Making Your Business More **Accessible**

Practical guidance for shops and businesses

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Making Your Business More Accessible

Practical guidance for shops and businesses

Introduction

For many disabled people, visiting shops and other businesses can be unnecessarily challenging. Steps at entrances, narrow doorways, inaccessible toilets, cluttered aisles and signs that are difficult to read or understand can prevent people from entering, finding their way around independently or accessing the goods and services on offer.

Research by the Research Institute for Disabled Consumers (RiDC) found that 98% of disabled respondents had encountered accessibility barriers when shopping in-store. More than half regularly abandoned shopping, whether online or in-store, because of accessibility difficulties, and two-thirds had changed where or how they shopped. While some avoided particular shops or brands altogether, many said they would return if retailers made meaningful accessibility improvements.

However, making your premises accessible means more than simply meeting your responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. It reflects a genuine commitment to removing barriers that exclude disabled customers, promoting independence, dignity and choice, and ensuring disabled people have equal opportunities to access goods and services.

Accessibility also makes good business sense. Improving access can help businesses attract and retain customers, strengthen their reputation and better serve disabled people and their households, whose combined spending power is often referred to as the Purple Pound.

Improving accessibility does not always require major building work or significant expense. Simple measures, such as keeping entrances and aisles clear, improving signage, offering suitable seating and ensuring staff understand how to assist disabled customers, can make a real difference. More substantial changes, such as installing permanent ramps, widening

doorways, providing lifts or creating accessible toilets, will require professional advice and investment.

This guide is intended for businesses of all sizes, from small independent shops to larger premises. It offers practical recommendations for identifying and removing accessibility barriers, ranging from simple, low-cost improvements through to more substantial changes that may require professional advice. The guidance covers entrances, parking, internal layouts and facilities, as well as sensory accessibility and barriers experienced by people with non-visible disabilities.

Accessibility is an ongoing journey. Everyone is different, and no single design or adjustment will work for everyone. By listening to disabled customers, welcoming feedback and making improvements over time, businesses can create more inclusive and welcoming environments for all customers.

Did you know that an estimated 16.7 million people in the UK have a disability, which accounts for 1 in every 4 people?

(Source: GOV.UK)

Your Responsibilities Under the Equality Act 2010

In England, Scotland and Wales, the Equality Act 2010 requires businesses to make reasonable adjustments so disabled customers are not placed at a substantial disadvantage compared with non-disabled customers when accessing goods and services.

Businesses have a duty to anticipate accessibility barriers rather than waiting until a disabled customer experiences difficulties. These barriers may include steps at entrances, inaccessible information or the way services are provided. Reasonable adjustments might include providing a suitable ramp, offering information in alternative formats or adapting how staff assist customers.

This duty applies to businesses of all sizes, including small independent shops. Businesses must take reasonable steps to remove or reduce barriers, and they cannot charge disabled customers for adjustments they are legally required to provide.

What counts as a reasonable adjustment depends on each business's circumstances, including its size, available resources, the adjustment's cost and practicality, and how effectively it would address the barrier. While cost is a relevant consideration, an adjustment should not be dismissed simply because it involves expense. Where a particular adjustment is not practical, businesses should consider other effective ways to remove or reduce the barrier.

For more information, see the government's guidance on the Equality Act 2010 and the Equality and Human Rights Commission's Code of Practice on Services, Public Functions and Associations.

Did you know that 71% of disabled consumers choose where to shop based on accessibility.

(Source: Purpl)

Small Changes That Can Make a Big Difference

Many accessibility improvements are straightforward and relatively inexpensive. The quick checklist below offers some practical ways to make your business easier to access and more welcoming to disabled customers.

- ✓ **Keep entrances and aisles clear:** Remove unnecessary displays, boxes, advertising boards and other obstacles.
- ✓ **Provide step-free access:** If your entrance has a step, a suitable portable ramp may be a practical, relatively low-cost solution for some smaller shops. Seek specialist advice on choosing a ramp suitable for your entrance, and ensure staff know how to use it safely. Make sure customers know a ramp is available, and provide an accessible doorbell outside your premises so they can easily request it.
- ✓ **Make information easier to read:** Use clear, high-contrast signage with easy-to-read sans-serif fonts, and have large-print versions of menus, price lists and other important information available for customers who need them.
- ✓ **Reduce background noise:** Turn off unnecessary music or keep it low enough for customers to communicate comfortably.
- ✓ **Avoid fragrances:** Skip air fresheners and strongly scented cleaning products in customer areas. If possible, encourage staff to go fragrance-free.
- ✓ **Offer somewhere to sit:** Keep a sturdy chair available for customers who need to rest or cannot stand in a queue.
- ✓ **Make assistance easy to find:** Ensure staff are clearly identifiable, visible and approachable, so customers can easily find someone to assist them when needed.

- ✓ **Ask customers what would help:** Encourage disabled customers to share their experiences and suggestions. Their feedback can help you identify barriers and understand where improvements are needed.

You may not be able to make every improvement at once. Start by removing barriers you can address now, while planning changes that require more time or investment. Focus on progress rather than perfection.

Using This Guide

This guide offers advice for businesses of all sizes and budgets. The guidance is organised into sections with practical recommendations, allowing you to focus on the areas most relevant to your business and prioritise improvements over time. Not every recommendation will apply to your premises, and the guidance is not exhaustive.

If you are planning building alterations or other technical improvements, seek advice from a suitably qualified professional to ensure the work meets relevant Building Regulations and applicable accessibility standards. Technical references to Approved Document M, Volume 2 (2015 edition, incorporating 2020 and 2024 amendments) apply to England. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own building standards.

If you rent your premises, check your tenancy agreement and obtain any necessary permission from your landlord before making physical alterations. If your building is listed or in a conservation area, check with your local council before starting work, as planning permission or listed building consent may be required.

