

2020-2021 Review

Covering period of September 2020 through till December 2021

[York Disability Rights Forum](#) is led by disabled people and works to promote equal access to human rights for all those with disabilities who live or work in York.

The Forum aims to be a collective voice, to raise awareness of issues affecting disabled people in York and create positive changes. Currently it receives no ongoing funding and members are not paid for their involvement.

So thank you to the local disability community - we are here to amplify your voices and concerns. We could not function without you and the time you've given us.

Thank you also to the volunteers who've supported us throughout the year and to Hilary Conroy, Disability Programmes Co-ordinator from the York Human Rights City Network, whose term of employment finishes in January 2022.

The Steering Group
YDRF

Introduction

York Disability Rights Forum was launched in Spring 2020 with practical support from York Human Rights City Network and financial support from York Independent Living Network.

In September 2020, we asked you what mattered to you about disability and York. Based on what you told us, we shaped our priorities and focused on:

- Footstreets; the changes to Blue Badge access in the city centre
- How Coronavirus was impacting health and care needs
- The impact of shielding on mental and physical health
- Physical accessibility such as dropped kerbs and ramps
- Transport, specifically buses
- Attitudes and awareness of disability

We explored these issues in more detail in December at an open meeting, as well as through twitter and facebook.

As well as the work we've been doing around those 6 priorities, we've been doing some of the other work that helps YDRF grow strong:

- Communications
- Building relationships and making contacts
- Open meetings
- Representing disabled people in meetings etc beyond just the priorities

We have joined York Centre for Voluntary Services (CVS) and are also working on all the nitty gritty things that mean we can become a registered charity in the future. This means we can apply for more funding opportunities which in turn means we can do more for disabled people in York.

The annual review takes a brief look at what we have done over the year so that our members and interested people can look at the kinds of areas we've worked on and how we've made progress around those 6 priorities.

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Priorities 2020-2021

The priorities were set by members in September 2020 through our first annual survey. As the pandemic was still very present, we asked people about their priorities regarding the pandemic as well as more generally. This meant we had three clear priorities for each section, i.e. (for the pandemic) footstreets, impact on health and care needs, and impact on mental and physical health); and (more generally) physical accessibility, transport and attitudes and awareness.

The survey from September 2021 asked again about priorities in general and in relation to the pandemic however this is to provide us with a chance to check in with how York's disabled community are feeling and whether we were on the right track with our priorities. As expected, key concerns were around relaxed restrictions and reduced support.

Footstreets; the changes to Blue Badge access in the city centre

The footstreet changes have dominated our time this past year and we have regularly challenged the council over the issue.

We know this matters to you and we have responded to many emails, phone calls and social media messages to reassure people they are not alone in feeling isolated by the changes and discriminated against by the council.

We have made statements at council meetings, taken part in workshops to share what you've been telling us and been part of shaping [York Civic Trust's Transport Strategy](#).

We have written about it in local media, had the issue covered in [local and national media](#) and worked closely with other organisations rights across the city to amplify your concerns. We will continue to do this.

A lot has happened and it's hard to keep track of all the many different stages so we wanted to provide a basic timeline and a more [detailed timeline](#).

How Coronavirus was impacting health and care needs

As the pandemic continued to unfold, we expanded this to include other ways Coronavirus was impacting on disabled people.

We've been [sharing resources and directing to support](#) through social media, in our newsletter and on our website.

We also fed into the [York Human Rights City 5th Indicator Report 2020](#) highlighting areas like the impact of digital exclusion, the impact of using words like 'vulnerable' and the in-accessibility of Covid-19 information. Another area highlighted was the impact of blanket policies and the impact of government lists on accessing support such as online supermarket deliveries for anyone not on its lists.

We wrote about [face coverings and disability in York Press](#).

Our blog post about [getting your vaccine](#) was well received and helped disabled people understand what to expect at the Askham Bar vaccination site. We shared information aimed at people with learning disabilities around the vaccination. We were also able to feed back your experiences with the vaccine site to the local NHS.

We added our support to a call from Disability Rights UK and others to [reform social care](#), an issue that has been amplified by the pandemic.

The impact of shielding on mental and physical health

We regularly shared resources available to help people through this time and articles to try and help make sure they didn't feel alone. We set up a facebook group for people to talk in a more private space.

We attended a meeting in 2021 about how the city would communicate with residents and visitors post 'freedom day' and raised concerns arising from people being at different levels of comfort with the idea. It was important that everyone understood that in response to 'freedom day' some people felt they needed to return to (or remain) shielding to stay safe and we didn't want them being, or feeling, excluded.

