**Petition to keep both Disability Access Officers (part-time) roles in Sheffield City Council**

Disabled people's independence in Sheffield is under threat following the council' s decision to axe the positions of Access Officers within the Planning Department.

**We the undersigned call on Sheffield City Council to retain both Disability Access Officer (part-time) posts and protect them each and every year.** These roles ensure a sustainable advancement of opportunity for disabled people to participate in every area of city life.

This service is already at the bare minimum level to be sustainable in the long term. Taking this action will ensure that equality of opportunity continues to be progressed in Sheffield as buildings and public spaces are renovated or replaced. This would demonstrate and facilitate good relations with the Disabled community as required under the Public Sector Equality Duty. Impairment will often come to us all whether through aging or misfortune of an accident and so we believe all citizens should care and what to see this cut reversed.

One ‘solution’ often offered is that Building Control Officers can provide accessibility regulation but this is ineffective as these officers are involved too late in the process for controlling development and only look at compliance to rules. No consideration can be given to whether the right solution was submitted. Finally, developers can pick and chose external Building Control inspectors who could be selected for a minimalist approach to checks and standards that is in favour of the developer rather than a more reasonable approach for the whole of society, including disabled people.

There are many issues where only Access Officers would have a role in improving access for disabled people. For example:

* Advising and Consulting on changes to public open spaces which are not covered by Building Control. This ensured that Charter Square was much better than a steep set of steps as originally proposed.
* Promote installation of dropped curbs where they are absent in the AMEY contract. This would not have happened or be charged to the council **unless** Access Officers had made a case for this.

**Further Background**

Today there are still many buildings and areas of public space which are difficult or completely inaccessible for people with disabilities to use. The specialist knowledge and support provided by Access Officers in the Planning department provide knowledge of the many minimum and supplementary standards which developers may not be aware of. This facilitates an increasingly accessible built environment for both public spaces and buildings in the city.

Without this expertise in house the following areas are likely to degrade or cease in terms of planning application assessment and pre build accessibility Quality Assurance:

* Ensuring tactile safety and navigation paving for the Visually impaired in    private and public developments.
* Proper assessment of the need for accessible parking spaces on or near new developments.
* Anyone with sufficient training in the several sections of BS 8300 and other standards and a mandate to remain up to date on these standards and their implications. (These standards cost £448 to    purchase for individuals to access which is unaffordable for self-representation even for the technically minded!)
* Assisting colleagues in professional development in this area, particularly in referring cases for further input as a part of the Public Sector Equality Duty.
* Good connection between SCC and a panel of experienced disabled people     who can assist in recommendations where standards are unclear or difficult to apply for a given new development or innovation such as the West Bar Grey to Green scheme.
* Develop research for areas of conflict such as the reduction or removal of     controlled pedestrian crossings.
* Compensate for the minimalistic nature of accessibility in architecture training in the area of accessibility.

The above losses massively and negatively impact the operation of the Council in their duty to Advance equality of opportunity to access private and public spaces, and to foster good relations where Disabled People. Disabled people need to be able to trust and interact with the Council in the spirit of openness and accountability as they are obliged to advocate for and not increase disadvantage to Disabled people by requiring them to take legal action in individual circumstances to enforce on obstruction.