

Access audit at West Dene Family Centre, Birch Road, Pendlebury

Conducted on 6th August 2013

Access 2 all Areas representatives: Burt Shepherd; Andy Roberts; Elaine Barber and Tommy Healey

Introduction: Access 2 All Areas were asked to conduct an audit of West Dene Family Centre by Russ Nutter of the City Council's asset management team. The premises at West Dene are all on ground level so this is better for visitors with mobility issues.

Burt is registered blind. Tommy is a wheelchair user. The group were welcomed by Joanne Kirkham who manages the centre. The centre is a front line service serving young people from ages 0-18 who are in care or have been made a ward of court. We were informed that there are children with a variety of disabilities who attend the centre including a relatively high proportion of autistic children.

Transport

The family centre is situated in Pendlebury but it is not on a main arterial route. There is a car park (see below) and the premises are also on a bus route.

Entrance

A gate provides access to the building where there is a small step which is difficult to negotiate for unassisted wheelchair users. There is an alternative entrance to the building via the car park which does not have steps. There was no sign indicating the route of the alternative access.



Entrance to Centre via gate and small step

The main entrance to the building was very difficult to access for wheelchair users. In particular the entrance had a small step from where it was impossible for any unassisted wheelchair users to reach the bell.

The bell was a simple device that alerts staff to come to the entrance. In the event that staff have not heard the bell, visitors have to wait. There is limited shelter at the entrance so that in inclement weather wheelchair visitors will be exposed to the elements.



**Main entrance
step and bell**

There is no intercom or CCTV camera at the building and the main door is not power assisted.

Signage to the premises was quite discreet but Joanne assured us that most people will be referred by a social worker who would give clear instructions about where the building is situated.



For deaf visitors or those with a hearing impediment there is no loop system either at reception or throughout the rest of the building.

Main building

There is an informal reception area but it wasn't clear whether this was manned at all times. Joanne said however, that staff were always about. In addition we were informed that all staff had received wheelchair training.

The building itself was set up almost in a circle with many different contact areas accessible as you walk through in a loop.

We asked about the availability of materials in Braille such as reading books for children visiting the centre. We were told that if a need became identified then resources would be made available.

Throughout the building the doors were open as the weather was warm. However there are locks on all the doors to ensure security. None of the doors were power assisted but most of the handles could be reached by wheelchair users. One of the corridor doors at the back of the building had a very high door handle which would be difficult for a wheelchair user to reach.

The floor surface was smooth and easy for wheelchairs to manoeuvre. The carpets were colour contrasted between rooms and therefore better for people with visual impairments.

The contact areas were all accessible to disabled people with enough width between the door frames. Seating was provided in all of the rooms, particularly for children who use the facilities. The furniture had rounded edges (in the main) with very few sharp edges except for tables.



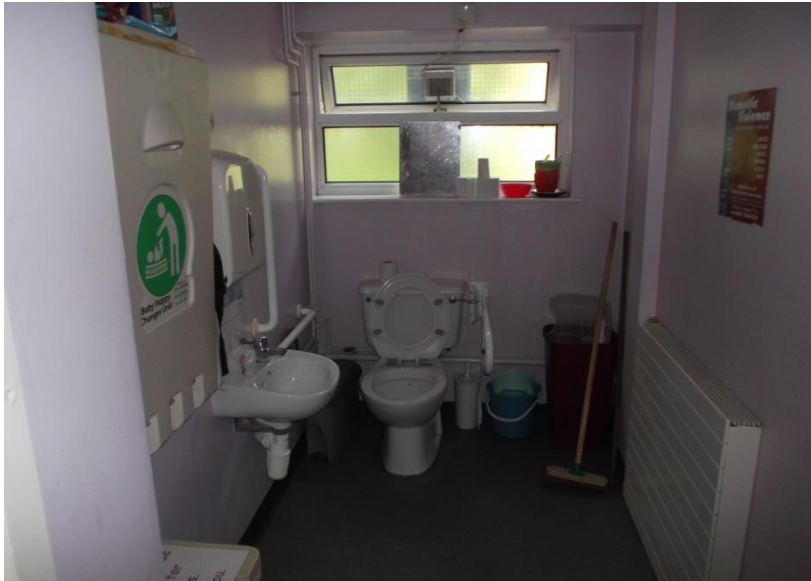
Entrance to one of the contact areas

One of the exits from the centre had a very big step which would be very difficult for a wheelchair user to negotiate. The group felt however that there were so many alternative exits this would not pose too much difficulty.



Toilet facilities

There were both able bodied and disabled toilet facilities. Tommy felt that the disabled toilets were suitable for wheelchair users, however there were bins on either side of the door and Tommy felt it might be difficult for a wheelchair user to reverse out.



Disabled toilet

Emergency exits

There were emergency exit signs, fire extinguishers and an alarm system. The group didn't feel there were any problems for disabled people to exit in safety.

Car parking

The car park was reached from Birch Drive but the driveway was rutted with pot holes. It was accessible for wheelchair users but could be improved. There were a limited number of car parking spaces but there is also on street parking on Birch Drive.



Driveway and car park



Recommendations

The West Dene family centre was a very welcoming place and the group could see that the staff were keen to ensure that the premises were as inclusive as possible. However, there were some improvements that the group felt would assist any disabled visitors to the premises:

1) Main entrance

Both the steps (at the front gate entrance and the entrance to the building) could be improved by a ramp. However the more pressing priority would be at the building entrance itself. Unassisted wheelchair users would not be able to press the bell. A ramp here with some form of shelter over the entrance would really benefit access. The installation of a CCTV monitor would also enable staff to view who is waiting at the door and make sure a member of staff lets them in as quickly as possible.

2) Installation of a loop system

The group recommends that a loop system be installed to assist visitors with hearing impediments. A portable loop system might be the best and most cost effective solution as it could be used in different rooms throughout the building.

3) Signage

The signage to the centre could benefit from being more visible from the outside. This would aid those visitors with visual impairments. A sign directing to an alternative entrance to the building should also be considered.

4) Braille/ audio resources

Whilst the centre manager considered it would not be a problem to access Braille materials the group felt that just a small selection of Braille or audio books would emphasise the inclusivity of the centre and encourage the development of visually impaired children.

5) Resurfacing of car park

The car park and driveway to the centre is in need of maintenance. The filling of pot holes would help all visitors to the centre using a vehicle but also be of benefit to wheelchair users.

6) Door handle

One of the corridor doors at the back of the building had a very high door handle. Re-siting the handle lower down would ensure that wheelchair users could reach it.

7) Accessible toilet

Re-locating the two bins in the accessible toilet would make it easier for a wheelchair user to exit.