Accessible Entrances and Exits

Making Entrances Easy to Identify

- **Contrasting colours:** Make entrances stand out from their surroundings by using good colour contrast between doors, door frames and surrounding walls. Ensure important features, such as door handles, handrails, grab rails and signage, also contrast with their backgrounds. Good contrast between floors and walls can also help people with visual impairments distinguish different surfaces.
- **Dark doormats:** Avoid black or very dark doormats that contrast sharply with surrounding flooring, as some people with dementia or visual or perceptual difficulties may mistake them for holes or changes in floor level.
- **Steps and ramps:** Make steps, ramps and changes in level clearly visible using suitable colour contrast and lighting. Steps leading downwards can be particularly difficult to identify when approaching from above. Ensure step edges have appropriate contrasting markings, and keep steps and ramps clean and free from slippery surfaces, particularly in wet weather.
- **Entrance signs:** If your business has more than one entrance, provide clear signage to help customers find the most accessible option.
- **Glass doors and windows:** Reflections, glare and shadows can make glass doors difficult to distinguish from surrounding windows. Use appropriate contrasting safety markings on glazed doors and other areas of glazing where there is a risk of people walking into the glass.
- **Lighting:** Ensure entrances, doorways, steps, ramps and door controls are well lit, without excessive glare or deep shadows.

Keeping Entrances and Approaches Clear

- **Remove obstacles:** Keep entrances and surrounding approaches clear of advertising boards, displays, furniture and other obstructions. These can prevent wheelchair access and create trip or collision hazards, particularly for older customers and people with visual impairments.
- **Make obstacles visible:** Use suitable colour contrast to highlight unavoidable posts, columns, bollards and other obstacles. Where possible, ensure they are positioned so people using long canes can detect them.
- **Advertising boards and pavement access:** Avoid placing advertising boards on pavements wherever possible, as they can obstruct access for disabled pedestrians. Local councils have different rules. For example, Cheshire East Council's A-board policy includes a maximum of one A-board per business, positioned immediately outside the premises, with at least 1.8 metres of clear, unobstructed pavement remaining. Boards must be stable, well maintained and must not obstruct pedestrian routes. Businesses should always check their local council's requirements before placing advertising boards outside their premises.
- **Pathway surfaces:** Keep paths you are responsible for firm, even, slip-resistant, and free from trip hazards. Broken paving, uneven surfaces and cobbles can make access difficult, unsafe or uncomfortable for customers using mobility aids or with visual impairments. Report hazards on public pavements to the local council.
- **Handrails along approaches:** Consider providing suitable handrails alongside ramps, steps and other approaches where additional support is needed, particularly for customers with reduced mobility or balance difficulties. Seek appropriate advice before installation.
- **Drop-off points:** Where possible, provide or identify a suitable drop-off point close to an accessible entrance, with a safe, unobstructed route into the premises.

Providing Step-Free Access

Some accessibility improvements can be made easily, while others require professional advice to ensure they are safe and meet relevant technical requirements.

Entrances and Doorways

- **Level access:** Provide a step-free entrance wherever possible, either by creating level access or installing a suitable ramp. Even a single step can prevent wheelchair users from entering independently.
- **Permanent ramps:** Where a level entrance cannot be achieved, consider installing a permanent ramp where reasonably practicable and permitted. Ramps should have a firm, slip-resistant surface and be designed with suitable gradients, widths, landings, handrails and edge protection. Handrails should be easy to grip, slip-resistant, non-reflective and visually contrasting with their surroundings. For more information, refer to Approved Document M, Volume 2: Buildings Other Than Dwellings.
- **Platform lifts:** Where a suitable ramp cannot be provided, consider whether a platform lift could offer an appropriate accessible route into the premises. Seek specialist advice on its suitability and safe installation.
- **Portable ramps:** Where a permanent ramp is not feasible, a portable ramp may be a practical, relatively low-cost alternative. A wide range of ramps is available to suit different entrance heights, slopes and layouts. Specialist ramp suppliers can advise on suitable options, often free of charge, so businesses should explore what is available rather than assume a ramp is not possible. Ensure any ramp is suitable for the premises and that staff know how to position and use it safely.
- **Entrance manoeuvring space:** Provide sufficient clear space outside and inside entrance doors for wheelchair users to approach, open and pass through them safely.

- **Relocating the main entrance:** If the existing entrance cannot reasonably be made accessible because of structural or technical constraints, or cost considerations, explore whether it could be relocated to a more accessible position.
- **Alternative entrances:** Where another entrance already provides suitable step-free access, ensure it is clearly signposted, available during opening hours and provides access to the same goods and services wherever possible. Where revolving doors are installed, provide a suitable accessible alternative.
- **Alternative shopping arrangements:** Where a customer cannot enter the premises, discuss other ways to provide the goods or services they need. These could include bringing purchases outside, helping customers select items, accepting telephone orders, preparing shopping for collection or arranging home delivery. These arrangements can help customers access your services, but should not be used as a substitute for addressing physical access barriers.

Making Doors Easier to Use

- **Door widths:** Ensure entrances and internal doorways are wide enough for wheelchair users and people using walking frames or other mobility aids. Where doorways are too narrow, seek professional advice about widening them. Refer to Approved Document M, Volume 2, for the relevant technical dimensions.
- **Door handles:** Position handles at an accessible height for wheelchair users and people of short stature. Choose handles that are easy to grip and operate for people with limited hand strength or dexterity.
- **Automatic doors:** Consider automatic or power-assisted doors to make entry easier for wheelchair users, people with mobility impairments, customers carrying shopping and people with pushchairs. Ensure powered doors have appropriate safety features to prevent people becoming trapped or struck. Where push-button

controls are provided, ensure they are clearly marked and positioned where wheelchair users can reach and operate them.

