

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Disability Advisory Group
Tuesday 11 December 2012 at 10.00am in The Cedar Foundation**

Present: Mrs Maria Bannon (Chair)
Mr Peter Wilson (The Cedar Foundation)
Ms Orla McCann (Disability Action)
Ms Jenny Ruddy (Mencap)
Mr Dermot Ferris (REAL Network)
Ms Joanne Sansome (REAL Network)

Apologies: Ms Arlene Cassidy (Autism NI)
Ms Paula Hanratty (Autism NI)
Ms Karen McGrath (Disability Action)
Ms Patricia Bray (Disability Action)
Mr Pascal McKeown (Mencap)
Ms Shirelle Stewart (National Autistic Society)

In Attendance: Ms Christine Watts
Mrs Angela McParland

Meeting began at 10.10am.

1. Introduction

Mrs Bannon welcomed and thanked members for their attendance at the meeting. Each member introduced themselves to the group.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2012 were agreed.

3. Matters Arising

3.1 Access to Parliament Buildings – update

Ms Watts provided the group with an update on the work that has been carried out on improving access to Parliament Buildings and advised that the main structural work is now complete. Ms Watts explained work on electronic access controls for the doors will begin in January 2013. Ms Watts also informed the group it is the intention of the Assembly to have an official opening of the ramps to which organisations including those of the members will be invited. The group discussed the importance of the ramps and the publicity surrounding the launch.

Ms Sansome advised the group that at a recent visit she perceived the lift in the Assembly shop was quite inaccessible. Ms Watts informed the group that this had

been brought to her attention and the appliance causing the obstruction was removed immediately. Ms Watts told members she has ensured the relevant staff are now aware of this issue and she will continue to carry out checks on the area to ensure this does not happen again.

3.2 **Evacuation Procedures Update (PEEPS and GEEPS) from Building Services – update**

Ms Watts informed the group of plans to make all Assembly staff aware of evacuation procedures. Ms Watts said Human Resources have agreed to include information on evacuation procedures in the staff Return to Work Interviews and to also make staff aware of the access to the upper car park in certain circumstances. Ms Watts further informed members that Front of House staff have received training to help visitors complete a simple questionnaire that will provide information needed in the event of an emergency evacuation. This information will be used to ensure the necessary amount of skilled staff are in place to cope with getting large numbers of people out of building in an emergency. Ms Sansome enquired as to the Assembly being equipped to deal with large numbers in the event of an evacuation. Ms Watts explained the Assembly has processes in place and the issue is being aware of numbers within the building at any given time.

Ms Ruddy commented that it is currently not clear who's role it is within all party groups to liaise with external groups. Ms Watts stated it is the responsibility of the all party group to advise Assembly staff of the numbers of people visiting Parliament Buildings with them needing assistance.

Mr Ferris asked if there were any policies based around sensory disorders. Ms Watts updated the group on the Assembly achieving an autism award from the National Autistic Society with Parliament Buildings being the first building in the UK or Ireland to achieve this. Ms Watts also explained the Assembly is currently looking at the wording on the Upper Access Request form in regards to people with sensory issue needs and the Assembly website offers information for people with sensory issues. Ms Bannon drew member's attention to the hand out which gives a snapshot of the autism page on the NI Assembly website. Ms Bannon updated members on the quiet room. Ms Sansome enquired whether the room was for use for people with autism only. Ms Watts explained that it can be used for variety of reasons such as when people need to avoid the effects of work being carried out within the building such as painting or deep cleans.

Ms Bannon described the Autism Champions list which has been set up for people to contact designated NI Assembly staff directly. Ms Bannon explained that the award is appraised annually and therefore it is a huge ongoing task to ensure standards are kept up. Ms Bannon informed the group that the Assembly has been liaising with a lot of organisations in actions such as the autism video and a wide range of mystery shoppers with feedback gathered throughout each process.

ACTION: Ms Bannon and Ms Watts to liaise with all party groups to put processes in place to ensure the all party groups communicate to the relevant Assembly staff the numbers of people in the building needing assistance in the event of an emergency evacuation.

3.3 Tours – update

Ms Watts updated members in relation to tours within the Assembly. Ms Watts described the braille book that the Assembly recently created which is now available for members of the public to use in a self guided tour or in a group tour. Ms Bannon informed the group the book is of excellent quality and was two years in development including a series of quality checks.

