

COUNCIL

28 October 2025

QUESTION ASKED PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO 5.5

The following question has been asked pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 5.5 by Councillor Barton:

- Access to council services for those with visual impairments

'With the understandable drive to push residents to use online services, what steps are TMBC taking to ensure that services are accessible to those with visual impairments? The 2010 Equalities Act requires services to make sure people with disabilities can access their services as easily as people without disabilities. I am concerned that when trying to help a resident with visual impairment, I was told in an email response that "We do encourage applicants to try and work with support workers, family, and friends to submit applications if they struggle to access the system, but we can support with this when required."

However, when advocating for a resident, I found over two weeks passed before anyone would call them because they were unable to use our online services and to be told that the solution is for someone else to do this for them infantilises members of the public by requiring someone else to act for them, rather than making our services accessible.'

Response of the Cabinet Member for Community Services (Cllr Keers):

We want all of our residents to be able to access our services and we offer a variety of ways for residents to get the help they need. For example, any visually impaired resident using our website may navigate the website using speech recognition software, listen using a screen reader or zoom in by up to 300% per cent. Any resident who needs information on the website in a different format e.g. accessible PDF, large print, easy read, audio recording or braille may contact the customer services team and we will be happy to assist.

Residents may also telephone, visit us in person or contact us via webchat. Where additional help is required to complete certain forms e.g. applications for housing benefit/ council tax support or appeals against Council decisions we will refer those residents to Citizens Advice North and West Kent as they are able to offer free, independent specialist advisors to provide help in completing the required paperwork. The Borough Council continues to grant fund Citizens Advice North and West Kent to provide this valuable support to residents.