We've also had wider discussions on social media, and written blog posts, about shielding, mental health and covid worries.

Physical accessibility such as dropped kerbs and ramps

This is clearly a big topic with a lot of work around it but we've been getting on with it, both with seemingly small actions and with bigger ones. We got a salt bin moved because it was blocking the pavement. We attended 'walkabouts' with the City of York Council to highlight inaccessibility in the city such as poor dropped kerbs and pavement cafes.

We met with Martin Higgitt and Associates, the consultants the council hired to carry out an independent review of city centre access.

We've spoken up about the [impact of pavement cafes](#). And we have been regularly checking planning applications for anything that might be of importance for disabled people.

Ahead of the planning application stage we were able to speak to a group working on a 'pocket park' in York near the Minster. Our concerns and suggestions were taken on board and we are expecting to have further conversations with the team once planning permission has been approved.

We met with Make It York and Indie York to talk about how York's businesses can be more inclusive of disabled people. And, in the end, win more of the purple pound! We've been talking about physical access to shops and cafés etc. as well as how businesses can start making their websites more inclusive and we provided a couple of guest [Make It York blog posts](#). We also invited Make It York to tell us about the accessibility of their [new city centre seating](#).

We met with representatives from the York outer ring road project to ensure a wide range of accessibility features were being considered for inclusion.

The York Street Charter is part of a national Royal National Institute of Blind people (RNIB) initiative to work with local Councils to make their streets more accessible to visually impaired people. It includes such things as shared spaces, crossings and pavement parking. Work on drafting the local Charter has taken quite a while and the process was gradually

broadened to include other disability groups. YDRF became one of the stakeholders and the draft Charter is now before the Council.

York and Scarborough Teaching Hospital invited our feedback on their 'Trust Inclusive Built Environment Strategy' early in 2021. We also raised accessibility issues around the vaccine centre and that the Community Stadium (which includes medical services) is not as accessible as we'd expect.

Later in 2021, we met with David Biggins, Inclusive Built Environment Lead, and Nichola Greenwood, both from York Hospital to catch up what they're doing, including bringing in the Sunflower Lanyard scheme and working to improve the Community Stadium. We discussed the intersection between trans and disabled people in relation to emergency appointments and dead names (dead names are the name a trans person was known as prior to transitioning), as well as including sanitary bins in all toilets. Following that meeting, the In With The Bins campaign was able to speak to the hospital about their work.

Transport

Blue Badge Applications

Alongside the footstreets issue affecting Blue Badge holders, the [application process](#) was also raised as an issue. Earlier in 2021 we were made aware that some people were having difficulties with it. We had what we hope to be the first of many meetings with Pauline Stuchfield and Philip Bell at the council and talked about how the experience could be improved. We also gave them some feedback about how emotional and difficult the process can be for the applicant.

Towards the end of 2021, we began to hear from a few people who had previously had a Blue Badge and who were being turned down despite their circumstances worsening. In one case, the appeals process was too daunting for someone to go ahead with whilst also taking care of their mental health. We heard about similar things happening in Redcar and will be speaking with a Disabled Peoples' Organisation (DPO) in that area in early 2022.

We will also be meeting with York Healthwatch and Older Citizens Advocacy York (OCAAY) about the application process in early 2022 with a view to making a joint approach to the council.

Buses

When we spoke to members in December 2020, it was clear that buses weren't meeting your needs so this has been our main transport focus and we have linked up with others to ensure a coordinated approach. Over the past year, we met regularly with York Bus Forum and developed a survey around bus stops with Age Friendly York.

We attended the York Quality Bus Partnership meeting in July 2021 and plan to attend such meetings in the future. This has allowed us to start building contacts and relationships with

the bus operators, and has led to a conversation with First York. This proved very useful and provided us with answers to some of your questions, and made us aware of some of their existing good practices. They are keen to keep the conversation open and have encouraged us to keep providing feedback on their service. We have also been able to link First York up with the student access officer at the University of York.

Cycling

We've had ongoing contact with York Cycle Campaign over the year, including discussions around the work that they've done to push the council to improve access across the city (on and off road) for cyclists using adapted cycles. We supported York Cycle Campaign in their request for spaces for non-standard cycles (such as tricycles and reclined cycles) to be included in all the cycle racks around the city. This would mean that disabled cyclists were not prevented from parking their cycles in the same places as other cyclists.

As with so many other issues, it's been a positive experience to talk together about areas where we share interests and areas where there can potentially be conflict in order to come up with shared ways forward.

