

## Taunton Deane Disability Discussion Group 24<sup>th</sup> April 2007

Group Facilitated by Val Dale - Equalities Co-ordinator, Taunton Deane Borough Council.

### **Representative in attendance;**

Harry Connery – Equalities Co-ordinator, Taunton Deane Borough Council.  
Helen Philips - Policy Support Co-ordinator, Taunton Deane Borough Council.  
Cllr Nigel Stuart-Thorn.

Bridget Brown – A4E Advocacy Service.

In addition to this 6 people attended the discussion group.

### **1.1. Introductions**

The meeting started with introductions from those attending and each participant was asked to give a brief summary of the type of things they wanted to obtain from the meeting. These are summarised below;

Care support

Mental disabilities – problems faced with waste segregation with conditions such as alzheimers.

Housing and Independent Living

Access Issues

Community Charges for Pensioners and effects on policies.

Car Parking

One participant identified themselves as standing in the local council elections next week and is interested in the view from disabled people in the area.

One participant identified themselves as a Director of Taunton Deane Community Transport.

### **1.2 Background**

Mandy Seaman from SAIN then explained that SAIN would be bringing together a discussion group to meet every other month and that the group would be facilitated by Taunton Deane Borough Council three times per year. For the remaining meetings, the group can decide if they would like to invite other representatives along.

Val Dale then explained that the 'Your Council Your Views' went out to all Taunton Deane residents in May of last year, the results of which highlighted the need for the Council to improve engagement with local groups including those with disabilities.

Following on from this they are in the process of establishing other equality forums such as Race/Ethnicity and Gender. It was explained that SAIN would be assisting with transport arrangements in future and that invites and publicity would continue as for this meeting, with SAIN members and local press. It was

explained that some services are provided by Taunton Deane Borough Council and that others are provided by Somerset County Council such as Social Care. Where issues arise that may concern other organisations it may be possible to invite them to future meetings or help by clarifying who the contacts would be.

Val Dale then read out a letter from a SAIN member who could not attend the meeting but wanted their comments noted. These comments were duly noted by the facilitators and Mandy Seaman will ensure a response is sent to the individual concerned.

The facilitators then explained that the main purpose of the meeting is to involve local disabled residents in discussions on topics which are relevant and of interest to them. The purpose is to generate a two way dialogue of discussion and to help build better relationships with local disabled people.

### **1.3. Future Structure.**

The group were then asked what structure they would like to group to have in future. An informal set up with questions and answers was decided, with attendance from Taunton Deane Council representatives to conduit points noted as helpful. It was decided to keep the meeting the same in terms on timings **(10.30am until 12.30pm)**.

SAIN have a database of people that have expressed an interest in attending the group and also receiving minutes if they are unable to attend. This will continue to be maintained by SAIN and minutes produced shortly after the meeting. If people are unable to attend a meeting, comments can also be passed on via SAIN representatives.

### **1.4 Transport**

The subject of transport was discussed and the difficulties some people have faced with community transport. It was advised that it is good to make yourself known to the Community Transport office and ensure that your details are logged with them. This will help to ensure that suitable transport is designated and that an ongoing relationship is established.

One person commented that they had not had a good experience with the Slinky Bus.

### **1.5 Customer Feedback**

Helen Philips from Taunton Deane Borough Council, then gave a summary of the Customer Feedback procedure and explained that any form of comment or complaint received helps to improve policies and procedures for future. The emphasis is on ensuring that they get things right and look at why other areas may not be able to and respond. Each complaint and letter received by the Customer Service department is responded to. A copy of the leaflet detailing the procedure was distributed to the group. Even if the complaint surrounds a subject such as Anti Social Behaviour the Customer Service Team can pass this on to the correct area.

Comments from the group of other experiences that are a good way to get feedback from the public include SAIN's recent membership evaluation where members were asked to give feedback on various subjects. A freephone helpline was suggested for people to call into as well as an answer service for those that may not wish to wait to speak to someone. One participant mentioned they had made a comment concerning the helpline and had noted an improvement since.

A view from a participant was expressed that it is important to be constructive with any criticisms to ensure that effective action can be taken.

From a disability perspective another participant said that you often find that you have to deal with more than one person and that procedures can be bureaucratic which may put people off getting in contact.

An information pack was left with participants giving an A-Z of services plus the Customer Charter providing further information.

### **1.6 Other Issues**

Independent Living was raised as enabling people to live in different areas and experience the way services as delivered in other parts of the country.

Housing allocations and choice based lettings were also discussed concerning bidding for properties. Representatives could be invited to future meetings to discuss this further.

Access to the coroner's court means that disabled people cannot be a juror. This point was noted.

The Citizens Advice Bureau was noted as a helpful point of contact for the group.

Deteriorating conditions sometimes mean that communication can be difficult for some people.

### **1.7 Corporate Equality Scheme**

Harry Connery then gave an overview of the Council's Corporate Equality Scheme document, provided in the information pack, which is shortly being launched by the Policy & Performance Team.

Following on from the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 the Disability Act 2005 places a duty on public bodies to eliminate discrimination and encourage participation from disabled people. The document is available on the Council's website or from the Equality Coordinator, Policy and Performance Department.

There are six objectives in the Scheme which concern disabled people including;

To improve disability access across Taunton Deane

To advance knowledge and understanding of disability issues in Taunton Deane

To promote equality of opportunity in our role as an employer.

Other topics raised from previous groups were mentioned;

Access into shops – acknowledged as a problem where enforcement is needed.  
Access Audit – now an action plan in place reference improvements for free parking for blue badge holders.

Taunton Crematorium – has been audited with an action plan for improvements.  
Deane House - accessible toilets are now in place and adjustments made to counters, plus smoke free areas and loop systems with portable loops available to take on house visits. Training Courses for staff and translation policies are now in place plus transcription services such as Braille, Tape, Large Print. The Borough Council website now has Browse Aloud for visually impaired people and the Website Marketing Manager follows RNIB guidance for design. If people do not have direct access to a computer, the local library is always very useful to help with this. A dyslexic group has also been consulted about suitable print fonts to use.

Councillor Stuart-Thorn noted that he is part of the equalities champion network, which consists of both Councillors and members of staff. He is keen to feedback views to the network which is highlighted in the Corporate Equality Scheme.

### **1.8 Future Meetings/Topics**

**June 26<sup>th</sup>** – SAIN will be facilitating and are hoping to arrange representatives attending from taxis, community transport and slinky bus.

**September 25<sup>th</sup>** – A representative will attend to discuss Disabled Facilities Grants.

Taunton Deane are also interested in bringing their HR Manager to a future meeting to discuss employment plus their Information and Consultation Officer. Mark Leeman is another representative who can update the group on the progress with the town centre Access Audit.

Others subjects were noted of interest to the group;  
Access to Council properties, Housing (Choice based lettings), Mental Health (ref refuge see earlier note) and Licensing (Taxis).

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Minutes compiled by Mandy Seaman

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