

Summary Notes from Taunton Deane Disability Discussion Group 26th June 2007

Housing – Choice Based Lettings

Tracy Vernon – Strategic Housing Officer from Taunton Deane Borough Council joined the group for the first part of the meeting to give an update on the Choice Based Lettings System. A consultation is currently taking place with tenants and people registered on the housing waiting list concerning the new system which is proposed to come into effect during the later part of 2008. This system will enable people to state a preference for where they would like to live and to apply for home that becomes vacant. The Council currently have approx. 6500 properties with 3500 on the waiting list.

It is currently proposed that all districts will advertise all the available empty properties coming up on to the website and other venues.

The group discussed the need to ensure equal access for more vulnerable people that cannot necessarily access the internet or even the local paper, and may need communication assistance to help them bid for properties. The group suggested that one way to obtain this information is to make Communication Needs part of the Tenancy Information that is kept on an individual.

There is also a way of automatic bidding where a housing officer will advise those interested which properties have come up, the system will give the option to bid for properties when they occur.

Tracy discussed the fact that the Council will be looking at the whole process of re-registering people as part of the new system and would be happy to provide SAIN with a copy of the form for comment.

More information on the consultation can be obtained by contacting Housing Strategic Services on 01823 356581.

A4E

Bridget Brown from A4E then gave an overview of the service A4E offer for people with physical disabilities, they can be summarised as follows;

Disability Advocacy Service – for people who live in Somerset who are 18-65 years old and have physical disabilities or sensory loss. An Advocate can help you with;

- Representation when your health and social care needs are assessed, including healthcare.
- Employment issues
- Support with benefit appeals and tribunals
- Housing Issues
- Getting the services you need such as leisure and education.
- Making complaints against public bodies such as the NHS or the County Council.

Direct Payment Advice and Support Service – Direct payments are money paid to people with assessed care needs so that they can choose, arrange and pay for their own care services. The Direct Payment Advisory Scheme in Somerset is provided for the County Council by the A4E organisation. A4E can support people with items such as setting up a bank account, payroll, considering care options, amongst others.

Short Break Service - This service supports people who want to arrange and manage their own short breaks. A4E will find out what is available and give each person information and advice about breaks that might be right for them.

Independent Living Fund – The funds primary aim is to help people with severe disabilities to live independently in their own homes rather than a care setting and have greater opportunities for choice and control in their individual care arrangements.

More Information on any of the above can be obtained by contacting **A4e on 01823 339494.**

Other Issues

The final part of the meeting was spent giving participants the opportunity to raise other general points and provide input on who they would like to invite to future meetings. The issues raised are summarised below;

- Problems with pavements and speed in Wellington
- Dropped kerbs in Taunton Town Centre and Wellington area.
- Refuse collection - problems associated with segregation for those with mental health issues.
- Suggestion to invite someone from Environmental Health to a future meeting.
- Day Services have recently moved to the Library Meetings Room in Taunton and are experiencing access problems to the Town Centre for wheelchair users where uneven pavements hit low footplates on some chairs. Also for those with Sensory Loss, there are problems associated with the uneven pavements.
- It was noted that Hatchers have recently installed a new lift which is wider and more accessible.
- County Stores is difficult for access, as well as the back doors of Boots – it would be helpful if these were automatic.
- Drivers are now not allowed to provide assistance for people with trolleys to get onto buses.

The next meeting will take place on **Tuesday 25th September** and will be facilitated by Equalities Officers from Taunton Deane Borough Council. It was previously agreed that Disabled Facilities Grants would be discussed then, but if possible the group would like to include some of the other topics raised.

We are also aiming to have a session dedicated to transport at a future meeting which will include Community Transport, Slinky Bus and Taxi Licensing. Lucy Ball the Town Centre Manager has also been approached to join a future meeting.