

Taunton Deane Disability Discussion Group 22nd July 2008

Group Facilitated by Mandy Seaman – Compass Disability Services, SAIN Project Coordinator.

Representatives present;

Liz Fothergill – Taunton & District Citizens Advice Bureau
Dean Lampard – Crown Prosecution Service, Taunton

Accessible Somerset

Mandy Seaman opened the meeting by informing those present on the Accessible Somerset Awards, inviting people to take away nomination forms to nominate places to eat, accommodation, services and recreation facilities that have provided good access. A question was raised concerning the information that would be published with the awards. Full details will be available when the awards are published concerning what the organisations have done to provide accessible facilities.

Citizens Advice Bureau

Liz Fothergill gave an overview of the role of Taunton & District Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and how they are funded, receiving a small amount of money from Taunton Deane Borough Council and with links nationally to the Head Office of Citizens Advice. Citizens Advice provide free, impartial, independent and confidential advice and also record social policy factors at local level which is then fed into the head office to lobby government .

Welfare Benefits and Debt advice account for 50% of their work and other main areas include; advice on utility bills, timeshares, neighbourhood issues, practical help in writing letters, assistance with form filling (including Disability Allowance and Attendance Allowance), Employment tribunals and domestic violence.

They work closely with other charities and some use CAB as an advocate, examples include when a parent needed help with travel costs to get to Bristol Children's hospital.

100 Volunteers work from the Taunton Bureau with 15 paid staff, some of which are funded from projects such as Legal Aid and work with the NHS Partnership at Cheddon Road once a week.

Out reach offices operate in Milverton, Priorswood, Wellington and Rydon House 1 day per week.

Taunton CAB opens Mon to Friday from 10 until 4 pm, where people can drop in for a 10 minute assessment to see if an appointment is needed, they are also open on a Saturday morning. They receive approx. 50 calls per day and have 2 people working solely to answer telephone queries. Enquiries are also received by letter, e mail or fax, and a text facility for hearing impaired.

Liz explained about the changes to Incapacity Benefit from October and that it is likely that new claims will be effected by the changes first. The new benefit will be called 'Employment Support Allowance'.

Also for those receiving a state pension, it may be worth looking into Pension Credits, even if you have savings.

A question was raised concerning the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and its effects on employment, have the CAB experienced a large number of enquiries concerning this? Liz explained that this wasn't a regular area for advice but explained about the responsibilities of employers concerning this to consult with employees to see what adjustments can be made.

The subject of wheel clamping was discussed and the variability of charges. It was suggested that individuals should let the CAB know when they experienced this, so that they can note the number of cases to their national office.

A question was raised as to how many disabled people the CAB employ – they have 6 disabled people currently working as volunteers.

Contact Details for Taunton CAB are;

Sussex Lodge
44 Station Road
Taunton, TA1 1NS

Advice: 01823 282235
Appointment: 01823 353100
E mail: advice@tauntoncab.org.uk

Crown Prosecution Service

Dean Lampard gave an overview of the Crown Prosecution Service and the work they do. They are the statutory body responsible for prosecuting criminal cases investigated by the police in England and Wales and are responsible for the following;

- advising the police on cases for possible prosecution;
- reviewing cases submitted by the police;
- determining any charges in all but minor cases;
- preparing cases for court;
- presenting cases at court.

They are headed by the Director of Public Prosecutions and consist of 42 areas corresponding to each police force area. The role of the Service is decide whether there is sufficient evidence and secondly, if it is in the public interest to prosecute a case in the courts.

Dean explained about 'The Code for Crown Prosecutors' which is a public document, issued by the Director of Public Prosecutions that sets out the general principles Crown Prosecutors should follow when they make decisions on cases. The code has two main stages;

- The Evidential test - When deciding whether there is enough evidence to charge, Crown Prosecutors must consider whether evidence can be used in court and is reliable. Crown Prosecutors must be satisfied there is enough evidence to provide a "realistic prospect of conviction" against each defendant.

- The Public Interest Test - Is it in the public interest for the CPS to bring the case to court? A prosecution will usually take place unless the public interest factors against prosecution clearly outweigh those in favour of prosecution.

Disability Hate Crime

The Criminal Justice Act 2003 Section 146 imposed a duty on courts to increase the sentence for any offence aggravated by hostility based on the victims disability (or presumed disability). The Crown Prosecution Service has a booklet entitled 'Policy for Prosecuting Cases of Disability Hate Crime' which explains the full detail of their policy. Copies are available from the cps website – www.cps.gov.uk or by telephoning the communications office on 0207 796 8442. A number of copies were available on the day and further additional copies have been requested to be held at the Compass Offices.

Other Issues

We unfortunately ran out of time to cover other issues at this meeting but it was requested that this should be allowed for at the next meeting in September.

An issue was raised separately by a member outside of the meeting of the need for a crossing at the top of Wilton Street crossing from Vivary Arms to Abbeyfields. This comment will be forwarded to Somerset County Council Highways Department.

Also – Taxi vouchers issued by Taunton Deane Borough Council for disabled people are currently £30 per year. A member noted that they do not last long especially with the increased costs of Taxis.

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 23rd September where we hope to discuss access to Leisure facilities in the area.

Minutes compiled by Mandy Seaman, Somerset Access and Inclusion Network
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