York Civic Trust Advisory Group

In January 2021 we joined the Civic Trust Transport Advisory Group (TAG) and initially encountered some negative attitudes to disability and access from a couple of the members of the group. However, we were able to bring the needs of disabled people into the TAG transport agenda and were pleased that TAG included the need for disabled people to be allowed to access the extended foot streets in their reports.

TAG asked City of York Council to reconsider their decision to close the foot streets and offered an alternative suggestion of a green badge scheme that had previously been used in York. As we have attended around 20 meetings and fed in to multiple papers dealing with all aspects of transport in York, we have been able to add the disabled person's point of view. For example, adding disability into discussions about proposed road closures around the city being replaced with bus and cycle lanes, and the need for Blue Badge holders to be exempt from any closures. We also facilitated citizens forums run by TAG and kept the disability issues on the agenda. TAG are currently working on a Transport Plan for York covering the next 15 years. TAG meet regularly with council officers and councillors and have quite an influence in all transport matters.

Attitudes and awareness of disability

Much of the work we do, by default, challenges attitudes around disability. We are disabled people speaking up about disability and that in itself challenges some people's assumptions. We are showing ourselves to be strong, powerful people who will speak up for ourselves and our community.

From asking the [Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner candidates to write statements](#) for our blog, to feeding into the York Human Rights City report, we have been adding disability to the conversation throughout the year.

As well as being involved in interviewing the candidates for the Community Voices role with York Human Rights City Network, we have participated in several citizen panels with City of York Council to assist the interview process. The Director of Prevention & Commissioning is now in her role and we met with her once she was in post as well as during the interview process. We were also involved in the interview process for the appointment of the Assistant Director of Adult Social Care. The interview process is a great chance for us to see how well informed that candidates are about disability issues in York, and provides an initial opportunity for future relationship building with the successful candidate.

Through our blog we cover a wide range of topics, including [mental health](#), [ableism](#) and [language around disability](#). Blog posts are shared on social media as well as through our newsletter and offer the chance to raise awareness of issues affecting the disability community as well as challenging assumptions etc.

Through meetings, events and presentations we've been adding disability to the conversation. We spoke at a diversity event held by York CVS, took part in an [event run by the women's organisation, Kyra, during York International Women's Week](#) and ran a presentation at a University of York INCLUDE meeting (INCLUDE is the staff disability forum). We engaged with York Museums Trust around '[Displaying Disability](#)' and shared other opportunities for disabled people to get involved with the Trust's work. And we spoke about our work at the annual meeting of the York Human Rights City Network.

We attended meetings of the York Dementia Collaborative, which is awaiting the publication of a much delayed draft Dementia Strategy. Dementia is itself a disability but it is also the case that people with other disabilities can get dementia. It's therefore been important for us to be involved with the York Dementia Collaborative and important to us that the draft strategy has a social model approach.

We've been at '100% Digital York' Steering Group meetings with the aim of ensuring that the interests and needs of disabled people are kept at the forefront. We're pleased to say that we get support from other members in doing so. There is agreement in the Group that anyone who chooses not to become digitally connected or who is not able to do so for whatever reason should be entitled to receive communications in non-digital formats, for example printed versions. We are pushing for this to be respected among the city's organisations but it's an uphill battle! The city's [IT reuse scheme](#) which provides equipment and support is aware that some disabled people need adapted equipment and try to help with that.

We spoke up loudly when [disabled councillors were nearly excluded](#) from conversations about disability at a council meeting in July 2021, and provided an interview to [iNews](#) about it.

In terms of work beyond the boundaries of the city, we have representation on the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Stakeholder Network which has links with the Disability Unit of the Cabinet Office and had some input into the National Disability Strategy.

As well as generally being present and ensuring disabled people and our rights are considered, we've been developing an introduction to disability training offer which unpicks disability, challenges stereotypes and will be delivered by disabled people.

Further, we've started a project around Disability Hate Crime.

Disability Hate crime

Disabled people have the right to be safe in York, and free from abuse and violence. But disability hate crime happens, and there has been a worrying rise during the pandemic. Disability hate crime is when someone hurts you because of your disability or because they think you are disabled. This happens way more than many people think.

York Disability Rights Forum wants action to stop hate crime, to increase reporting and to help disabled people access support. We're pleased to say that we've got highly motivated volunteers helping YDRF out with this work – thank you Olivia, Kirsty and Michayla!

To make this action happen, we aim to:

- raise awareness of disability hate crime;
- share stories about hate crime experiences;
- empower people to act if they witness hate crime against a disabled person.

