

Taunton Deane Disability Discussion Group
25th September 2007

Group Facilitated by Harry Connery - Equalities Co-ordinator, Taunton Deane Borough Council.

Representatives in attendance;

Cllr Alan Wedderkopp – Deputy Leader Council Taunton Deane Borough Council

Cllr Richard Lees – Taunton Deane Borough Council

Karen Hughes - Leisure Development Manager.

Kerry Knapman – Deputy Team Leader, Customer Services.

Alastair Croucher – Senior Home Aid Technical Officer.

In addition to this 19 people attended the meeting.

1.0 Introductions/Minutes and matters arising.

Minutes from the meeting which took place on the 24th April were reviewed with the key issues summarised;

Mental Health Issues – previous points surrounded problems associated with the segregation of waste. This has been raised with the waste department as well as the subject of the disposal of clinical waste. They are currently working on extending the factsheet which is available to cover clinical waste and will keep SAIN informed of the results.

A further discussion concerning waste disposal then took place including assisted collections, frustrations which occur when bins are not put back where they came from and rubbish being left on the road. Kerry Knapman from Customer Services explained that any incidents such as this can be reported to Taunton Deane Borough Council Customer Services and a complaint can be logged for response. It was then agreed that a representative from the waste department should be invited to attend a future meeting for a discussion.

Harry Connery explained that they hope to try and get representatives from Social Care at Somerset County Council to answer questions in future.

SAIN will be organising a meeting to discuss transport on 27th Nov where representatives from County Hall, Community Transport and Licensing at the Council will be present.

A final version of The Taunton Town Access and Mobility Audit is now available at the SAIN offices to view as well as in CD format from the Council. Mark Leeman is happy to come and talk to the group to update people on the progress. This will be arranged for either January (at the next Taunton Deane meeting) or a separate meeting will be arranged. Ed Norton from Taunton Deane Borough Council has also agreed to talk at a future meeting to discuss access to Council owned or managed buildings.

The Taunton Citizens Advice Bureau were invited to attend this meeting but were not present.

2.0 Leisure Development

Karen Hughes then gave a talk concerning the current topics that Leisure Development are involved in;

- A play strategy as recently been completed with an application to the Big Lottery for play rangers in the area to carry out activities with children with an inclusion focus, comments are welcome concerning this subject.
- They are also looking at access and inclusion to parks generally, including pathways, gates and facilities. A steering group is in place to look at a multi sensory garden in vivary park. If anyone would like to be involved with this please contact Karen Hughes at the Council.
- Allotments – a growing day will take place in Victoria Park on 7th October in conjunction with their growing programme to encourage the use of allotments. A piece of uncultivated land at Hamilton Court playing fields is being investigated for the use of allotments. The council are keen to speak to disabled people who have allotments to gather their views about access. Some comments were raised at the meeting particularly the fact that raised beds are extremely helpful.

- A gardener service (neighbourhood care) for disabled people was discussed. Cllr Wedderkopp commented that this service is currently oversubscribed but that contact details would be made available for those interested.

3.0 Customer Services

Kerry Knapman gave an overview of Customer Services at the Council. All letters should receive an acknowledgement and then a reply within 7 working days. Customer Services are available to speak to over the phone about any queries concerning Council services and will do their best to avoid passing people on to others rather than dealing with the query.

A discussion took place concerning problems experienced by individuals in local shops and taxis. A suggestion was made to approach the shops concerned, as most have customer service desks.

An A-Z of Council services was distributed to the group as well as contact details for Customer Services.

4.0 Home Aid Partnership and Disabled Facilities Grants

Alastair Croucher gave an overview of the Home Aid Partnership scheme, which is a partnership with South Somerset and Taunton Deane to serve the over 60s, people living with a disability or others considered to be vulnerable. The aim of the scheme is to enable residents to remain living independently and securely in their own homes. Examples of work carried out by the Home Aid Partnership include;

General Housing Advice, Home Maintenance help to access loans and grants for leaking roofs etc. Aids and Adaptations, by helping to provide a range of adaptations. Handyman Services (excluding gardening and decorating) for smaller jobs.

Disabled Facilities Grants are specifically designed to works to provide facilities and to carry out adaptations to dwellings or to the common parts of buildings containing flats, for the benefit of disabled people. The system

is means tested, with a provisional financial assessment being made, the Council will then calculate any contribution to be made to you. The system is funded 60% by government and 40% by Taunton Deane Borough Council. Examples of works aimed at facilitating access for the disabled person in the home, would be eligible such as; WCs, bathroom and kitchen facilities and sleeping accommodation.

For more information on this please contact Somerset Direct on **0845 345 9133**. Somerset Direct will help determine the correct agency to deal with the query as an occupational therapist may be required to make an assessment.

One participant at the meeting shared the fact that for ex service people the British Legion can often help to make up deficits from Disabled Facilities Grants. SSAFA (Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen & Families Association) also have a housing advisory service to offer help.

Other organisations that participants had used included Warm Front which is a government funded initiative to provide grants for insulation and heating improvements up to the value of £2700. Contact **0800 316 2805** for more information.

Free and independent energy advice can also be obtained by contacting your local Energy Efficiency Advice Centre on - **0800 512012**.

5.0 Other Points

Following the meeting two further points were raised by a participant;

- Many organisations give concessions to carers when they visit places of interest ie Crealy for children. There is also the Cinema card, which allows carers to go free when the person they care for is in receipt of Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance. There does not seem to be any concession given to carers by Taunton Deane at their leisure facilities. Could carers get a free or reduced price 'buzz card' which would enable them to keep healthy and look after their own well being?

- A letter was recently written to a bereaved carer to pay back Council Tax due to the fact that it was calculated a year in advance, which was considered insensitive at the time. A letter of apology has since been instigated but the carers representatives wanted to raise the fact that as the letters are standardised it can be confusing and upsetting following a bereavement.

6.0 Summary

Harry Connery closed the meeting by thanking those that had attended and informing the group that the next meeting to be facilitated by Taunton Deane Borough Council will take place on **Tues 22nd Jan 2008**.

The next meeting of the group to discuss transport will take place on **Tues 27th November 2007** at the SAIN offices.

Minutes compiled by Mandy Seaman
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