

Time commenced : 6.30 pm
Time finished : 8.20 pm

DISABLED PEOPLE'S DIVERSITY FORUM
(formerly Disabled People's Advisory Committee)
15 MARCH 2007

Present: Councillor Turner (in the Chair)
Councillors Chera, Harbon, Rawson, Troup and Webb

Representing groups

Judi Bateman – DCIL
Andy Findlay – Access Group
Pat Fletcher – DCIL
Trevor Ford – D H Forum
Marta Hancock – Disability Direct
Alison Hicking – Derby Deaf Forum
Nancy Pountain – Derby Access Group
George Sanders – CamTAD
Edith Storer - EMASH
Janet Warner – Derby Shopmobility

City Council Advisors

Andrew Auld – Head of Communications and Consultation
Jane Coates – Electoral Services Officer
Pam Thompson – Consultation Support Officer
Katherine Taylor – Constitutional Services Officer
Sarah Turner - Electoral Services Officer
Ann Webster – Equality Standard Project Manager
Sharon Hancock – Derby Homes, Disability Equality Scheme

Also Present

BSL Interpreters

45/06 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from, Amarjit Raju – Disability Direct, Martin Austen – Freedom Forum and Mick Watts - Access Officer.

46/06 Late Items Introduced by the Chair

The Chair introduced the following late items for consideration by the Forum:

The Forum was advised that there would be a meeting on Community Cohesion and Members of the Forum were invited to attend. More information could be obtained by contacting Tony Hurrell from Derby City Partnership.

Sharon Hancock of Derby Homes invited members of the Forum to attend Derby Homes Disability Equality Scheme meeting that was being held on Wednesday 21 March from 9.30am in the Centurion Walk Common Room. She asked members who would like to attend to contact her with their dietary and transport requirements.

47/06 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

48/06 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 2006 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to the following amendment to minute number 38/06:

Judy Bateman is replaced with Judi Bateman.

49/06 Updates on Minutes of previous meeting

The Forum was advised that the purpose of this item was to update members on actions from the previous meeting's minutes. The Chair said that he would welcome any member request to include items on future agendas.

Councillor Webb requested an update on minute number 44/06 regarding provision for blind people following the closure of Lancaster Sports Centre. Andrew Auld, Head of Communications and Consultation said that he did not have the information with him, but would provide it to Councillor Webb following the meeting.

To note the item.

50/06 DPAC Project Group Minutes – 11 December 2006 and 12 February 2007

The Forum considered the minutes of the DPAC Project Group held on 11 December 2006 and 12 February 2007.

Ann Webster – Equality Standard Project Manager, updated the Forum with regard to the disabled parking bays on East Street. These would be located on Osnabruck Square until the Morledge redesign was completed at which time they would be permanently located on the Morledge. She said that it was good that the concerns raised by the Forum over the street furniture proposals for this area had been taken into consideration during the design.

Resolved to note the minutes.

51/06 Postal Voting and the Electoral Process

Sarah Turner and Jane Coates, Senior Electoral Services Officers, provided the Forum with an oral report on the new Electoral Administration Act that came into effect on 1 January 2007. The main changes as a result of the act were highlighted and included the following:

1. It is now possible to register to vote in the May 2007 elections up to the 18 April.
2. The introduction of a framework for reviewing polling stations on a regular basis
3. Poll cards would be sent to all electors, including those with a postal vote

4. The requirement to provide a witness on the Declaration of Identity has been removed
5. Additional requirements to combat fraud had been introduced, specifically the need to provide a signature and date of birth for voting by post and proxy.

The Forum was informed that the Act recognised that not everyone could provide a signature and that in certain cases it is possible to apply for a waiver.

Councillor Webb asked what criteria had to be fulfilled in order for a waiver to be granted.

Sarah responded that a person could request a waiver if they were unable to provide a consistent signature. The waiver needed to state whether the person was unable to sign because they were unable to read and write or because of a disability. They would then have to get someone to confirm this by signing the waiver. The waiver would be granted if the Electoral Services team were satisfied with the request.

Concern was expressed by members of the Forum whose signatures were inconsistent. Jane responded that if a returned postal vote was rejected by the scanner that an authorised officer would adjudicate. She also reiterated that in order to avoid the risk of a vote being wasted it was possible to apply for a waiver if an elector was not able to provide a consistent signature.

Councillor Rawson asked if voters whose signatures had been rejected would be notified. Jane replied that neither the law nor time would permit this. Sarah added that as in previous years candidates and their agents would be permitted to witness the postal vote opening process, which would take place from 23 April. The adjudication process could also be witnessed.

A member of the forum sought reassurance that she would not receive two votes as she had returned two personal identifier capture forms.

Jane explained that the reason two forms had been received was because there had been a delay in processing the returned forms before a reminder had been sent out. She assured the member that she would not receive two votes as a result.

