Item for Town Clerk’s Correspondence for Council Meeting 8th September 2015

The Mayor and I met representatives of the Disability Forum on 19th August to discuss access to our meetings. The most serious constraint upon us is the design and functionality of the town hall.

When meetings are held in the council chamber we can offer access to people who cannot use stairs by way of the lift to the first floor and then the stair lift. This is not a perfect solution as the stair lift is a cumbersome piece of equipment, it is slow and can only be operated by a Herefordshire Council custodian. However, it provides a workable solution. The main issue is that it cannot take the heaviest powered wheelchairs, especially if they have a particularly large person in them as the motor will not work if the platform is over loaded.

The use of the meeting room in the offices for committees has freed us from dependence on the availability of the chamber and it is a pleasant room in which to meet,. However, a person who could not use stairs would have no way of accessing a meeting in there. When we advise people applying for grants that they will need to have a representative available to attend the committee we now emphasise that they must advise us if the representative is in a wheelchair so we can make alternative arrangements. This advice will be added to the website and notice for meetings for general visitors as anyone can attend our meetings whether they have specific business with the committee or not.

The issue arises of how we would make those arrangements if there was a short notice replacement, or if the chamber was not available because of a prior booking. The only room which could be accessed by a wheelchair which is big enough to hold a committee meeting in and which is in our control as far as bookings is the parlour. The current mayor has indicated that he would be more than willing for the parlour to be used for committee meetings to enable either a disabled visitor or a disabled elected member to attend if the chamber is not being used.

I intend to ask each incoming mayor (or mayor-elect) to indicate that they will continue this availability as it offers us the best opportunity to meet our obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the Equalities Act 2010 without lobbying for expensive, and possibly technically impossible, adaptations to the building.