- **Heavy doors:** If automatic doors aren't feasible, consider modifying or replacing heavy doors or their closing mechanisms so they require less force to open, while maintaining fire safety.
- **Holding doors open:** Where appropriate, consider devices that safely hold doors open to make access easier. Fire doors must not be wedged open. If a fire door needs to be held open, seek professional advice about a suitable device that allows it to close automatically in the event of a fire. Avoid leaving doors partially open, as they can obstruct access or create a collision hazard.
- **Door thresholds:** Keep thresholds as level as possible. Even a small raised threshold can obstruct wheelchair access or create a trip hazard. Where a raised threshold cannot be avoided, seek advice on a suitable accessible solution.
- **Entrance mats:** Use securely fitted, firm entrance mats that are flush with the surrounding floor wherever possible. Avoid loose or raised mats that could slip, curl or create trip hazards.
- **Additional support:** Where appropriate, provide a securely fitted handrail or grab rail near the entrance to assist customers who need support when approaching or using the doorway.
- **Space between sets of doors:** Where an entrance has two sets of doors, ensure there is enough space between them for wheelchair users to manoeuvre safely, including opening and closing doors without becoming trapped between them.
- **Assistance bells:** Where customers may need help opening a door or require a portable ramp, provide a clearly marked bell in an accessible position. Where a portable ramp is available, display a sign by the bell informing customers that they can ring to request it. Ensure staff respond promptly.

- **Clear sightlines:** Where practicable, maintain a clear view between the entrance and the service counter so staff can see when someone is waiting at the entrance or may need assistance.
- **Security gates and turnstiles:** Where security gates, barriers or turnstiles are installed, ensure there is a sufficiently wide, accessible route for wheelchair users and people using mobility aids. Gates should be easy to operate and must not create an obstruction or hazard.

Assistance Dogs

- **Welcome assistance dogs:** Make it clear that assistance dogs are welcome, for example by displaying a sign where appropriate. A general 'no dogs' policy should not exclude assistance dogs. Assistance dogs are not required to wear a harness or identifying vest, and handlers should not be required to provide identification or certification.
- **Emotional support dogs:** Unlike assistance dogs, emotional support dogs do not have the same legal recognition. However, allowing one may be a reasonable adjustment for a disabled customer. Consider requests individually, taking account of the customer's needs and the circumstances of your business.
- **Avoid distractions:** Do not touch, call, feed or otherwise distract an assistance dog without the handler's permission, as this may interfere with its work.
- **Offer water:** Where practical, offer a bowl of water for an assistance dog, checking with the handler first. Place it somewhere safe, away from walkways where it could cause a trip hazard.

Inside Your Business

Making your business accessible doesn't stop at the entrance. Once inside, customers should be able to move around comfortably, find what they need and use your services as independently as possible. Simple improvements to layout, signage, lighting and noise levels, along with helpful, knowledgeable staff, can make a real difference and create a more welcoming environment for everyone.

Signage and Accessible Information

- **Clear signage:** Use simple, non-reflective signs to provide clear directions throughout your premises. Ensure signs are well lit, large enough to read and positioned where they are visible to both wheelchair users and standing customers. Where signs need to be positioned higher, use larger lettering.
- **Sign design:** Use clear, sans-serif fonts, upper- and lower-case lettering, and good colour contrast between text and background. Keep longer text left-aligned and use recognisable pictures or symbols to support written information where helpful. Consider tactile signs that can be read by touch, and keep fonts, colours and layouts consistent throughout your premises.
- **Directions to facilities:** Clearly signpost accessible routes, exits, toilets, payment points and lifts, where provided. Make reception areas easy to locate from the main entrance, with clear signage and unobstructed access.
- **Product information and prices:** Ensure product labels, pricing information, menus and information boards are clear, easy to read and positioned where customers can see them.
- **Portable signage:** Position freestanding and portable signs where they will not obstruct aisles, circulation routes or access to facilities.
- **Accessible written information:** Make menus, product information and other written materials available in alternative formats where

needed. These may include large print (for example, 18-point text or larger), Braille, audio and Easy Read, depending on customers' requirements. Staff should also be available to explain information or offer assistance.

- **Alternative communication methods:** Offer different ways for customers to contact your business or obtain information. These could include telephone, email, text messaging and services such as Relay UK for people with hearing or speech difficulties. Where practical, consider staff training in basic British Sign Language (BSL).
- **Information in other languages:** Where appropriate to the communities your business serves, provide important customer information in additional languages. This can help customers whose first language is not English understand the services and information available.

Lighting, Noise and Sensory Accessibility

- **Consistent lighting:** Provide adequate, consistent lighting throughout the premises and make good use of natural light where possible. Consider additional lighting around service counters, product displays and other areas where customers need to read information or interact with staff.
- **Avoid overly bright lighting:** Reduce glare and avoid excessively bright, harsh or flickering lighting where possible. Some neurodivergent customers and people with neurological conditions, migraines or light sensitivity may find this type of lighting distressing or difficult to tolerate. Softer, well-controlled lighting can help, as long as visibility remains adequate.
- **Glare and reflective surfaces:** Avoid highly reflective or shiny surfaces that produce glare or make it difficult to distinguish objects, signs or changes in level.
- **Background music and noise:** Keep background music low or switch it off, particularly where customers need to communicate with staff or each

other. Reduce unnecessary noise from televisions, announcements and other equipment. Loud or competing sounds can be particularly challenging for people with hearing impairments, sensory sensitivities, difficulties processing sound, or chronic pain.

- **Sensory considerations:** Consider offering quiet shopping hours at regular, clearly advertised times. You could also coordinate quiet hours with neighbouring shops or shopping centres. Where practical, provide sensory items such as ear defenders, sunglasses, and fidget toys. Maintain a comfortable, consistent temperature.
- **Fragrances and scents:** Strong scents can trigger migraines, breathing difficulties and sensory distress. Avoid air fresheners and strongly scented cleaning products in customer areas and, where possible, encourage staff to go fragrance-free.
- **Quiet areas:** In larger premises, consider providing a quieter area where customers can take a break from noise, lighting and other sensory demands. Provide seating where practical. If a shop is too small for a quiet area, consider identifying a suitable, accessible quiet space nearby (if available) or exploring a shared facility with neighbouring businesses. Offer additional reassurance and a quiet place to sit when someone with dementia becomes distressed or confused.
- **Mirrors:** Consider the size and positioning of mirrors, particularly in corridors and other areas where customers need to find their way around. Reflections can confuse or disorient some people with dementia or perceptual difficulties, especially when mirrors create the impression of another doorway or a larger space.