In 2021:

- we launched a webpage about hate crime which also has contact details of organisations if you need support or want to report an incident.
- Olivia wrote blogs about disability hate crime which you can read on our website
- We ran our first public event about disability hate crime during National Hate Crime Awareness Week with North Yorkshire Police and York People First. Marilyn was interviewed by BBC Radio York to promote this event
- Marije joined the York Hate Crime (Action) Group run by the Council. This brings together organisations across the city to raise awareness of hate crime and to improve reporting.

In 2022, we want to

- make podcasts to explore disability hate crime further;
- run more events to talk about disability hate crime;
- work with third-party reporting centres so that they are accessible for disabled people;
- if resources allow, develop materials around disability hate crime.

Communications

In Autumn 2020 we launched our website and our social media channels. Through Twitter, Facebook and now Instagram, we have been asking questions, got to know more about what matters to you, shared articles and surveys and kept you up to date with what was

going on. We also set up a private facebook group to have more personal conversations with you.

We have sent monthly emails which can be accessed in our [newsletter archive](#) and cover local disability news, ways you can put disability into the conversation through surveys etc and tell you about upcoming events. We are pleased to have been able to extend our online newsletter to include a postal version.

Our emails have been very busy and we always try to support you where that's needed or direct you elsewhere when that's appropriate. We've also been sending and receiving emails from local and national groups and organisations.

Our blog has been a great place for us to explore complex issues such as the footstreets changes which have been difficult to follow with lots of council processes that we've tried to unpick for you. We've used it to share template letters, statements we've presented to the council and more fun things like reviews of films and books! We also have guest blog posts from individuals and groups including [Speak Up Diversity](#).

We are delighted to now have a voicemail system where people can leave their details and we can call them back. We know the internet isn't for everyone, and isn't an option for everyone, so as much as we've been able to, we have tried to manage alternative communication routes with the limits that the pandemic has placed on us.

Open Meetings

We have held four open meetings and we have plans to increase that in 2022.

- [YDRF First open meeting](#)
- [Meet us this Easter!](#)
- Discussing footstreet changes with Rachael Maskell MP and Councillor George Norman.
- Disability Hate Crime; a discussion around what it is, how to report it and how it affects people.
- Ahead of York Disability Week 2021, we held a couple of events:
 - How is the UK meeting its obligations to disabled people? A workshop which helped YDRF feed into and shape the next shadow report about disability rights in the UK.
 - What do disabled people want in York and how can we go about getting it? A discussion about our priorities for 2022 and an initial look at specific topics.
- During York Disability Week:
 - Bringing equalities and human rights law alive in York: Hearing about the role of the Equality and Human Rights Commission in monitoring and reporting on the CRPD.
 - Disability and race: A space to discuss disability and race, and how identities interact in people's experiences of being disabled.
 - Meet us: A chance to meet us in person, find out more about YDRF and get to know us.

About the Steering Group

The Steering Group is made up of about ten disabled people and allies. Disabled people are in the majority and we have a range of experiences, knowledge and skills.

We meet monthly to discuss our priorities, our actions and to plan things going forward. We also have contact in between meetings and have welcomed a few new members over the year.

We have guests to our monthly Steering Group meetings, such as AccessAble, York LGBT Forum and Speak Up Diversity. We later added our support to Speak Up Diversity's motion to make York an Anti Racist and Inclusive City which was unanimously adopted by the council.

If you are interested in joining the Steering Group or to help us in any other way, please get in touch to find out more.

Email us at: hello@ydrf.org.uk

Leave a voicemail on: 01904 326781
(please include your name and contact details)

Write to: York Disability Rights Forum
C/O Centre for Applied Human Rights, Yorkshire House
6 Innovation Close, Heslington,
York, YO10 5ZF

Concluding Thoughts

YDRF started in Spring 2020 and since then has worked to raise the profile of disabled people in and around York. The forum has become a place where disabled people can seek out information, gain support and link up with other disabled people in the city. It has also been increasingly approached by a range of groups, businesses and services wanting to find out more about what we do and how we can help make their offer more disability friendly.

The decision about the footstreets was frustrating and disappointing, but it was really important that we challenged it and made coherent, rights based arguments to support our position. Doing so means we kept media coverage on the issue and raised the profile of the decision amongst the wider public. We will continue to be part of the campaign to reverse the decision.

Our priorities for 2022 overlap with work we have already started, namely around physical accessibility and attitudes and awareness of disability. This year, members said that health and care was more of a priority than transport. We will continue to work on improving transport for disabled people whilst focusing more of our time and efforts on health and care.