

Statement from York's Human Rights & Equalities Board on City Centre Access

The city's Human Rights and Equalities Board (the board) is convened by City of York Council and seeks to engage the city's statutory and other agencies in the vision of York Human Rights City, providing strategic direction for the council's human rights and equalities work, and tackling issues raised within the York Human Rights City Indicator Report.

The board has recently been briefed by officers of City of York Council on the work that is being undertaken by the council with respect to future arrangements for access to the city centre by Blue Badge holders. This was intended to be the first stage of the board's engagement with this issue as it is aware that access is a matter of significant public concern and that there are important human rights that need to be balanced in any decisions.

As a result of the pandemic, simplified pavement café licences were introduced by the Government for a temporary period to support the economic recovery of the hospitality industry. In response, the council made a temporary Traffic Regulation Order (TRO), removing the Blue Badge exemption from Blake Street, Lendal, Goodramgate, Church Street and Castlegate and making changes to Fossgate to create space for social distancing and for café licences, and extending the hours of the footstreets operation to 8:00 pm.

The council now intends to make a decision about what the permanent arrangements will be and has undertaken a statutory consultation on the TRO. At the same time, the council is also undertaking a wider review of city centre access with a view to improving access to and through the footstreets and balancing the competing demands for space in our city centre.

The council's Executive will be taking its decisions in November. The statutory consultation on the footstreets has now closed and the results will be fed into the Executive report. The public engagement on the proposals contained in the wider strategic review will be undertaken in October. The deadline for both reports is 5 November, meaning that input from the Human Rights and Equalities Board, with regard to the implications for Blue Badge holders from both reports, will need to be received in mid-October.

The board agreed the following three actions:

- First, the board requested that the available equalities impact assessments conducted by the council, as well as the legal advice on which the council has based its approach, be made public.
- Second, the board agreed to ask the York Human Rights City Network¹ to assist the city to find an appropriate way forward in this matter by providing guidance on how the council can best respect the human rights of all when taking these complex decisions. The review of law and practice will include consideration of how other cities have approached this challenge. A paper on these matters will be produced, and made public, by mid-October.
- Third, the board offered to facilitate attempts to co-design solutions to the access issue. This will form part of the upcoming public engagement on the wider measures to improve accessibility to and within the footstreets (which will run for 3 weeks from the start of October), and inform ongoing discussions about access to the city thereafter.

In addition to the board's guidance, the council will continue to take legal guidance on its duties under equalities legislation to ensure that any decision it takes is consistent with existing case law and the Equalities Act.

¹ York Human Rights City Network is a civil society partnership, hosted jointly by York CVS and the Centre for Applied Human Rights at the University of York, which aims to be a catalyst for York people, business and organisations to champion a vibrant, diverse, fair and safe city. In July, it issued a statement on Blue Badge access to the city centre: [Blue Badge Access to York Statement July 2021 - York Human Rights City](#)