Aisles, Layout and Flooring

- **Aisle widths:** Aim to maintain at least 1,200 mm of clear, unobstructed aisle width for wheelchair users and people using walking aids, with wider spaces for passing and turning wherever possible. Consider rearranging shelving, displays and other fixtures to improve access and ensure customers can move around and reach goods and services.

Approved Document M, Volume 2, paragraph 3.14, specifies a minimum unobstructed width of 1,200 mm for corridors and passageways, with wider passing spaces where required. Seek professional advice where accessibility improvements are difficult to achieve.

- **Clear circulation routes:** Arrange fixtures, fittings, displays and furniture to keep shop floors, aisles and corridors free from clutter, trip hazards and obstructions.
- **Overhanging fixtures:** Avoid fixtures, shelves and displays that project into circulation routes, particularly at heights where people with visual impairments may not detect them with a long cane.
- **Space between furniture:** Provide enough space between furniture and displays for wheelchair users to manoeuvre comfortably and for people with visual impairments to move safely.
- **Consistent product locations:** Keep product locations and store layouts consistent wherever possible. If changes are necessary, ensure signs are updated, and staff can help customers find what they need.
- **Handrails in corridors:** Consider providing handrails along corridors where customers may benefit from additional support, ensuring they do not obstruct circulation routes.
- **Slip-resistant flooring:** Ensure floors are firm, stable, even and slip-resistant. Repair damaged flooring and remove loose rugs or other trip hazards. Deep-pile carpets and rugs can make movement difficult for wheelchair users and people using walking aids.
- **Changes in flooring:** Avoid unnecessary changes in floor texture or appearance that may cause confusion for people with visual or perceptual difficulties. Ensure transitions between different floor surfaces do not create trip hazards.
- **Reflective and patterned flooring:** Avoid highly reflective flooring, which some people may perceive as wet, and strong patterns that may be mistaken for obstacles or changes in level.

- **Access between floors:** Where customers need to move between levels, provide a suitable lift or ramp wherever reasonably practicable so disabled customers can access goods and services on other floors. Where this is not feasible, consider alternative arrangements to help customers obtain the goods and services they need.
- **Accessible lifts:** Where lifts are provided, ensure wheelchair users can approach and operate them independently, with controls at accessible heights, clear visual and audible information, and sufficient space to enter, manoeuvre and exit safely.

Counters, Checkouts and Payment

- **Accessible counters:** Provide a section of the service counter or reception desk that wheelchair users can approach and use comfortably. Approved Document M, Volume 2, paragraph 3.6, recommends a section at least 1,500 mm wide, with a surface no higher than 760 mm and knee space at least 700 mm high. Ensure there is sufficient space for wheelchair users to approach and manoeuvre. Keep the accessible section free from storage or displays.
- **Accessible demonstrations and services:** Where product demonstrations, beauty treatments or consultations are offered, ensure disabled customers can access these services comfortably, with suitable space, seating and equipment such as handheld mirrors where relevant.
- **Accessible checkouts:** Provide at least one checkout route wide enough for wheelchair users to pass through and manoeuvre comfortably. Where self-service checkouts are provided, ensure customers can access staff assistance. Consider offering priority assistance or alternative queuing arrangements for customers who find standing in queues difficult. Display the total purchase cost clearly, and ensure staff can communicate the total verbally when needed.
- **Accessible card payment machines:** Make sure wheelchair users can reach and use card payment machines comfortably. If a machine is

attached to the counter, ensure staff can move it closer to the customer using a long enough cable or a wireless terminal. Customers should be able to enter their PIN independently, privately and securely.

- **Payment accessibility for blind and partially sighted customers:** Choose payment terminals with accessible features, such as tactile buttons or touchscreen accessibility modes with audio guidance, so customers can enter their PIN independently and securely. Where needed, count cash change aloud and check how customers would prefer it to be handed to them. For customers who cannot easily read pricing or promotional information, explain relevant offers and discounts verbally.
- **Induction loops:** Consider installing hearing loops, particularly at customer service counters, reception desks and payment points, to assist customers who use compatible hearing aids or cochlear implants. Ensure loops are clearly signposted, regularly tested, and that staff know how to use them.

Shopping Equipment

In larger stores, consider the following measures to help disabled customers shop more independently:

- **Accessible shopping baskets and trolleys:** Provide lightweight shopping baskets and trolleys suitable for wheelchair users, where practical.

- **Mobility scooters:** Consider providing mobility scooters for customers to use free of charge. Ensure they are clean, charged, regularly maintained and suitable for use within the premises.

Seating, Waiting and Queuing

- **Seating:** Where space allows, provide seating near tills, toilets and changing rooms for customers who need to rest or wait, including older

people and those with mobility, balance, pain or fatigue-related needs. Keep routes clear.

- **Choice of seating:** Where possible, offer stable chairs that are easy to sit down on and stand up from, including chairs with and without armrests. In waiting areas, consider high-backed chairs for customers who need additional support.
- **Seating throughout larger premises:** In large shops and venues, provide opportunities to sit and rest at suitable intervals rather than requiring customers to walk long distances without a break.
- **Wheelchair spaces in waiting areas:** Ensure waiting areas have sufficient space for wheelchair users to wait alongside companions and other customers, without obstructing circulation routes.
- **Queuing arrangements:** Recognise that some disabled customers may find standing or waiting in queues difficult because of pain, fatigue, mobility difficulties, anxiety or other conditions. Where possible, offer seating, alternative waiting arrangements or assistance so customers do not have to remain standing in a queue. Ensure queuing areas have sufficient space for wheelchair users and people using mobility aids to enter, manoeuvre and leave safely. Avoid barriers, furniture or temporary queuing arrangements that obstruct access.
- **Access Card awareness:** Encourage staff to familiarise themselves with the symbols used on the Access Card and the types of support they may indicate. However, customers should not need an Access Card or other proof of disability to request assistance or reasonable adjustments.

