

Hospitality sector best practice guide: making outdoor spaces accessible

This guide has been written by blind and partially sighted people working with Sight Loss Councils (SLC).

Visual impairment can sometimes be hidden

Not all blind or partially sighted people wear dark glasses, use a cane or have a guide dog. Some may have useful vision, allowing them to navigate without a visible mobility aid, however, they may still require assistance. They may be wearing a Sunflower badge or lanyard, making it easy to recognise them as someone requiring assistance.

How to Assist?

Some examples of help include a clear greeting as a visually impaired (VI) person might not be able to find staff to ask for assistance or see who is in uniform. “Hi, I’m Alison, I’m a

member of staff, can I help?” could go a long way. They may need help in locating the queue and/or counter, getting seated and reading print (i.e signs and menus). They will be able to let you know what assistance they need.

Social distancing and hygiene

Many VI people find it tricky to social distance effectively. If there is not a safe alternative, they may need to be physically guided. Face masks and hand sanitisers should be used unless those involved have a medical exemption. Legally no proof of an exemption is required.

Guiding

Despite social distancing, it might still be necessary to physically guide a VI person. Ask the person how they would prefer to

be guided, such as by following you or placing a hand on your shoulder or elbow. You can help a VI person by placing their hand on the back of a chair.

Verbal guidance is also an option, if the VI person is comfortable with this. Clear and accurate communication is vital, e.g. “the chair is about three steps in front of you, to your left, at about a 10 o’clock”. It might be helpful to tap the chair/table, so the VI person can hear where it is.

A mixture of guiding techniques might be required. Always ask the VI person what help they would like – never assume.

Outside your premises

Many hospitality businesses are now open for outdoor service. This means pubs, cafes and restaurants will be using outdoor furniture to welcome customers. We ask that you keep in mind blind and partially sighted people when positioning outdoor furniture, as this can sometimes be hazardous. It is illegal to block pavements.

Ensuring there are clear walkways to the entrance and around chairs and tables will help people social distance, as well as providing space for VI people to get past or become a paying customer. Anything across a walkway, near the ground or at head height, is still an illegal obstacle.

You can find out more guidance for outdoor seating by contacting your local council or visiting the [Local Government Association website](#).

The Law

The Highways Act 1980 states that highways must be kept clear of obstructions, which includes pavements. The Highways Authority has the duty to uphold this law, which covers temporary obstructions, such as a table or chair.

The Equality Act 2010 outlines that services need to make reasonable adjustments, to ensure disabled people are not disadvantaged.

All actions suggested in this guide are reasonable and pose little inconvenience to businesses.

Public authorities are required, under the Equality Act 2010, to take action on highways which have become inaccessible to disabled people. This is also enforced by the Town and Police Clauses Act. Find out more about reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010 [here](#).

www.sightlosscouncils.org.uk

