

Disability Advisory Group Meeting Notes

10.30am, 9 January 2015

Room 21, Parliament Buildings

In attendance:

Maria Bannon (Chairperson)	Northern Ireland Assembly
Roisin Mooney (Secretary)	Northern Ireland Assembly
Christine English	Autism NI
Dermot Ferris	REAL Network
Orla McCann	Disability Action
Paul McKenna	Cedar Foundation
Jenny Ruddy	Mencap
Will Plunkett	Cedar Foundation
Christine Watts	Northern Ireland Assembly
Tracey Wilson	Northern Ireland Assembly

Apologies:

Irene Anderson	Autism NI
Louise Close	Northern Ireland Assembly
Shirelle Stewart	National Autistic Society

Opening and update

Maria Bannon opened the meeting with an update on facilities and activities within the Northern Ireland Assembly, including the roof project and access arrangements in the Chamber. She informed the group that the Equality and Good Relations Unit will soon begin work on a number of key documents, including a new Equality Scheme, a new Audit of Inequalities and a new Disability Action Plan. She said that she expected that the unit would contact groups for input and suggestions in September.

Engagement Strategy/Assembly Community Connect

Maria Bannon updated the group on behalf of Louise Close, Outreach Manager, who sent her apologies. She reminded members about the ongoing consultation on the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on the Engagement Strategy, and that anyone who wishes to comment should do so by Monday 16th March 2015.

Action: Roisin to provide link to [Engagement EQIA](#)

Maria gave an overview of the work of Assembly Community Connect (ACC) and explained how, in 2015, disability is one of the areas on which there will be a greater focus. She highlighted the free training that ACC provides for the community and voluntary sector, and explained how ACC will be taking a new sectoral approach to

issues; for example, focusing on health or social development. Maria also asked the group to let Louise Close know of any training that would be useful for Outreach staff to have.

Action: Roisin to provide contact details for Outreach (see Annex 1)

Update on Facilities

Christine Watts, the Assembly's Environmental Services Manager, updated the group on the facilities available at Parliament Buildings, including the Braille tour guide, and showed members the tablets used for tours in Irish and British sign language. She told members about action taken to make Parliament Buildings more accessible to people with autism, including an access video available on the Assembly website showing what to expect when visiting Parliament Buildings. She informed the group that the Assembly has maintained its 'Louder Than Words' charter mark accreditation following an audit by Action on Hearing Loss in August 2014. In addition, training in sign language has been delivered to staff, and front-line staff have been trained in evacuation procedures.

Action: Roisin to provide links to [Assembly accessibility page](#) and [Access to Parliament Buildings video](#).

Christine told the group that the Red Bull Crashed Ice Championships will take place in the Stormont Estate in February 2015, which will affect access arrangements. The Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP), which is responsible for the management of the estate, is developing a parking strategy for the event. Orla McCann said it was critical that buses to and from the event are accessible. Christine said that Parliament Building will remain fully accessible throughout the month.

Action: Roisin to send details of traffic arrangements for Red Bull event.

Digital First

Tracey Wilson, the Assembly's Information Manager, briefed the group on Digital First, a programme which aims to change how the Assembly creates content, with an emphasis on promoting digital output and reducing printed output.

As the Digital First programme will involve significant changes in how content is produced and distributed, a key consideration will be ensuring that content remains accessible. In order to gather the necessary information around this and other issues, an EQIA will be carried out on the draft strategy once it is devised. Tracey asked the group to let her know about any research or information that would be useful as Digital First develops, and about any concerns members may have around access to information. Maria Bannon noted that technology can sometimes be a barrier for people and that the Digital First project was trying to address this by producing information in various forms from source. Tracey said that while Digital

First would seek digital solutions in the first instance, other considerations would be taken into account.

Tracey also highlighted the upgrade to the Assembly website. Jenny Ruddy mentioned some issues she had experienced in accessing Assembly web streams on her mobile phone. Tracey said that anyone experiencing problems should contact the Communications Office for assistance.

Action: Roisin to provide relevant contact details (see Annex 1).

The group had a general discussion about facilities available at Parliament Buildings, including the quiet room near reception, the WWI interactive exhibition, and the Changing Places facility. Christine Watts said that she would be happy to talk to other organisations about setting up a Changing Places facility. Orla McCann asked about promotion of the facilities. Maria Bannon said that they had been promoted through the Assembly website and social media, but noted that it is important to keep momentum going and asked members to promote the facilities through their user groups.

Action: Roisin to provide link to Assembly [accessibility page](#) for members to issue to user groups.

Time of meetings

Maria Bannon asked the group about preferred times for meetings to allow members time to travel to venues. The group agreed that 10.30am would be a good start time.

Action: Roisin to schedule next meeting for June 2015.

Annex 1

Contact details

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