Changing Rooms

- **Accessible changing rooms:** Where changing rooms are provided, ensure at least one is accessible to wheelchair users, with sufficient space to manoeuvre and transfer safely. Provide an appropriately positioned seat, suitable grab rails, clothes hooks and a mirror that can be used from a seated position. Ensure there is space for someone to assist if needed. Accessible changing rooms must not be used for

storage. Refer to Approved Document M, Volume 2, for guidance on suitable layouts and fittings.

- **Assistance in changing rooms:** Allow disabled customers who need assistance to be accompanied into changing rooms by their partner, family member or personal assistant, regardless of gender.
- **Priority use:** Keep accessible changing rooms available for customers who need their additional space or facilities. Avoid using them as general changing rooms when standard changing rooms are available.
- **Emergency assistance:** Provide a clearly marked emergency pull-cord alarm reachable from the changing seat and floor. Test it regularly, keep reset controls accessible, and train staff to respond promptly.
- **Changing-room doors:** Consider outward-opening or suitable sliding doors to maximise internal space, ensuring they do not obstruct circulation routes. Doors should be easy to operate with an emergency-release mechanism so they can be opened from outside if necessary. Ensure there is sufficient space for wheelchair users to enter, manoeuvre and approach the changing seat safely.

Tables, Shelving and Displays

- **Accessible tables:** Where tables are provided, ensure wheelchair users, including powered wheelchair users, can get close enough to use them comfortably, with sufficient space around and beneath the table for their knees, feet, armrests and wheelchair controls. Avoid low crossbars or table bases that obstruct access. Consider providing tables at different heights or height-adjustable tables where practical.
- **Shelving:** Position products towards the front of shelves so customers can reach them more easily. Avoid placing frequently purchased items on excessively high, low or deep shelves. Keep shelves uncluttered, and ensure shelf labels clearly match the correct products. Ensure staff are available to assist customers with items that are difficult to reach or carry.

- **Accessible mirrors:** Where mirrors are provided for customers to view clothing, accessories or other products, position them so they can be used by wheelchair users and people of different heights. Consider full-length, adjustable or portable mirrors where appropriate, and ensure there is sufficient space to approach them.
- **Clothing rails and displays:** Where clothing or other products are displayed on rails, position them so wheelchair users and people of shorter stature can browse and reach items comfortably. Consider providing rails at different heights and ensure customers have sufficient space to move between them. Staff should be available to assist with items that are difficult to reach.
- **Product labels and information:** Ensure allergen information and other important health information is clear, easy to read and readily available. Consider using accessible QR codes or scannable barcodes that provide product information in formats compatible with screen readers. However, do not rely on these as the only way for customers to obtain essential information.
- **Fridges and freezers:** Choose and position fridges and freezers for maximum accessibility. Avoid heavy or hard-to-open doors, keep products reachable, including for wheelchair users, and ensure staff can help with items in high cabinets or deep chest freezers.

Supporting Customers with Non-Visible Disabilities

- **Hidden Disabilities Sunflower:** Consider joining the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower scheme and ensure staff recognise its lanyards and symbols. Wearing the Sunflower is a voluntary way for someone with a non-visible disability to indicate that they may need additional support, time or understanding. However, customers should not be required to wear a Sunflower lanyard or disclose their disability to receive assistance.
- **Individual assistance:** Encourage staff to ask customers whether they would like assistance and what would be most helpful, rather than

making assumptions about their needs. Some customers may need more time, a quieter environment, help locating goods, or an alternative way to access a service. Ensure staff respond with patience and understanding, and provide appropriate assistance wherever possible.

Staff Awareness and Customer Service

- **Disability awareness training:** Train staff in disability awareness, accessibility barriers, inclusive language and offering assistance. Staff should address disabled customers directly, rather than their companions, unless asked otherwise. Never touch or lean on someone's wheelchair, or move their walking stick, crutches, walking frame or other mobility aid without permission. Speak clearly and naturally, without shouting or exaggerating lip movements. Keep your face visible when speaking to customers who rely on lipreading. Allow customers time to communicate without interrupting or finishing their sentences. If you do not understand something, politely ask for clarification rather than pretending to understand. Ask blind or partially sighted customers whether they would like assistance and how they prefer to be guided. If guiding someone, explain any steps or changes in level and let them know before moving away. Larger businesses may wish to appoint a disability champion.
- **Supporting disabled customers:** Make sure staff know how to assist customers with different access requirements and are familiar with the facilities, equipment and alternative services the business offers. Ensure staff are easy to identify and approach. Where practical, offer services such as pre-booked shopping assistance, help with packing purchases, or help carrying shopping to customers' vehicles.
- **Packing and handing over purchases:** Ask customers how they would like their purchases packed or handed to them, rather than assuming they can lift or carry heavy bags. Never place bags on someone's wheelchair or mobility aid without permission.

- **Addressing discriminatory behaviour:** Make clear that discriminatory attitudes and behaviour towards disabled customers are unacceptable, whether from staff or other customers. Ensure staff know how to respond appropriately, support anyone affected and involve a manager where necessary.
- **Accessibility information:** Ensure staff can answer customers' questions about accessible facilities, available assistance and any access limitations, whether in person, by telephone or through other contact methods. Make this information available on your website where possible.

Accessible Toilets

Accessible toilets should be easy to locate, enter and use, with sufficient space and suitable facilities for disabled customers. If you are considering installing or altering an accessible toilet, seek professional advice to ensure the design is safe and meets relevant technical requirements. The following recommendations are not exhaustive. Refer to Approved Document M (Volume 2) of the Building Regulations and BS 8300-2:2018 for detailed design guidance.

