

Minutes of the Meeting of the Disability Advisory Group held on Wednesday 23 June 2010 at 10.00am in Room 141

Present: Ms Maria Bannon (NI Assembly- Equality Manager)
Mr Peter Wilson (Cedar Foundation)
Ms Paschal McKeown (MENCAP)
Ms Kelsey McQuaid (RNIB)
Ms Clare Lavery (RNID)
Ms Patricia Bray (Disability Action)
Ms Orla McCann (Disability Action)

Apologies: Lady Christine Eames (Leonard Cheshire Disability)

In Attendance: Ms Christine Dodson (Secretary)
Ms Christine Watts (present for Item 2 & 3)
Ms Tracey Wilson (present for Item 3)
Mr James Stewart (present for Item 4)

1. Introduction

Ms Bannon welcomed everyone to the meeting

2. Front Door Access

Ms Bannon welcomed Ms Watts to the meeting. Ms Watts provided group members with a background to issues and policies affecting access through the front entrance of Parliament Buildings. She informed the group that at the May meeting of the Senior Management Group (SMG) approval was given to develop the scheme proposal for ramped access to the front elevation of Parliament Buildings and that a paper will now be brought to the Commission for consideration in September 2010. The interim measures that have been put in place are roller ramps to allow for easier access into the building.

Action: Ms Watts to provide group with pictures of the roller ramps currently being used.

3. Access Audit

Ms Watts informed the group that there are two Access Audits planned with Disability Action and RNIB during June and July 2010. The recommendations arising from

those audits will be tabled at future SMG and Commission meetings for consideration. Ms Lavery reported back to the group the outcome of a mystery shopper who contacted reception of Parliament Buildings requiring information on tours. She said the deaf person contacted the Assembly using the Talk by Text software from his PC. The call was answered promptly and the Assembly representative knew how to operate the software. However, the wrong advice was provided to the mystery shopper in relation to visiting Parliament Buildings and having an individual tour. Interpretation services were offered by way of NIA contacting the Equality Manager. It was recommended that all front line staff should be given information on requesting interpretation services directly through, for example, RNID instead of having to go through the Equality Manager.

Action: Ms Watts and Communication: The Northern Ireland Assembly Website should be updated with the relevant information on how members of the public can access building tours.

Action: Ms Watts to provide update on recommendations arising out of the Access Audits.

Action: Ms Bannon to provide feedback on the mystery shopper to the relevant Directorate and staff to allow changes to be made with immediate effect.

Parking

Ms Watts informed the group that she had been in contact with the Department of Finance & Personnel (DFP) in regards to the issue of parking. DFP are unable to assist on this issue at present until the NIA exhaust all other possible means of accommodating parking. Ms Watts said she had been in discussions with the Facilities Directorate regarding the current security arrangements in order to come to an agreement on the issue of having to give 24 hours notice, for disabled parking, prior to coming into Parliament Buildings. Security has agreed that the 24 hour notice arrangement can be waived and parking will be allowed in the Upper East car park providing it is for legitimate business only. Disability Action will be including car parking as one of the issues to be looked at during the audit.

Training

Ms Bannon and Ms Watts spoke to the group on the issue of training for Front of House Staff. Ms Bannon explained that new training providers had recently been appointed by the Assembly Commission through a procurement exercise. A meeting will be set up with Ms Bannon and the new providers to determine the training needs of staff in relation to equality. Ms Bannon explained to the group that training on Equality and Disability is already provided to all staff through induction, however this is theory and policy based, and she considered a more practical based training

course would be more beneficial to staff members, particularly those dealing directly with the public.

Ms Watts explained that Communication training for Front of House staff will be provided by RNID once the current recruitment exercise has been completed, this is currently due for completion in August 2010. Ms Mc Keown suggested a meeting between the Disability Advisory Group and the new training providers.

Ms Watts also conveyed to the group that draft leaflets are being drawn which will provide information of fire evacuation procedures (PEEP) etc. A draft leaflet will be brought to the September 2010 meeting for the group's consideration.

Actions: Ms Watts to provide group with draft leaflet.

Ms Bannon to meet with new training providers.

Ms Bannon: Meeting with training providers and group to be arranged.

Ms Watts left the meeting

4. Update on Website

Ms Bannon welcomed Ms Wilson to the meeting. Ms Wilson provided the group with an overview of progress to date in relation to taking forward the web project and informed the group that the successful company that won the tender exercise was Bluecube Interactive. The project has been divided into three parts, those being: Design, Web Hosting and Content Management System. Ipsos Mori has begun the research stage of the project. They are meeting with and talking to a number of different user groups to get opinions of the current site and what they would like to see included in the new site. The focus is going to be that the new website is user friendly. Ms Wilson agreed that the list of stakeholders who have been contacted to participate in the research aspect will be shared amongst the group. Discussion around the areas of sign language, live streaming, subtitles and audio video accessibility were highlighted as areas that the contractors would specifically look at and ensure that they would be included in the new website. The time frame for the website is March 2011 and all testing will be carried out beforehand to ensure that all areas have been covered. Ms Wilson informed the group that by the next meeting she may well be in a position to show the new concepts and provide the group with an idea of the new style.

