

Title of Report:	Accessibility Strategy
Report to be considered by:	Executive
Date of Meeting:	21 July 2011
Forward Plan Ref:	EX2306

Purpose of Report: To seek agreement to the draft Accessibility Strategy.

Recommended Action: Approval of the draft Accessibility Strategy.

Reason for decision to be taken: There is a statutory requirement for all Local Authorities to publish an Accessibility Strategy showing how they plan to increase access to schools for children with special educational needs and disabilities. This includes access to the curriculum, access to education and to the physical environment.

Other options considered: Not applicable

Key background documentation: Draft Accessibility Strategy 2011-14

The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the following Council Plan Priority:

CPP2 – Raise levels of educational achievement – improving school performance levels

The proposals will also help achieve the following Council Plan Themes:

CPT9 - Successful Schools and Learning

CPT10 - Promoting Independence

CPT11 - Protecting Vulnerable People

CPT12 - Including Everyone

The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the above Council Plan Priorities and Themes by:

The proposals for supporting schools to include children with SEN will help to make them more successful in meeting the needs of all the children in their community, including those with SEN / disabilities.

The proposals will enable children with SEN to achieve greater independence in adult life as if their needs are more effectively met at school they are more likely to be employed and therefore more likely to be able to live independently as adults.

The report recommends actions which will help to ensure that children who are vulnerable because of their disability are given the best possible access to the opportunities which our schools can offer, both academic and extra curricular, and that discrimination against children with disabilities does not occur in our schools.

The proposals will help schools to cater for the needs of children with SEN more effectively. This should reduce the number of children with SEN who are excluded from school and who need to be educated outside of the area in residential schools rather than within their own community.

Portfolio Member Details	
Name & Telephone No.:	Councillor Irene Neill - Tel (0118) 971 2671
E-mail Address:	ineill@westberks.gov.uk
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	18 June 2011

Contact Officer Details	
Name:	Jane Seymour
Job Title:	Service Manager, SEN & Disabled Children's Team
Tel. No.:	01635 519783
E-mail Address:	jseymour@westberks.gov.uk

Implications

Policy:	The Accessibility is consistent with the Council's existing SEN Inclusion Policy.
Financial:	<p>The majority of actions in the Action Plan section of the Accessibility Strategy do not have financial implications and can be delivered within existing resources.</p> <p>The only action in the strategy with any significant financial implications is the proposal to carry out a feasibility study, by 2014, to determine how and at what cost one of the secondary schools in the eastern area of the Authority could be made fully accessible to children with mobility difficulties including wheelchair users. The cost of the feasibility study will have to be met from within the Education Capital Programme. The Accessibility Strategy does not make any commitment to proceed with the necessary works to make a secondary school in the east of the Authority fully accessible; it only proposes at this stage that a feasibility study is conducted.</p>
Personnel:	There are no personnel implications.
Legal/Procurement:	It is a statutory duty for all Local Authorities to publish an Accessibility Strategy. The actions in the Strategy will assist schools in meeting their legal duties towards children with SEN and disabilities under the 1996 Education Act and the Disability Discrimination Act and Equality Act.
Property:	The property implications are outlined under Financial Implications above.
Risk Management:	Not applicable
Equalities Impact Assessment:	Stage 1 completed

Is this item subject to call-in?	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No: <input type="checkbox"/>
<p>If not subject to call-in please put a cross in the appropriate box:</p> <p>The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission or associated Task Groups within preceding six months <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Item is Urgent Key Decision <input type="checkbox"/></p>		

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

- 1.1 There is a legal requirement for all Local Authorities to publish an Accessibility Strategy. The Strategy must show how the Authority plans to increase access to its schools for children with special educational needs and disabilities. It must cover access to the curriculum, access to information and access to the physical environment. The existing Accessibility Strategy needs to be reviewed.
- 1.2 A Steering Group was set up to oversee the process of creating a new Accessibility Strategy. The group included representatives from schools and voluntary groups, parents and relevant Council officers.
- 1.3 Data was collected to inform the strategy. An extensive consultation exercise was also undertaken in summer and autumn of 2010. Parents of children with SEN and schools had the opportunity to complete a questionnaire giving their views. Focus groups for parents were also held.
- 1.4 The draft Accessibility Strategy attached to this report was based on the data collected and the consultation feedback.

2. Proposals

- 2.1 It is proposed that the attached draft Accessibility Strategy should be adopted by the Council.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 Adoption and implementation of the strategy will meet the legal requirement to have an Accessibility Strategy and will improve outcomes for children with SEN and disabilities by supporting schools to improve access for this group of pupils.

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2. Accessibility Strategy

- 2.1 The attached draft strategy includes a range of actions in the Action Plan section of the document which are designed to improve access to the curriculum, to information and to the physical environment of West Berkshire schools. A large number of the proposed actions relate to additional advice, training and guidance for schools.
- 2.2 It is recommended that the strategy is adopted.

Appendices

- Appendix A – Draft Accessibility Strategy
- Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment

Consultees

- Local Stakeholders:** West Berkshire Schools and PRUs
Parents of children with SEN
Parent Partnership Service
Children's Centres
Neighbouring Local Authorities
Sensory Consortium Service
Primary Care Trust
MPs
Mencap
National Autistic Society, West Berkshire Branch
Royal National Institute for the Deaf
National Deaf Children's Society
Royal National Institute for the Blind
Berkshire Blind Society
Diocesan Authorities
Non maintained and independent special schools
- Officers Consulted:** Cathy Burnham, Rhian Ireland, Anne Cooper, Mark Lewis, Valerie Witton, Elaine Walker, Ian Pearson, Jacquie Lynch, Lorna Hunt, Julia Waldman, Andy Tubbs
- Trade Union:** Not consulted