- **Size and manoeuvring space:** Provide enough space for wheelchair users to manoeuvre and transfer safely. Approved Document M, Volume 2, Diagram 18, shows a standard accessible toilet measuring at least 1,500 mm wide × 2,200 mm deep, with a 1,500 mm × 1,500 mm manoeuvring space. However, this space may be too small for some powered wheelchairs to manoeuvre. Where this is the building's only toilet, paragraph 5.10 specifies a wider room of 2,000 mm, with an additional washbasin. Room dimensions alone do not guarantee accessibility; the layout and positioning of fittings are also important. Seek professional advice when designing or altering these facilities.

- **Clear signage:** Clearly identify accessible toilets and provide signs directing customers to them. Use large, legible lettering, appropriate symbols and good colour contrast.
- **Location and privacy:** Ensure accessible toilets are easy to find and reach via a clear, step-free route. Where possible, locate them close to the main customer areas. Make sure their position and layout provide privacy and dignity.
- **Toilets for ambulant disabled people:** Where separate-sex toilet facilities are provided, include suitable cubicles for disabled customers who can walk but need additional space or support. These should have appropriately positioned grab rails and sufficient room to use the facilities safely, in accordance with Approved Document M.
- **Baby changing facilities:** Provide separate baby changing facilities rather than using wheelchair-accessible toilets for this purpose. Where facilities share the same room, consider options for separating them and ensure the baby changing table does not obstruct wheelchair manoeuvring or transfer spaces. Display a clear, high-contrast sign reminding users to fold away and secure the table after use.
- **Step-free access and doors:** Provide a level, unobstructed route to the toilet and a doorway with sufficient clear opening width for wheelchair access. Use easy-to-operate handles and an outward-opening door where specified by the accessible toilet layout. Ensure the door can be opened from outside in an emergency.
- **Flooring and lighting:** Provide slip-resistant flooring and adequate, even lighting. Avoid unnecessary glare.
- **Visual contrast:** Use good colour contrast between key fittings and surrounding surfaces, including the toilet seat, grab rails, walls and floor, to help people with visual impairments identify and use the facilities.
- **Grab rails:** Install securely fixed horizontal, vertical and drop-down grab rails in suitable positions, following accessible toilet layouts. Ensure they contrast with the walls and allow wheelchair transfers.

- **Transfer arrangements:** Ensure there is sufficient clear space beside the toilet for wheelchair transfers. Position the toilet, washbasin and grab rails so they work together to support safe transfers. Where more than one accessible toilet cubicle is provided, consider layouts that allow customers to transfer from different sides.
- **Toilet paper:** Position toilet paper so someone seated on the toilet can reach and dispense it without excessive twisting or stretching. Where suitable, consider drop-down grab rails with integrated toilet-roll holders.
- **Flush controls:** Position the flush control on the side of the toilet where a wheelchair user transfers from their wheelchair, so they can reach and operate it easily.
- **Accessible washbasin:** Provide a washbasin that wheelchair users can reach and use comfortably, with sufficient space for their knees and feet where appropriate. Ensure taps are easy to operate, such as lever-operated or suitable sensor taps. Position the soap dispenser so customers can wash their hands conveniently.
- **Hand drying:** Position hand dryers at an accessible height and consider providing paper towels for customers who cannot use a hand dryer or find its noise uncomfortable. Ensure a suitable hand-drying option is within easy reach of the washbasin so wheelchair users do not have to operate their wheelchairs with wet hands.
- **Accessible bins:** Provide suitable waste disposal bins that wheelchair users and people with limited dexterity can reach and operate easily. Avoid relying solely on pedal-operated bins.
- **Mirrors:** Provide mirrors that can be used by customers of different heights, including wheelchair users. A full-length mirror is particularly useful for people who need to check clothing or medical appliances, including stoma bags.
- **Medical supplies shelf:** Provide a clean, easily reachable shelf or surface in accessible toilets for customers to place medical equipment and supplies, including catheter equipment, stoma products and

feeding tube supplies. Position it so that it does not obstruct essential clear spaces.

- **Cleanliness:** Maintain high standards of cleanliness and hygiene, particularly for customers who need to handle medical equipment, including feeding tubes and stoma supplies. Avoid automatic air fresheners that spray at intervals, and other fragranced products, which can affect people with sensory sensitivities, migraines or respiratory conditions.
- **Keep the space clear:** Ensure wheelchair manoeuvring and transfer spaces remain unobstructed. Position bins and other equipment so they do not obstruct the doorway, transfer area or essential clear spaces. Accessible toilets must never be used for storage.
- **Emergency call system:** Provide an accessible emergency assistance alarm that alerts staff to respond promptly. Ensure the red pull cord is never tied up and can be reached by someone who has fallen. Approved Document M illustrates two red bangles, with the lower bangle 100 mm above floor level and the upper bangle 800–1,000 mm above floor level. Ensure the alarm provides appropriate audible and visual indications, reset controls are accessible, and the system is regularly tested.
- **RADAR keys and access arrangements:** Where a RADAR key is used, provide clear signage explaining where customers can collect the key from. Ensure staff can provide prompt assistance and that customers are not prevented from using the toilet simply because they do not have their own key.
- **Maintenance and regular checks:** Check accessible toilets regularly to ensure emergency alarms work, doors and locks operate correctly, grab rails remain secure, supplies are replenished, and essential clear spaces remain unobstructed. Address faults promptly.
- **Emergency evacuation:** Ensure emergency procedures take account of disabled customers who may be using the toilet and that staff know how to respond if assistance is required.

- **Alternative arrangements:** If your business does not have an accessible toilet, ensure staff know the location of the nearest suitable facility and can give customers accurate directions. Be clear about what facilities your premises can and cannot provide, while continuing to consider what reasonable adjustments could improve access at your own premises.
- **Communication:** Ensure staff can answer questions about accessible toilet facilities before customers visit, whether by telephone, email or other contact methods. Where possible, include details of the facilities on your website.
- **Changing Places toilets:** Consider providing a Changing Places toilet where appropriate. These facilities provide additional space and specialist equipment, including a height-adjustable adult changing bench, a peninsular toilet and a ceiling-track hoist.