Action: Ms Wilson to provide the group with a list of stakeholders for participation in research. If possible bring forward to the September meeting the new concept of the Website.

Ms Wilson left the meeting

5. Update on Speaker's Event

Ms Bannon provided an update in respect of the planned Speaker's event to mark International Day of Persons with Disabilities. After discussions with the Speaker's Office it has been decided that this event will be targeted at users and not organisations. The Speaker would very much like to work with the group and will be in touch in the near future with further information.

Action: Further information to be provided to the group closer to the time of the planned event.

6. Screening

Ms Bannon provided the group with an update in relation to the screening exercise. This has now been completed and a report will be drawn up within the next few weeks. Ms Bannon explained to the group the difficulties that are now going to be experienced due to the release of the new guidance issued by the Equality Commission. As a designated authority the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission will likely be given notification around May/June 2011 of the date that the Equality Commission for NI will be expecting the submission of a revised equality scheme. Ms Bannon said that work on an Audit of Inequalities, Monitoring Strategy and Action Plan will begin in September 2010. The Audit of Inequalities will most likely identify access as an inequality. This will be brought back to the group once completed.

Action: Ms Bannon to provide the group with the results from the Audit of Inequalities.

7. Practical Briefing Guides

Ms Bannon spoke to the group about the idea of developing Practical Briefing Guides for the staff in the Assembly. A discussion on what should be included in the guides commenced and it was agreed that they should be kept to a minimum of two pages, to be kept simplistic and real. The information contained within the guides should put into context public life attitudes, Section 75 and Disability Discrimination Duties. By using real life case studies that can be gleaned from the group the guides will be user friendly and easy to understand.

Action: Members of group to discuss this further and provide case studies that may be used in the guides during September's meeting.

8. Education DVD

Ms Bannon welcomed James Stewart to the meeting. Mr Stewart provided brief background information on the Education Service in the Northern Ireland Assembly and said that 420 groups (13,500 pupils) had visited the Education Service with 13 of these groups from Special Needs Schools (260 pupils). Mr Stewart explained that during the recess period all of the education programmes are going to be reviewed; there will also be specific special needs materials for programmes developed. The Education DVD has now been completed and is currently getting subtitles and audio descriptors added. The DVD is geared towards Key Stage 3 (14-18 year old) and is reflective of the curriculum. It has been split into 4 chapters, namely: Introduction to Democracy, How Parliament Buildings functions, Legislation/Laws and Participation. This DVD will be posted to all post primary schools before September 2010. A copy of the DVD will be brought to the group before it is released to the schools. Mr Stewart further explained that another DVD and a comic will be developed; this will be aimed at Key Stage 2, (5-11 year old) the Education Service would appreciate input from the group during development of the DVD. Ms Lavery suggested that RNID could put a link onto their website promoting the DVD in current production. Mr Stewart agreed to return to September's meeting and provide a more holistic update on the Education Service for members of the group.

Action: Mr Stewart to provide a holistic update on the Education Service at the September 2010 meeting. A copy of the DVD will also be issued to the group.

Mr Stewart left the meeting

9. Any Other Business

Ms Bannon informed the group that an Employment Equality Plan had been drafted and approved by SMG and is tabled for the next Assembly Commission meeting in September. She said that within this plan is an action to initiate a pilot placement scheme for people with disabilities and that she would update the group in September of progress.

Ms Bannon spoke to the group about the Parliamentary Equality Group. They meet approximately four times a year and are due to meet again in September 2010. This meeting will be hosted by the Equality Unit in Parliament Buildings. Ms Bannon explained that if there was anything they wanted raised during the meeting to contact her over recess and she will ensure any issues will be added to the agenda.

A visit to George Best Airport is being arranged by Ms Watts to view the changing places facility that has been installed there. An update on this visit will be conveyed to group at the next meeting.

Ms Bannon spoke to the group about the results of a current Disability Audit of staff that was carried out. The results of this audit disclosed that 5.8% of staff had a disability. Following the Audit it has been decided that an Internal Disability group would be established, this will go some way in helping to encourage a cultural shift in attitudes. A paper will go to SMG in September 2010 outlining the proposals for this group to be established. An update will be provided following the SMG meeting.

Ms Bannon explained the Equality Working Group within the Assembly have now received training on Screening and EQIA. A leaflet has been developed which outlines the expectations of the group, a copy of this will be sent out to the group. A joint meeting with the Disability Advisory Group and the Equality Working Group will be arranged for September 2010.

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed without amendments.

10. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place in September 2010. Three possible dates will be issued to members of the group over the summer recess period for agreement.

Meeting ended at 1pm at which time the group participated in a tour.

Maria Bannon