

## **Speech by Mayor Caitriona Jones at the Launch of National Accessibility Week 2011 – 28<sup>th</sup> November 2011**

Fellow Councillors, Manager and guests, it is my pleasure as Mayor of South Dublin County to welcome you to the South Dublin County launch of National Accessibility Week 2011.

Local Authority National Accessibility Week 2011 is taking place from 28<sup>th</sup> November to 5<sup>th</sup> December. The week-long campaign will coincide with International Day of Disabled Persons which is taking place on 3<sup>rd</sup> December.

The second annual National Accessibility Week has been designed with a particular focus on illegal and inconsiderate parking, poor parking behaviour and the difficulties and access issues that are caused by parking on footpaths, blocking entrances, and illegal use of accessible parking spaces. The theme of the week is '*Park Right*'.

Parking illegally on the footpath effectively forces disabled people, wheelchair users, parents with pushchairs, older people and all pedestrians onto the roadway and into traffic. The campaign aims to create general awareness of this issue on both a national and local level.

The National Week is being co-ordinated by the Local Authority Access Officer Network under the aegis of the LGMSB Disability Steering Committee.

National Accessibility Week is also an important opportunity for local authorities to encourage all people to focus on issues of accessibility for disabled people and so Councils, businesses and community groups across the country are using the Week to highlight the accessibility of their facilities and services; and to encourage wider society to also be more inclusive of the varied access needs of disabled people.

So what does Accessibility mean? Accessibility means that an environment or service can be accessed, used or understood by all people without restriction. It is achieved through recognising that people have diverse abilities and access needs and that changing the way in which we work and deliver services enables us to achieve equality of access for all. Of course provision of ramps and tactile paving, Braille and tactile signage, dished kerbs, adapted toilets, induction hearing loops, lifetime homes and use of plain language and WAI Compliant websites are fundamental to achieving this equality of access, but recognition of diversity and 'proofing' how we work and the services we deliver are vital first steps.

South Dublin County Council has been committed to access and equality since the Council was established in 1995 and in 2007 the Council adopted its' Disability Act Implementation Plan "Enabling Access - Ensuring Equality of Opportunity". Evidence of this deep commitment includes the innovative Jobot's Access All Areas accessibility game, online video access guides to key Council facilities, establishment of the South Dublin County Disability Advisory / Consultative Panel, and delivery of a significant programme of access works across the County since 2005.

And what is Accessible South Dublin County? Specific examples of the Council's commitment to access include:

In July of this year I had the pleasure of attending the celebration of accessibility in the Camac Valley Caravan and Camping Park, which was held to highlight how accessible the facility has now become. And couple of weeks ago I had the pleasure of accepting the Chambers Ireland Excellence in Local Government Award for Outstanding Customer Service for this facility. The Award was achieved due to the significant level of access that is now available to disabled visitors.

There is a high level of access provided for disabled people across all South Dublin County Council's public buildings including induction loop facilities in the Council Chamber here in County Hall, and in the Area Committee Chamber in Clondalkin Civic Offices.

The quality and range of access in Tallaght Stadium was greatly enhanced last year including installation of an FM system in the Stadium to facilitate people with hearing impairments.

The Council's website is Double-A Compliant with international web content accessibility guidelines.

My fellow Elected Members participated in the development of a Disability Proofing Toolkit designed specifically to assist us in considering the needs of disabled people when we are carrying out our duties as public representatives.

The South Dublin Libraries have a significant range of assistive technologies and resources in alternative formats available across the Library Network, and their award winning Digital Books Service has significantly improved access for library members in general, but most significantly for many disabled members.

This Week South Dublin County Council will be promoting accessibility through:

- Participating in the national 'Park Right' poster campaign. The 'Park Right' posters are on display in public buildings, schools and community facilities across the County.
- At South Dublin Library Services there will be staff on hand to highlight the range of accessible services available to citizens. These include the TTRS (***Touch, Type, Read and Spell***) software programme which is delivered by Library staff to children and adults, in a group or one to one, who experience learning and reading difficulties.
- There will be a display on Planning and Accessibility available throughout the Week here in County Hall. This will include information on the Disability Access Certification process.

There are also a variety of events scheduled to promote accessibility during National Accessibility Week. For example tomorrow I will be taking calls from Deaf/Hard of Hearing people via webcam using a system similar to Skype called OoVoo and using remote Irish Sign Language interpretation. If you know of anyone who would like to participate in this they should contact Selina Bonnie to book a time slot.

Other events include a Children's' story time in the County Library using literature selected to celebrate National Accessibility Week, information stands from Arthritis Ireland, Lucan Disability Action and Accessible Community Transport Services.

On Thursday people will have the opportunity to discuss adapted driving options for disabled people with an experienced driving instructor and to view an adapted car from the National Mobility Centre. And then on Friday the Dublin Deaf Choir are going to put us in the festive mood by treating us to a lunchtime Christmas carol concert.

Just before I finish I would like to take a moment to congratulate South Dublin County on its recent achievement in the EU Access Cities Award 2012. The Access City Award sets out to showcase and reward cities/counties which take exemplary initiatives to improve accessibility in the urban environment. Out of a total of 114 contenders South Dublin County was one of only 33 selected to go through to the second stage.

So well done to all concerned across the Council for your dedication to achieving Accessible South Dublin County – A Place that is truly for All People.

Thank you