Returns

- **Returning goods:** Make returns straightforward and accessible for disabled customers. Clearly explain your returns policy before purchase, including any charges and how goods can be returned. Consider offering free or affordable return options, including home collection for goods purchased online or in-store. Where possible, allow online purchases to be returned in-store. Ensure online returns systems work with assistive technology and offer alternative ways to arrange returns where needed. Be flexible when a product proves inaccessible to a disabled customer, including considering a return or exchange, while respecting their consumer rights and your duty to make reasonable adjustments.

Emergency Procedures

- **Accessible fire alarms:** Ensure fire alarm arrangements can alert disabled customers, including those who are Deaf or have hearing impairments. Provide suitable audible, visual or other warning

methods, taking account of the findings of the premises' fire risk assessment.

- **Emergency evacuation:** Ensure your fire risk assessment and emergency procedures take account of disabled customers who may need assistance to evacuate safely. Train staff in appropriate evacuation procedures, accessible escape routes and the safe use of any specialist equipment provided, such as evacuation chairs. Seek professional advice where specialist evacuation arrangements are required.
- **Maintaining access during alterations:** Plan renovations, building works, maintenance and temporary changes to the layout carefully to minimise risks to disabled customers. Keep accessible entrances, emergency escape routes and facilities unobstructed and available wherever possible. Where access is temporarily affected, ensure suitable alternative arrangements are in place and that emergency evacuation procedures remain safe and effective. If possible, inform customers about any temporary access restrictions in advance.

Car Parks

Where customer parking is provided, disabled customers should be able to park close to the premises and reach the entrance safely and easily.

- **Accessible parking spaces:** Provide clearly marked accessible parking spaces close to the accessible entrance, with enough room for wheelchair users and people using mobility aids to get in and out of their vehicles safely. Allow space for wheelchair-accessible vehicles with side or rear ramps and lifts.
- **Accessible parking bay dimensions:** Approved Document M, Volume 2, Diagram 2, shows a parking bay measuring 2,400 mm × 4,800 mm, with additional 1,200 mm access and safety zones. Department for Transport guidance recommends access zones on both sides of perpendicular parking bays, which can be shared between adjoining bays, and at the end used to enter or leave the vehicle. Keep these areas clear of

obstructions and seek professional advice when creating or altering parking spaces.

- **Number of spaces:** Provide a suitable number of accessible parking spaces for the size and use of your car park. Department for Transport guidance recommends 6% of the total capacity for visiting disabled motorists at shopping, leisure and recreational facilities, in addition to spaces for disabled employees. Check relevant planning requirements and accessibility standards when designing or altering a car park.
- **Accessible routes:** Ensure routes from accessible parking spaces to the entrance are sufficiently wide, unobstructed and level wherever possible, or have a suitably gentle gradient. Provide firm, even, slip-resistant surfaces, dropped kerbs and appropriate handrails where required. Ensure any crossings are safe and accessible and check that overhanging branches, signs and other objects do not create hazards.
- **Lighting and signage:** Provide adequate lighting in car parks and on pathways leading to the entrance. Clearly signpost accessible parking spaces and routes, using visible markings and appropriate symbols. Ensure customers can easily identify the accessible route from the parking area to the entrance.
- **Accessible parking payments:** Where parking charges apply, ensure payment machines and controls are accessible to wheelchair users and people of short stature. Provide clear information about charges, payment methods and any Blue Badge concessions. Where possible, offer alternative payment methods and assistance for customers who cannot use the machines.
- **Public parking information:** If your business does not have its own car park, provide information about the nearest accessible public parking where possible. Include useful details such as its location, approximate distance, parking charges, number of accessible bays and any known access barriers along the route.
- **Parking enforcement:** Regularly check that accessible parking bays are not being misused. Clearly communicate the parking conditions that

apply, including any Blue Badge requirements, and take appropriate action when spaces are used without authorisation. Where you manage your own parking, consider how to accommodate disabled customers who need accessible parking but do not hold a Blue Badge.

- **Public transport:** Consider providing information about nearby public transport, including the location and approximate distance of bus stops and railway stations. Where possible, explain whether the routes from them to your premises are accessible.

Regular Maintenance Inside and Outside Your Business

Accessibility features must remain safe, available and usable.

- **Check accessibility features:** Regularly inspect ramps, lifts, automatic doors, assistance bells, hearing loops and other accessibility equipment to ensure they are working correctly. Check that handrails and grab rails remain secure and that accessible toilet alarms are functioning. Address faults promptly. Where lifts or other essential access equipment are out of order, inform customers as soon as possible, including through your website or other communication channels. Display clear information at the premises and explain any available alternatives.
- **Keep routes clear:** Regularly check that advertising boards, street furniture, deliveries, temporary displays and other obstacles do not obstruct entrances, exits, aisles or pedestrian routes.
- **Snow, ice and debris:** Keep pathways, ramps and entrances clear of leaves, snow, ice and other debris. Take appropriate precautions during adverse weather, such as gritting areas at risk of becoming slippery, and ensure accessible routes remain safe to use.
- **Spillages and wet floors:** Clean up spillages promptly and prevent floors from becoming slippery during cleaning. Use clear warning signs

while floors are wet, and ensure signs and cleaning equipment do not obstruct accessible routes.

- **Doors and handles:** Regularly check that doors, handles, hinges and door closers are secure, operate correctly and have not become stiff or difficult to use. Address any problems promptly, without compromising fire safety.
- **Air conditioning and ventilation:** Maintain air-conditioning and ventilation systems to minimise unnecessary background noise and help maintain a comfortable indoor temperature.

Accessibility Information for Customers

Euan's Guide Access Survey 2025 highlights the importance of providing clear accessibility information. Almost half of respondents find it difficult to locate access information before leaving home, and only 7% find it easy to locate when they're out and about. If they cannot find the information they need, 42% say they avoid venues altogether, assuming they are inaccessible.

Telling Customers about Accessibility

Providing accurate accessibility information helps disabled customers plan their visits and decide what arrangements or assistance they may need.

