

Councillors, the petition that I present to you today speaks very much for itself.

What doesn't is the reasons behind my asking you, the decision makers to think again.

We all know that financial savings have to be made and that there are many competing calls for those scarce resources. For any manager deleting a post such as The Development Officer Inclusion and Mobility provides a simple and, easy way to balance the books; but what does this post actually do you might be thinking?

First and foremost this post assists in providing an appropriate professional support not just to other Council officers but also to professionals in external organisations and businesses that enables the delivery of an inclusive built environment for residents of and visitors to our district.

Additionally the post works alongside disabled people and provides invaluable advice to the Council's Planning and Highway service on a wide range of access issues as well as inclusive design advice, including the importance of complying with current equality legislation and how all of this fits in with the delivery of planning, building control and highway processes.

We are informed the Mobility Planning Group and the Planning Highways Access Forum both supported by the post are to continue but not how in reality this will happen. I can only conclude that the senior manager in the Planning and Highways service that made the commitment to continue these user-led groups which this post also supports doesn't know either as there has been no detail at this late stage as to what will be put in its place.

The Council rightly, promotes equality as one of its core principles and as such is supposed to be central to all of its works. If this is to be anything more than just words then I cannot understand the logic in deleting your own in-house specialist area for disabled access in favour of... well I don't know as no one has told me what happens once the post is deleted.

The disabled have benefit of a protected characteristic as defined by the 2010 Equalities Act and as such the decision to delete this post could be subject to Judicial Review as it would have a detrimental impact on lives of disabled people and their ongoing ability to enjoy the public realm as well as to use public transport. The costs involved in defending a Judicial Review will not be insignificant.

The loss to the Council of a specialised, professional and most importantly in-house resource also has a cost and a cost far greater than that of the on-going salary of this post.

If all Council Officers are sufficiently informed of inclusive design principles then there wouldn't be as much of an issue, but unfortunately from my experiences this is far from the case. Planners, Highway Engineers and Building Control staff are experts in their respective fields but through no fault of their own are not when it comes to accessible design. And I would contend the cost of making them so would exceed the savings being made by the deletion of this post.

And where would those officers go for advice if this post was to be deleted?

Outside consultants and at what cost to the public purse would that be?