabled people as set out in the Equality Act 2010 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. It also states that in designing safer public spaces organisations should consider accessibility issues carefully, carrying out equality impact assessments, consulting with and considering the particular needs, of disabled people.

The Covid pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated some of the inequalities and difficulties faced by disabled people in our communities, including access to shops and public spaces. Our Disability Equality Forum has met several times during the pandemic. As Chair, I have asked members of the Forum to produce a Covid-19 Disability Impact Report to help us to address these inequalities, improve routes to challenge public bodies' decisions and enhance accessibility for disabled people to their local facilities and services.

The report is being produced co-productively through a subgroup of the Forum to ensure that the voices of disabled people are heard. The subgroup includes representatives of a wide range of lived experience perspectives and interest groups within the field of Disability policy, including Disability Wales, as well as social research and data analysts from Welsh Government. The report will summarise key issues, including access equality, that have emerged during the pandemic and thus provide a means to mitigate impacts. It is the intention that this report will then provide the evidence to update the *Action on Disability* framework and action plan, taking into account the impacts of Covid-19.

The Covid-19 Disability Impact Report will be an important output from the Disability Equality Forum and a draft version will be discussed at its next meeting on 27 January, prior to wider dissemination.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke above the first letter.

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