



Low cost  
**No cost**

Helping small businesses  
become more accessible to  
disabled customers

## About this guide



This guide aims to help small businesses improve access to goods and services for disabled customers.

Businesses who provide goods or services to the public (whether paid or free of charge), are classed as a 'service providers'. Service providers have legal responsibilities to their disabled customers.



It is against the law to discriminate against a disabled person by offering a lower standard of service.

Businesses are legally required to make **“reasonable adjustments”** to improve access for disabled people.

These adjustments do not

have to be very costly.

It could simply mean small physical changes, such as improving the lighting or signage, or making other changes like staff training or new policies.

## What’s a “reasonable adjustment”?

Several things will affect whether changes are seen as “reasonable”. These include:

- Would the changes actually improve things?
- How realistic it is for the service provider to take the measures?
- Are the adjustments affordable?
- How much disruption would be caused?
- Is financial help available?

Small businesses are likely to have less resources to carry out adjustments. So it is important for them to improve as much as they can by making low cost or

no cost adjustments. That's where this guide can help.

## Why bother?

Apart from the legal requirement, there are clear financial benefits to making adjustments. Around 100,000 people living in Stoke-on-Trent are affected by disability in some way. They may be disabled themselves or a carer for a disabled person.

That's a significant number of people with considerable spending power who could benefit from improved access.



It's also worth remembering that improved access for disabled people

can help other customers, including:

- Friends, family and carers of disabled people
- People with pushchairs
- People carrying heavy

shopping or luggage

- Customers with children
- Older customers
- Customers with short-term illnesses or injuries.



The idea that all disabled people use wheelchairs is inaccurate.



Many business owners think they have done everything they need to do because they have level or ramped access. In fact, only around 1.5% of disabled people use a wheelchair.

You may think that there is little point improving access as you may not currently have many disabled customers. It may also be too hard to access your business at present. However, improving access could bring you more customers.

As far as possible, disabled customers should be able to access services on the same basis as other customers. However, this may not always be possible.

Remember, there is nothing in the law to stop you making **extra** provision for your disabled customers. Disabled customers can benefit from a range of improvements, many of which don't have to be expensive.

### **General principles**

Meet the needs of as many customers as possible.

Think about how you use the space you have. For example, could you move public areas to the ground floor?

Staff awareness can make a huge difference. Make sure all staff are aware of their duties under the Disability Discrimination Act



(DDA). For more information, please see the leaflet "DDA Aware".

Non-physical adjustments can also benefit disabled customers. For example, introducing a mail order or telephone order service, or providing services in the customer's own home.



This information is intended as guidance only. If you have any doubts about whether you are meeting your legal requirements, it is best to get independent legal advice.

Please note that you may need to get permissions, for example from Planning, Building Control, Highways and other statutory bodies. If in any doubt, please seek advice.

## **Physical adjustments**

**Parking** - Disability bays should be monitored to make sure they are not misused.

**Lighting** - Could you improve external and internal lighting?

**Signage** - Is the route to the main entrance signed? How easy is it for a person to find their way around the premises? Are the tills, help desks and fire exits clearly signed? Are signs at an easy height to read?

**Paths** - Ensure that leaves are swept and that there are no puddles or ice on paths. Do not block paths with A-frames or litter bins. Ensure that vegetation is cut back. Repair or replace damaged paving.

**Main entrance** - If you cannot make the main entrance accessible, could another entrance be used? Could this become the main entrance for all customers? Is the alternative entrance suitably signed?

**Doors** - Could doors be made lighter by adjusting door closers? Do handles need replacing?

**Steps** are the single biggest barrier to people with mobility difficulties. There are several possibilities, including:

- Raising the level of the approach path
- Install a permanent ramp (ideally as well as steps)
- Provide an alternative entrance

If none of these suggestions are possible, alternatives include:

- Provide a temporary ramp
- Fit handrails to the steps
- Improve the steps - ensure they are not too steep, are non-slip and that the edges are clear.
- Provide a call bell for the customer to summon help
- Provide services in a different way, such as home delivery, mail order or internet shopping.

## Internal areas

Keep aisles, corridors and exit routes clear of clutter, including stock displays.

**Signs** - should be:

- Simple and short
- At a suitable height to make them easy to read
- Easy to read with clear typefaces.
- In Upper and Lower Case, rather than ALL CAPITALS
- Well contrasted, with good contrast between the letters and the background
- Not highly reflective

Make sure that **floors** are non-slip and in good repair.

Think about how **goods are displayed**. Arrange similar goods at a variety of heights, and make sure popular goods are not on very high or very low shelves.

Could you provide **customer seating**? If so, try to provide seats both with and without arms.

Use **lighting** to highlight areas such as reception counters, or potentially dangerous areas such as stairwells.

Maximise **natural lighting** by keeping windows clean and curtains or blinds open.

Ensure blown light bulbs or fluorescent tubes are replaced promptly.

## Customer toilets

For many smaller businesses, the issue of providing customer toilets does not arise. But toilets would be expected where customers may be on the premises for some time (such as a hairdressers) or where toilets would normally be provided (such as a restaurant). In this case, consideration should be given to how accessible the toilets are.

If there is only one customer toilet on the premises, best practice states that this

should be a **unisex wheelchair accessible toilet**. These are larger than standard toilet compartments, and you should seek technical advice on how to create an accessible toilet on your premises. The location, layout, dimensions and positioning of fixtures and fittings is critical.

### **Exits**

Often the only route out of a building a customer will know is the route they used to enter the building.

Bear in mind that customers may be carrying heavy or bulky goods when they leave. For this reason, it is important that exits are well-signed and not obstructed and that doors are easy to open.

In an emergency, it may be necessary to use a different route. Ensure that fire escape routes and exits are suitably signed, and are

level or ramped with no tripping hazards.

Ensure that alarm systems are in working order.

Ensure that staff are trained how to respond to an emergency, including disability training such as helping visually or hearing impaired people to safety.

### **Non-physical adjustments Communication**

People with different disabilities have different communication needs.

- Improving communication: Ensure telephone calls are answered promptly, and calls are returned if necessary.
- Induction loops are used by people with hearing aids. They are particularly useful at reception desks, ticket counters, cashier windows and meeting rooms. Portable systems are available so that the system can be used in various locations.

- Keep background noise to a minimum.
- Improved lighting can assist people with visual impairments and people with hearing impairments who lip read. Encourage staff to look at customers and not cover their mouths when speaking.
- Provide an email address for customers who find it difficult to use the phone. Ensure email enquiries are dealt with promptly.
- Allow extra time for communication with disabled customers. It may be necessary to double check the accuracy of information.
- Lowered counter areas help wheelchair users and people who may prefer to sit.



**If you have any queries about this booklet, please contact:**

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