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Title of meeting:	Culture, Leisure and Economic Development Decision Meeting
Subject:	Seafront Accessibility
Date of meeting:	17 July 2020
Report by:	Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services
Wards affected:	St Thomas, St Judes, Eastney & Craneswater

1. Requested by

1.1 Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Economic Development.

2. Purpose

2.1 To update the Cabinet Member on the work to make the seafront as accessible as possible so as many people can access this part of the city as possible.

3. Information Requested

3.1 We are aware that Portsmouth has limited access for those with mobility issues to the shingle beaches along Southsea promenade with the exception of Eastney beach and at the current time it has not been possible to put in place an effective operation to support direct access to the sea.

3.2 Officers have explored a wide number of options for consideration including the potential of beach buggies as well as researching other good examples of inclusive beaches. Regrettably to date we have not been able to identify a fully accessible beach where they have similar physical conditions to the steep shingle banks as we have in Southsea.

3.3 We have been in touch with other local authorities who face similar difficulties including Worthing and Brighton who like us have steep shingle banks. Brighton are continuing to trial a number of options but have not yet identified a solution which has allowed permanent disabled access to the shoreline. They are due to trial a new electric all-terrain wheelchair which they have sourced internationally and we hope to be able to have access to the results of this trial in the future.

3.4 Officers have also had conversations with a number of specialists firms in other European counties including Greece where alternative options have been explored,

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as well as with more local specialists engineering firms including HOP where they were also involved in the discussions with Brighton.

- 3.5 At the suggestion of the petitioner we have also examined the existing ramp opposite the entrance to the ex-Royal Marines Museum but our investigation showed that this ramp is far too steep as well as not extending far enough across the shingle. The ramp itself ends further away from the sea edge than the existing disabled access matting and therefore is not feasible to use as the basis for access to the sea at the current time.
- 3.6 Until 2018 we had just one permanent maintained access area on Eastney beach adjacent to the Coffee Cup. This had a limited access provision that included extended secure matting linked to a concrete access ramp with the matting running across the beach but not fully to the shoreline.
- 3.7 An additional track of disabled access matting adjacent to the Eastney beach huts was expanded in 2018 by approximately 40% lengthwise with a broader end in order to support a turning circle. The beach here at Eastney is relatively flat and the shingle is secured to some degree by the vegetation growing on the beach which limits the movement of the shingle making it slightly easier to maintain. However the matting still requires sweeping and checking/repairing every week plus cable tying every fortnight.
- 3.8 According to user feedback, face to face and by phone the new matting is easier to use and after the trial period it is now being made a permanent addition. In order to support this the final elements of adjustment are being put in including:
- Dropped kerb from the road to the promenade (due to be completed by July 2020)
 - Disabled parking bay
 - Signage
 - Website information
- 3.9 We have been working with Shopmobility Portsmouth in recent weeks and we will be putting in place a new scheme to operate around the seafront which can be accessed through a pre-booked system. It is hoped that the provision of wheelchairs through Shopmobility will enable more people with mobility issues to access areas such as the promenade and the surrounding seafront landscape.
- 3.10 We are continuing to learn from other schemes and are aware that other considerations such as these need to be explored in order to have a fully accessible seafront:
- Hoist facilities for user to use (interestingly in the Northern Ireland scheme this cannot be aided by staff or volunteers)
 - Floating beach wheelchairs (only available for use when Lifeguards are present)
 - Wheelchair surf board
 - Developed booking system & operational procedures
 - Occupational therapist volunteers for equipment training
 - Adapted building to include shower facilities, changing bed and overhead hoist

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- 3.11 Going forward we will continue to liaise with Brighton & Hove Council to explore how the trials of their new all-terrain vehicle work and to continue to consider how to overcome the physical difficulties of actually reaching and accessing the sea. We are aware that the Coastal Defence scheme could provide some opportunities for elements such as viewing platforms, improved signage and more practically safe storage for equipment and we are keen to further develop a volunteer scheme to provide more information and assistance for people with mobility issues across the seafront.
- 3.12 In a more strategic approach the Cabinet member has also arranged for 2 members of the Portsmouth Disabled Access group to join the stakeholder advisory group for the Coastal Defence Scheme to ensure that enhancements will benefit disabled access and he has extended an invitation to Portsmouth Disability Forum to also have representation.

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Signed by
Stephen Baily
Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services

Appendices: None

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location