

Tackling disability stigma and discrimination

A 'hidden disability' is a disability that may not be immediately obvious. Hidden disabilities don't have physical signs and include learning difficulties, mental health conditions as well as mobility, speech, visual or hearing impairments. It is regrettable that there have been instances where people with hidden disabilities which require urgent visits to toilet facilities, have faced abuse from the public and even accusations by staff members of being ineligible to use accessible toilets.

Crohn's and Colitis UK is encouraging venues providing accessible toilets to install new signage. This is to help stop stigma and discrimination towards people with Crohn's Disease, Ulcerative Colitis and other invisible conditions. The signage has two standing figures and a wheelchair user with the words 'Accessible Toilet' and the logo 'Not every disability is visible'.

It is encouraging that the Council are currently exploring becoming a '*Sunflower Friendly Council*' to promote that the authority is Hidden Disability-friendly. Choosing to wear a lanyard bearing a sunflower logo enables people to discreetly indicate to others that they have a Hidden Disability and may need additional support, time or help. By adopting the scheme, the Council will be able to offer residents with a hidden disability the recognition, understanding and help they may need when out and about across North Somerset.

In terms of wider disability issues, changes to statutory guidance came into effect from January 2021 requiring the provision of '*Changing Places*' toilets in certain new buildings. These are larger accessible toilets for people who cannot use standard disabled toilets, with equipment such as hoists, curtains, adult-sized changing benches and space for carers. Campaigners declared that the provision of these toilets will open up a whole new world for the hundreds of thousands of people who rely on them. The Government has announced a new £30 million fund to increase the number of facilities across England. Councils are invited to "opt in" to bid for a proportion of the funding in order to install such facilities in their communities.

In view of its duties under the Equality Act 2010 and as a demonstrable indication that it supports the dignity of all its residents, whilst aiming to do all it can to prevent and challenge instances of abuse and discrimination, this Council resolves to:

1. Ensure that all Council accessible toilets bear the Accessible Toilet signage;
2. Encourage town and district centre retailers and leisure outlets to do likewise with their accessible toilets;
3. Seek advice from disability charities on the information and training that could be provided for Council staff, to further their understanding of these conditions and to prevent potential embarrassment for those who have them;
4. Complete exploratory work required to become a '*Sunflower Friendly Council*';

5. Opt in to bid for a proportion of the Government '*Changing Places*' toilets fund;
6. Use its community leadership position to exploit opportunities to raise awareness of hidden disabilities; be explicit in condemnation of disabilism; and work continuously to ensure maximum accessibility for all who live in, work in or visit North Somerset.