Ms Bannon spoke on the Speakers Art Advisory Group which has focused on braille, audio, sensory and in 2013 will be looking at lists of events to tie in to what is happening around NI / UK.

3.4 Statutory Duties – update

Ms Bannon provided the group with an update in relation to the Northern Ireland Assembly's Statutory Duties. Ms Bannon spoke of the four year Disability Action plan which had been sent out for consultation. Ms Bannon updated members on the feedback received and informed members the revised plan is now on the NI Assembly website. Ms Bannon informed members that the plan can be added to at any time from suggestions by members.

3.5 Internal Disability Advisory Group – update

Ms Bannon spoke on the Internal Disability Advisory Group and explained it is made up of a range of staff from all Directorates and levels. Ms Bannon explained the criteria needed to be a member on the group and provided the group with an update in relation to the Northern Ireland Assembly's Statutory Duties. Ms Bannon informed the group that terms of reference had been agreed by the group and one to one interviews were recently carried out with members of the Internal Disability Group to help develop a forward work plan for the group, it's next meeting to be January 2013. Ms Sansome asked whether the two groups will get together. Ms Bannon agreed it is a good idea to meet and that this group could bring a lot of knowledge to the internal group. Mr Wilson asked for more information on the group. Ms Bannon informed members the group currently has 10 members and meets quarterly.

ACTION: Ms Bannon to add meeting with Internal Disability Group to agenda for next meeting.

3.6 Youth Assembly - update

Ms Bannon passed on to the group Ms Mallon's apologies for not being able to attend and updated the group on the Youth Assembly. Maria explained the background behind the Youth Assembly and directed members to the hand out provided which detailed an answer to an oral question in the NI Assembly on the Youth Assembly. Ms Bannon informed members that careful consideration is being

given to the next steps for recruitment to the Youth Assembly in order to ensure as best as possible that the panel is diverse and that the criteria will not disadvantage anyone in line with Public Life position. Ms Bannon stated that people with disabilities will be a core component to the success of this project. Ms Bannon informed members it is a large and complex undertaking, especially in the current climate of austerity cuts, but that the project has the commitment from the NI Assembly Commission and all of the parties.

ACTION: Ms Bannon will come back to the group when at the point of recruiting.

4. Autism Initiative

Ms Watts had already covered in earlier discussion.

5. Assembly Extra Video

Ms Bannon spoke on the website and directed members to the hand out which gave a snapshot of the video which is available on the NI Assembly website.

6. Responses to Disability Action Plan

Ms Bannon had already covered in earlier discussion.

7. Evaluating Effectiveness of Group

Ms Bannon asked the group for their opinions on the effectiveness of the group. Ms Sansome said she thought the group was very effective but suggested it meet more regularly or that there be more contact between members in between meetings. Mr Wilson stated issues raised by the group such as the front ramps at Parliament Buildings originated from discussions within the group and the group agreed many such projects have originated from the group discussions though they are not involved heavily in the later management of such projects. Ms McCann suggested the group look at how effective members are in involving their own organisations by bringing information from meetings back to their respective organisations. Mr Ferris suggested the internal group could visit their organisations and shadow and bring Ms Bannon up to date on issues. Ms Bannon agreed and suggested they could then report through her any knowledge learned to this group.

ACTIONS: Ms Bannon to bring suggestion to Internal group to shadow at members organisations. Put on next agenda.

8. Any Other Business

Ms Bannon asked members if they had any other issues they wished to discuss. Ms McCann requested members return to the discussion on the launch of the new ramps and suggested there be a holistic approach to the publicity surrounding the launch which highlights all the achievements recently achieved by the NI Assembly i.e. autism award, braille maps, changing facilities, the work of this group. Ms Bannon informed the group of links to groups' websites on web. Ms McCann suggested looking at other means available, such as features in local publications, to inform the

public rather than relying on people to consulting the website only. i.e. Disability NI. Ms Bannon agreed should look at such publications. Mr Ferris suggested more work with tourist board. Ms Watts informed the group about discussions happening around brown signage. Ms Bannon spoke on the charity of the year.

ACTIONS: Ms Bannon work with communications on having articles in publications.

9. **Date of Next Meeting**

Ms Bannon arrange for minutes to be sent out to members and for a date in March 2013 to be agreed possibly in Ms McCann's building.

Meeting ended at 11.05am

Maria Bannon
Equality Manager