Andrew Findlay from Derby Access Group asked whether a person who had not returned either personal identifier form would still be able to vote at a polling station. Jane responded that they would be able to vote at their polling station, as they would not longer be registered to receive a postal vote. She also said that poll cards would be sent out in time for people who wished to receive a postal vote to apply for one before 18 April.

Councillor Webb asked whether someone with a postal vote could also vote at a polling station. Sarah responded that postal votes could be handed into the elector's polling station up until the close of poll, but that unless a postal ballot was reported lost or spoilt then that person could not also vote at their polling station.

Jane informed the Forum that Mick Watts, Access Officer would be helping the Electoral Services team to compile a checklist for polling stations and that comments would be sought from the Forum once this had been drafted.

Jane reported that the team had experienced difficulty in securing polling station venues at some schools in the City as they considered it would interfere with the curriculum. She added that they had the power to insist a school be used as a polling station if there was no other suitable venue in the district.

Councillor Webb commented that schools have a few days per year in addition to the holidays when they were not teaching and considered that one of these could be scheduled for Election Day which was usually always the first Thursday in May. Schools were particularly useful venues as they generally complied with the Disability Discrimination Act with regard to accessibility to the premises.

Judi Bateman from DCIL asked about the provision of suitable booths at polling stations. Jane told the Forum that new aluminium booths had been purchased, which provided four compartments for voters to use, one of which was lower and wider to permit a wheelchair user easier access to it.

Sarah advised the Forum that a more detailed written report would be provided to a future meeting.

Resolved to thank Jane and Sarah for attending and providing the update.

52/06 International Day of Disabled People: Debrief

The Forum noted that the International Day of Disabled People event that was held on 1 December 2006 had been a great success and expressed its thanks to all those who had contributed to its organisation.

Councillor Rawson thanked Ann Webster and the rest of the working group for organising the event.

One or two members of the Forum commented that additional help with moving tables and other furniture would have been useful and to take this into consideration when planning the next event.

Resolved to include an item regarding the 2007 event on the next agenda

53/06 Equality Standard Progress Report

The Forum received a report of the Director of Corporate and Adult Social Services, setting out information about the Council's progress against the Equality Standard for Local Government. It was noted that work is still outstanding if the Council is to achieve Level 3 of the five levels and the report included its strengths and areas for improvement.

The auditors will visit during September 2007 to interview employees and representatives from external challenge groups.

Ann Webster, Equality Standard Project Manager informed the Forum that Equality Impact Assessments had taken place on the proposals for Cathedral Green. She said that a Highways and Water feature impact assessment still had to be

competed and invited members of the Forum to contact her if they wanted to take part in future assessments.

Concern was raised by members of the Forum that Cityscape had not included the Forum in its work at the earliest opportunity.

Resolved to:

- 1. agree that Marta Hancock, Judi Bateman, Nancy Pountain, Pat Fletcher, Amanda Gibson, John, Angela Neill – Gender Diversity Forum representative - and Janet Warner to attend a reference/challenge Group with the auditors for Level 3 assessment of the Equality Standard.**
- 2. ask members of the forum to contact Ann Webster if they have any comments on completed equality impact assessments.**
- 3. ask the Chair to write to Cityscape expressing the concerns of the Forum.**

54/06 Equality Forums – Progress Report

The Forum received a report of the Director of Corporate and Adult Social Services updating the members of the transition from Advisory Committees to Diversity Forums. Pam Thompson advised the Forum of plans to have an official launch of the Forums during the Derby City Partnership week in June 2007. The report also requested that members make suggestions on items to be included in the work programme.

Resolved to:

- 1. include the following key items, which were raised at the meeting, on the 2007/08 work programme:**
 - Receive a detailed report on the progress the Council is making with its Equality Impact Assessments and include this as a standing item on future forum agendas**
 - Request a report on what stage Equality Impact assessments are considered in the planning application process**
 - To ask Cityscape to provide the Forum with information about future schemes requiring input from them**
 - To write to Westfield asking them to respond to the minutes of the Project Group meeting**
 - To receive a progress report on the self-assessment scheme process**
- 2. ask the Chair to write to each of the organisations represented on the former Advisory Committees to inform them formally of their closure and to invite nominations for representation on the Diversity Forums in order to formally open them.**

55/06 Work Programme

The Forum received an update of the work programme for 2006/07.

Resolved to note the update

56/06 Nominations to attend the next Chair's Briefing

Andrew Auld, Head of Communications and Consultation explained the purpose of the Chair's briefing.

Agreed that Marta Hancock, Andrew Findlay and Nancy Pountain would attend the next briefing.

57/06 Issues for Consideration at Future Meetings

There were no further issues raised.

58/06 Forward Plan

A copy of the Council Cabinet Forward Plan for March 2007 was circulated to members for information.

MINUTES END