

Official opening of Changing Places in Dorset

Pioneering new toilet and changing facilities for disabled people will be unveiled at the Bridport Leisure Centre later this month.

The Dorset Learning Disability Partnership Board and Bridport Leisure Centre have teamed up to make leisure opportunities more accessible to all with the launch of the first 'Changing Place' in West Dorset.

Changing Places offer more, specially adapted features than standard disabled toilet facilities, and meet the needs of people with profound learning disabilities and serious physical impairments.

They contain extra equipment including height-adjustable hoists, changing benches and washing/shower facilities, as well as more room for disabled people in wheelchairs and their carer(s).

The Dorset County Council led Partnership Board was set up in 2001 to help develop services and improve opportunities for people with learning disabilities in their local community. It is made up of public sector organisations representing social care and health, education and leisure, plus charities, volunteer groups and – crucially – service users and carers.

The Changing Places project, completed as part of the re-development work at Bridport Leisure Centre, was funded by the Partnership Board with generous contributions from West Dorset Mencap and West Dorset District Council.

Rachel Mason, Dorset family carer co-ordinator and a carer herself said:

“I am delighted the council is opening a Changing Place in Dorset.

“Families and carers all over the country have been struggling without these types of facilities for a long time now, often having to change their dependants in cramped toilet cubicles without changing benches and so being forced to use the floor. This means that trips away from home are limited and often kept pretty short to avoid this situation.

“As more Changing Places become available across the south west, it will become much easier for individuals, their families and carers to experience a more natural day out in their community - something that most people take for granted.”

Bridport Leisure Centre Manager Nick Neale said:

“I am pleased that we have received this funding to help accommodate disabled users by providing the most sophisticated changing facilities in the area.

“This changing place will be open to anyone that needs it and will be advertised nationally so visitors to the area can find out more about it too.”

Steve Pitt Dorset County Council director for adult and community services and co-chair of the Partnership Board said:

“Treating all our residents with dignity and respect is top of our agenda.

“As the number of people living with profound learning disabilities increases and the way they choose to spend their time changes with the arrival of personal budgets, we have an important role in making sure normal community facilities cater for all.”