- **Accessibility information online:** If your business has a website or social media accounts, provide clear, accurate information about the accessibility of your premises and services so disabled customers can make informed decisions before visiting. Include relevant details about entrances, lifts, accessible toilets, hearing loops, seating and available assistance. Where applicable, mention quiet hours, sensory packs, pre-bookable assistance and accessible store maps showing product locations. Be honest about any access limitations.
- **Accessible digital information:** Make online information easy to read and use. Provide alternative text for informative images, captions for

videos and good colour contrast. Use descriptive links, capitalise each word in multiword hashtags (CamelCase), and avoid unnecessarily dense text, excessive capitalisation and decorative formatting that makes information difficult to read. Where businesses offer online booking, ordering, payments or contact forms, ensure these services are accessible to customers using assistive technology and provide an alternative method where needed.

- **Information by telephone and other methods:** Ensure staff can provide accurate accessibility information to customers who telephone before visiting. Offer alternative contact methods, such as email or text messaging where practical, for customers who cannot easily use the telephone.
- **Keeping information up to date:** Review accessibility information regularly and update it whenever facilities, services or access arrangements change. Whenever possible, inform customers about temporary restrictions, such as broken lifts or inaccessible entrances, before they travel.

Consider including the following information on your website or in an accessibility guide. A short, accurate webpage may be sufficient for a small business, while larger premises may benefit from a more detailed guide.

1. **Introduction:** Briefly explain your approach to accessibility and your commitment to improving access for disabled customers.
2. **Getting there:** Provide information about nearby public transport, approximate distances from bus stops and railway stations, accessible parking and routes to your premises, including any known barriers.
3. **Physical accessibility:** Describe entrances, exits, steps, ramps, lifts, doorways and any other features or barriers that may affect access. Clearly state whether step-free access is available. Include useful photographs and accurate measurements where appropriate to help customers understand the layout.

4. **Facilities:** Explain what accessible toilets, changing rooms, seating, hearing loops, tactile signs and other facilities are available, including any relevant limitations.
5. **Assistance services:** Describe the help staff can provide, including assistance with shopping or guided visits where available. Explain how customers can request or arrange assistance.
6. **Information and communication:** Explain what alternative formats are available, such as large print, Braille or audio, and how customers can request accessible information. Include information about events, exhibitions, products and services where relevant.
7. **Policies and procedures:** Explain relevant accessibility arrangements, including assistance dog policies, priority seating and any restrictions or limitations customers should know about.
8. **Feedback and commitment to accessibility:** Invite customers to share their experiences and provide clear contact details for questions, feedback or complaints. Ensure customers can raise accessibility concerns through a suitable communication method and explain how their feedback will be considered. Include a short statement about your commitment to improving accessibility.
9. **Virtual tour:** Consider providing a video tour showing entrances, routes, facilities and important accessibility features. Include captions, spoken descriptions of important visual information and an accessible written alternative.

Examples of accessibility guides and information

Businesses can also use VisitEngland's guidance on providing accessibility information to help decide what information to include and how to present it.

- Example of an Accessibility Guide for a Restaurant (Downloadable Word document)
- Example of an Accessibility Guide for an Attraction (Downloadable Word document)

- Example of The Glasshouse's Access Information Page (Website)

Making a Difference, One Improvement at a Time

Creating a more accessible business is about recognising barriers and taking meaningful action to remove them. Some improvements can be made straight away, while others require more planning and investment.

Every barrier removed can make a real difference to someone's independence, dignity and ability to access your goods and services.

Start with what you can change today, plan for what needs more time, and keep building on your progress. By listening to disabled customers and making positive changes, you can create a business where everyone feels welcome, valued and included.

Did you know that UK high street shops are estimated to lose around £267 million every month because of poor accessibility for disabled customers?

(Source: UK Parliament)

Sources

- **Access Card:** About the Access Card Scheme
- **Association of Convenience Stores (ACS):** ACS Official Website
- **British Standards Institution (BSI):** BS 8300-2:2018 – Design of an Accessible and Inclusive Built Environment: Buildings – Code of Practice
- **Changing Places:** Changing Places Toilets – Official Website
- **Congleton Town Council:** A Board Policy
- **Department for Transport:** Using Local Parking Measures to Support Disabled People
- **Department for Work and Pensions:** Family Resources Survey, 2024 to 2025
- **Equality and Human Rights Commission:** Assistance Dogs – A Guide for Businesses and Service Providers
- **Equality and Human Rights Commission:** Code of Practice for Services, Public Functions and Associations – Chapter 7: Disabled People: Reasonable Adjustments
- **Euan's Guide:** Access Survey 2025 – Results (published March 2026)
- **Government Equalities Office:** Disability – Quick Start Guide for Service Providers
- **Hidden Disabilities Sunflower:** Hidden Disabilities Sunflower – Official Website
- **HM Government:** Approved Document M, Volume 2 – Access to and Use of Buildings Other Than Dwellings (incorporating 2024 amendments)
- **Home Office:** Fire Safety Risk Assessment – Means of Escape for Disabled People
- **Macclesfield Town Council:** A Board Policy
- **Purpl:** Purpl Pulse – Disabled Consumer Behaviour Report
- **Relay UK:** Relay UK – Accessible Telephone Communication Service
- **Research Institute for Disabled Consumers (RiDC):** Re-Imaging Retail – Designing Inclusive Experiences for All
- **Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB):** Accessible Chip and PIN Payment Devices
- **Scope:** Accessibility and Disability – Facts and Figures
- **UK Parliament:** Accessibility of products and services
- **VisitEngland:** Providing Accessibility Information

Other Guides in This Series

- Disability Awareness: A Brief Overview
- Is Your Business Missing Out on the Purple Pound? – A Guide for Businesses
- Event Accessibility Guide – With Checklist

For more resources, please visit: https://deborah-lawson.co.uk

This guide provides general guidance and does not constitute legal advice. Laws, standards and local policies may change, so always check the latest requirements.

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