

**Taunton Deane Disability Discussion Group
Tues 31st March 2009 - Compass Disability Meetings Room**

Those Present

Jackie Marsh – Somerset Direct

Kim Prowse – Age Concern

Somerset Direct

Jackie Marsh provided a presentation on the services provided through Somerset Direct and answered questions throughout.

Somerset Direct is an information and advice service for older people, carers, relatives and other adults with care needs.

You can phone them from 8am – 6pm Mon – Fri and 9am – 4pm Sat. Somerset Direct receive approx. 5,000 calls per month. The phone number is **0845 345 9133** and they deal with items such as;

- Blue Badge applications and renewals. Applications are dealt with by them on behalf of the Department of Transport. A Department of Transport leaflet is available through Somerset Direct entitled ‘Can I get a blue badge’ which provides useful information on blue badges. The application relates to how far you can walk. If you are in receipt of the higher rate of Disability Living Allowance or Registered Blind you automatically qualify for a blue badge. Badges last for 3 years, a reminder is sent from Somerset Direct’s Bridgwater office one month before they are due to expire. Reminders are not distributed for temporary badges.
- Occupational Therapy – referrals are taken for Social Services for Occupational Therapists to visit to review equipment needs.
- You can phone them for replacement rubbers on the end of walking sticks. These are sent Free of Charge.
- If you are hard of hearing they can arrange for a Sensory Loss worker to visit to review equipment needs.
- Meal services – they can arrange for Wiltshire Farm Foods to provide complete meals. These are delivered to your home every fortnight; prices are around £3.05 for a meal and pudding. Another organisation they can put you in touch with is Oakhouse Foods who also deliver groceries as well as food. A microwave or freezer is available for hire from Wiltshire Farm Foods.
- Domestic help is not provided by Adult Social Care, but Somerset Direct can send information to you on cleaning services in the area.

- Supporting People Service – This is not as widely known, but is a service which helps you to stay safe at home and will help you to go out if you require support. Direct Payments are one way to help you do this, which is when money is paid to people with assessed care needs so that they can choose, arrange and pay for their own care services. Money is paid into a separate bank account, the money can be used to buy the help their assessment has shown they need. The Direct Payment Advisory Scheme in Somerset is provided for the County Council by A4E. Referrals are sent to them from Social Services.
- You can also speak to Somerset Direct about Carers Services, such as respite services, sitting services. The maximum charge for a sitting service is £5.10 per hour, Somerset County Council pay the rest and it is not means tested.
- Pensions and benefit advice – The Finance Team will come out and assess if you are in receipt of the correct benefits and can be arranged with Somerset Direct. They are part of the Department of Work and Pensions and are a service for people over 60 or if you are under 60 and are in a receipt of a care package. Citizens Advice will also help you to complete forms. Age Concern are another organisation that can give advice on benefits.
- Falls Service – to help you stay on your feet. Somerset Direct can take a referral from the Primary Care Trust and will contact you.

Other services accessed through Somerset Direct include;

- Keep warm and well – assistance with cavity wall installation and loft insulations. Some are available free of charge for people over 70.
- Somerset Home Safety Action Partnership – Handyman scheme.
- Adaptations to the home such as flat floor showers.
- Bobby van service – Offer free of charge security checks for disabled people, fire safety checks and free smoke alarms.
- Gardening Scheme – Taunton Deane Neighbourhood Care. Rates are approx. £7 per hour.
- The Gateway service is available via computer (www.somersetgateway.somerset.gov.uk) which provides information on clubs and activities in the area, such as Active Living Centres. If you do not have access to a computer, you can phone Somerset Direct and they will look up the information for you.
- The Active Living Centre Coordinator for the area is Yvonne Spraggs. Contact details for Yvonne are 01278 437225. They provide a range of activities for people over 55 years of age.
- Community Transport – The Slinky bus is free if you have a travel pass and will transport you to in the areas they operate, they can be pre-

booked to collect you at a certain time and operates until 11pm. Community Transport is another service which will help you to the door. Members of the group shared their experiences of Community Transport and that some had been told they wouldn't be collected after 3pm.

Age Concern

Kim Prowse from Age Concern provided an overview of their services.

To receive the services provided by Age Concern Somerset, you have to be over 60 and live in Somerset. Age Concern are a registered charity and receive donations from Social Services, NHS and other sources. In Taunton their office is located in the Market House (details at the end of the report).

Information

If they can't help you, they will put you in touch with an organisation that can. They have lots of contacts details in their office for all types of people such as Mobile Hairdressers, Opticians, Groups such as Somerset Association for the Blind, Cleaners and Tradesmen.

Products

They have a number of trading products which are for anyone aged 50 or over, such as travel insurance, car insurance, home insurance, and aid-call personal alarms.

Life Book

Age Concern offer a free Life Book which enables you to record all useful information such as who provides your car insurance, to where you put your TV licence. It can also be invaluable to other members of your family if they need to locate important information about you in an emergency.

Advocacy

They have 500 volunteers throughout the area and also operate an Advocacy service to assist you with any problems you may have, examples include;

- Welfare benefits – help to complete forms and check what you are entitled to.
- Help to solve a problem - this might mean helping to write a letter of complaint or visiting a solicitor or a doctor. An advocate can help you prepare and even go along to give moral support.

Befriending Service

The countywide Befriending service provides a valuable social link for older people who are lonely or isolated, particularly in rural areas.

Volunteers visit people, perhaps for an hour each week, in their own home to chat, reminisce maybe and enjoy a cup of tea in a relaxed environment.

Falls Prevention

A Toe Nail cutting service is offered by Age Concern. Volunteers can visit the home to provide this service at a charge of approx. £7 per visit to cover the cost of clippers etc. However, they cannot provide this service for people with diabetes or if you are on certain medication. For ex-forces people or their dependants this service is free.

The safe and secure service come and fit grab rails, carry out safety checks, or if your carpets need tacking down, will do this for you. They will also change light bulbs free of charge. Key Safes can also be supplied through this service for carers to access keys to a property.

A list of fact sheets that are available from Age Concern is enclosed with the notes from the meeting. All factsheets can be obtained from www.ageconcernsomerset.org.uk or by telephoning 0800 00 99 66 (free call), 8 am - 7 pm.

Contacts for both organisations are as follows;

Age Concern Somerset
The Market House,
Fore Street,
Taunton
TA1 1JD

Tel: 0845 643 4621

Somerset Direct
PO Box 618
Taunton
TA1 3WF

E mail: somersetdirect@somerset.gov.uk

Tel: 0845 345 9133

Other Issues

- Members of the group asked about SOS bracelets for storing medical information. These can be purchased in local jewellers or a range of providers can be found on the internet

- A member who could not attend asked to raise the issue of access to shops in St James St – still impossible owing to steps. This information will be forwarded to Taunton Deane Borough Council.