

**Taunton Deane Disability Discussion Group
Tues 29th Sept 2009 - Compass Disability Meetings Room**

Those Present

Mark Leeman – Strategy Lead – Taunton Deane Borough Council

Lisa Redston – Strategy Officer – Taunton Deane Borough Council

Corporate Strategy

Mark provided a presentation to the group (copy enclosed) on the Council's corporate strategy explaining that it is a three year business plan which sets the Council's priorities. The budget situation, performance data, community priorities are used to inform this. The current corporate priorities are three areas;

Affordable Housing

Climate Change

Tackling Deprivation

Affordable Housing

As average property prices are mostly 8 x a persons income there is an identified need for affordable housing, which has been identified as 1875 pa in the Taunton Deane, Sedgemoor and West Somerset area. All housing need has been identified as 3000 pa. There is a need for affordable family housing and small housing in rural areas. The target is for 40% of all new housing to be 'affordable'. Issues to be considered included the fact that 1/3 of households in the South West have a limiting or long-term illness which is set to increase due to the ageing population. Accessible housing (adapted bathrooms, stair lifts etc) needs to be considered.

A separate presentation was given on climate change and the need to conserve energy usage.

Tackling Deprivation

There are 7 indicators of deprivation;

Income, Employment, Health, Education, Barriers to housing & services, Crime and finally Living Environment. 8% of the population live in area of deprivation, this has increased from 5.6% in 2004. Areas of deprivation in Taunton were then identified such as Halcon North and Lyngford West. There are also rural issues surrounding Fuel Poverty and Access to services plus income/employment in areas such as Wellington.

Mark explained that councillors will be considering this over the next 2-3 months before agreeing the strategy ahead. A public consultation is planned for early 2010 to enable people to feedback to the council.

Questions / General Issues

A question was asked about new developments in areas such as Wellington where it does not appear that infrastructures are put in place such as schools to be able to cope with the increase in dwellings. Where does the need come from?

Affordable Housing – is it going to be suitable for access for disabled people. Taunton Deane need to qualify the need and the types of adaptations required.

Blackbrook Road – problems with highways and Ilminster Road.

Project Taunton (a separate Arms Length Management Organisation) are working with the council and local businesses concerning future developments.

Transport – issues surrounding taxi vouchers and the fact that they do not last long. This was raised with John Lewis at Taunton Deane who He agreed to raise this with local councillors however in view of the budgetary cuts that the council are faced with considered it unlikely that they would be changed in the near future.

Can First Buses be contacted concerning accessible buses? – you do not know which bus will come along each time, will it be accessible or not?

Key Issues

Lisa Redston then coordinated the second part of the meeting asking some key questions that the council would like your feedback on. A copy of all the questions are enclosed. However some of the some points discussed were as follows;

Taunton Library – query of toilets and the lack of an accessible toilet means you have to go outside to the one in the car park? A question was asked if there is a legal requirement for the provision of public toilets? Somerset County Council are looking to bring in new toilets with additional facilities.

Lifts near shop mobility – always broken down. The removal of seat in the old market was not a good idea for those who need places to stop and rest. As this is under private ownership this was not a council decision.

The reception area in Deane House - obstacles have been removed and improvements made to the layout but the lighting is still poor particularly for people with visual impairments.

Literature – for people with visual impairment a minimum of arial font 14 was requested and left justified, large margin. Alternative Languages – how do the

council collate information on the most common languages in use? This is collated through schools data from County.

Disability Living Allowance – confirmation of benefits people are receipt of ref housing and the need for third party permission causes delays in information being confirmed.

Disabled parking bays – lack of provision outside residential properties and difficulties in applying for extra space and having extra space approved. Lack of disabled parking in the towns, especially Wellington high street, because of the restriction of doubled double yellow lines. No alternatives are offered.

Parking in the main high street in Wellington is an issue.

Are new houses going to have spaces for cars to park?

The best methods for consulting with people were discussed. It was felt that questionnaires are sometimes limiting and that a combination of meetings and questionnaires would be useful for future consultation.

The group were encouraged to feedback views to Lisa Redston and Lisa agreed to consider views for future.

Contact Details

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Key Questions from Taunton Deane Borough Council 29th Sept.

1. We have carried out an accessibility audit on our public buildings.
 - How do you find the accessibility to our public buildings?
Deane House, Library, Municipal Buildings, etc.
2. We have a corporate style guide which asks that we use plain English and offer of alternative formats on all our documents.
 - How do you find the communications you receive? Have you noticed the Access statement?
3. We have increased our number of parking spaces in response to customer needs.
 - We believe we have enough provision – Do you agree?
4. We need to understand the needs of our communities more and ensure that we are responding to those needs, we are working across all services to do this. To help us...
 - How would you prefer to be consulted?
5. Extensive testing taking place to ensure that the new website will be fully accessible.
 - Would you be interested in testing the new site?
6. We want to ensure that every member of our community feels able to contribute to the decisions the council makes.
 - Do you feel you can be involved in making decisions?
 - Do you feel you could get involved by becoming a councillor?