

Taunton Deane Disability Discussion Group

Tues 23rd Sept 2008 – Compass Disability Meetings Room

Those Present

Teresa England – Operations Director, Tone Leisure.

Melissa Day – Health Development Officer, Tone Leisure.

Ian Ayre & Mark Leeman - Forward Planning Unit, Taunton Deane Borough Council.

1.0 Leisure

Teresa England from Tone Leisure started by asking the group to identify themselves and the groups they may represent. Many attend this group as individuals but some identified themselves as being involved in other groups such as;

The local MS Society

Somerset Wheelchair Sports

The Macular Disease Society (also links with Somerset Association for the Blind).

Other groups were mentioned as currently providing good facilities outside of Taunton for disabled people to swim such as Axminster pool (help with changing provided) and the Apollo Club in Yeovil, Bridport Holiday Park where good hoist facilities exist to enable independence.

Hydro pools and the lack of availability of them was also raised – Musgrove Hydro pool is only for people with new injuries as far as some people were aware. Can the hydro pool be hired? For more information on this please contact Sharon Lake at Taunton CVS on 07718 267703. There is currently a possibility for hire of the pool for one hour of an evening on certain days at the cost of £7.50 per hour for people with long term disabilities, please contact Sharon for more information.

Many people present expressed an interest in using swimming facilities but stated they would like to go in a group and would need assistance to get in and out of the pools. Teresa explained that to put any group together like this would need funding for staff.

Teresa explained the differences between the two pools, Station Road pool is less programmed than St James St Pool, which is used by Schools, for lessons and for exclusive hire. There is a new pool vision being worked on for Taunton Deane which it would be good to feed in the views gathered from this meeting.

One person wanted to advise that the Somerset Association for the Blind hire St James Street pool and a Monday between 4 and 5pm for use by visually impaired people at the cost of £3 (transport can be arranged, for more details contact 01823 333818).

Another person explained that the Somerset Disabled Sports Club meets on a Tuesday between 6 and 9pm at Wellsprings Leisure Centre and will be shortly moving to Taunton Vale Sports Club at Gypsy Lane. They give people the opportunity to get involved in many different types of sports such as Hockey.

Contact details for Open Daws were requested during the meeting. Open Daws provide activities for disabled people primarily living in West Somerset. They can be contacted on 01984 653330 – Liz Stewart.

One participant raised an issue concerning Wellington Pool where no wheelchair access is provided. Teresa explained that some things have been added and more amendments are planned such as automatic doors. The question as to why you should still have to pay membership fees when the facilities are closed for alterations was raised with Teresa.

Access to St James Street Pool was also raised, disabled access is only available from one side of the building.

Dry facilities at Wellsprings Leisure Centre was raised and the new equipment available for use. Skilled and qualified staff are available to give advice on adaptations to equipment to assist use. GP referrals are only allowed a limited timeslot from 11.30 until 12.30pm which some find does not give them enough time especially when you need help to sort out equipment etc.

Concessionary charging was raised. Charging is currently in 3 bands; Adults, Senior Citizens/Jnr/Student, Low Income. A review of the criteria for the Low Income layer is currently underway and will be completed by January 2009.

Melissa Day gave an overview of the other services in place such as a Health Walking Scheme which is a Free Activity lead by volunteers which meets around Taunton, accessible routes have been considered by this scheme.

Mark Owen – Community Activity and Lifestyle Officer is working on the Active Somerset Initiative which can support the start-up of a physical activity for a group of people. He can be contacted on 01823 273088 or e mail m.owen@toneleisure.com

Funding for a new swimming pool in Taunton was discussed and at the moment has not been allocated for the next stage of development.

2.0 Housing Growth Consultation

For the next part of the meeting Ian Ayre & Mark Leeman gave a presentation on Accommodating Housing Growth in the area. As a result of the Regional Spatial Strategy which identifies areas for housing and employment growth in the South West, Taunton has been identified as a Strategically Significant City or Town. Figures were shown indicating a need for 18,000 homes in Taunton (please see presentation copy for breakdown) and 3,800 homes beyond Taunton in areas such as Wellington, Bishops Lydeard etc. A Core Strategy planning document is currently being prepared to define the role and function of settlements, areas for development and guiding principles. A public consultation will take place in Feb / March 2009 with a formal six week public consultation. Mark agreed that this group would be included in the consultation and the agreement was that a separate meeting would be need for this.

Questions raised by the group included;

How many houses will be suitable for disabled people? There isn't an exact number, work with house builders etc. needs to take place for decisions on the type of housing, whilst ensuring regulations are met.

No. of car park spaces per dwelling? 0 or 1 for town centre housing was the suggestion. Outside the town centre the number of spaces per dwelling increases.

Other policy issues were discussed to be considered in the core strategy such as access, parking for disabled people, public transport infrastructure.

Mark Leeman provided his contact details at the end of presentation (see attached) and welcomed comments and suggestions.

Other Issues

One member wished to raise an issue concerning a National Express Coach being used on Local First Services between Taunton and Exeter (Exeter 92 route) which is totally inaccessible for wheelchair users. Recently a person had travelled to Exeter but could not return on the last bus of the day because they were a wheelchair user. When will this

coach be scrapped? A letter was sent to Jeremy Browne MP by the member who responded to say that First in conjunction with the Local Authority are investing in more low floor vehicles for use in the Taunton area, a number of new vehicles are on order for delivery in the autumn, further investment should take place in 2009, enabling the virtual elimination of buses with steps at their entrance giving the customers a much improved service. First also said they seeking to improve the level of service provided to meet the demand. However SAIN will ask for an update on this situation and report at the next meeting.

Feedback from attendees

Following the meeting an evaluation form was sent to attendees asking for feedback, comments received included;

I expected a "harder edge" to the audience question and a better sense of inclusion from Tone Leisure who to my mind offered quite patronising and dismissive reposts (not replies) to questions that frequently highlighted differences of provision and quality between their own Centres.

I look forward to attending future meetings and to contributing to successful outcomes for participants.

Had hoped more information for those not able to use Pool or Gym.

Felt the meeting was rushed and that there wasn't enough time. Also felt room was closed in.

Representatives with Housing Consultation should have had more information with them ref housing for disabled people, felt presentation was very general and did not have information specifically for disabled people.