

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Disability Advisory Group
Wednesday 22 January 2014 at 10.00am,
Room 28, Parliament Buildings.**

Present: Mrs Maria Bannon (Chair)
Mr Peter Wilson (The Cedar Foundation)
Ms Orla McCann (Disability Action)
Mr Dermot Ferris (REAL Network)
Ms Joanne Sansome (REAL Network)
Ms Shirelle Stewart (National Autistic Society)
Ms Christine Dodson (NIA)

Apologies: Ms Arlene Cassidy (Autism NI)
Ms Jenny Ruddy (MENCAP)

In Attendance: Mr Seamus Mc Ateer (NIA)
Mr Richard Anderson (NIA)
Ms Louise Close (NIA)

Meeting began at 10.00am.

1. Introduction

Mrs Bannon welcomed and thanked members for their attendance at the meeting.

2. Apologies

Jenny Ruddy (MENCAP)
Arlene Cassidy (Autism NI)

3. NIA Charities Policy

Ms Close provided the group with brief background information on the development and implementation of a Charities Policy for the Northern Ireland Assembly. This is currently out for consultation, when responses have been received a paper will go back to the Assembly Commission for their consideration. Members will be kept up to date with the development of the Charity Policy.

4. Assembly Community Connect

Ms Close provided the group with background information on Assembly Community Connect (ACC), the main purpose of ACC is to enhance connections between the Assembly and the community and voluntary sector through education and outreach.

ACC provides training, information and support for the local community and voluntary sector. Examples of the training programmes that have been rolled out to date are 'Get to Know the Assembly' – this is a two hour educational programme that provides an overview on how the Assembly works and how groups can effectively engage with it. So far the uptake and attendance has been high and feedback very positive.

ACC has also committed to four outreach conferences to be held in various places throughout Northern Ireland during 2015, it was agreed the forward work plan for these events will be forwarded to group members.

AAC also carry out tailored training, they work with various groups i.e. women, ethnic minorities and disability organisations who can avail of this training. Ms Close urged all members of the group to register their details on the Assembly Community Connect website www.niassembly.gov.uk/acc

4. Evacuation and Access Updates

Mr Anderson explained to the group the current position in relation to the evacuation procedures currently being drafted. He requested the groups advice on the draft policy, the group agreed to have a look at the draft policy and provide Mr Anderson with feedback and comments.

Mr Anderson also updated the group on the access arrangements that are currently in place in Parliament Buildings, he explained that he works closely with the Events Office to ensure that any visitor requiring access arrangements can enter the building unhindered. On a daily basis he is provided with a list of all expected visitors, which informs him of any further arrangements that may be needed to be put in place, for example ensuring that EVAC chairs are available in the event of an evacuation. The number of people within the building who have received training in the correct usage of the EVAC chairs has been increased as well as an increase in the Autism Champions, which currently stands at 13.

Mr Anderson then provided the group with an update on the lifts within Parliament Buildings; currently the lifts cannot be used in the event of an evacuation. Enquiries have been made into the estimated costs of fire proofing the lifts, which is approximately 60 - 70k each. Mr Mc Aleer assured the group that although the lifts cannot be used in an evacuation the provisions and procedures that are in place are more than adequate to ensure that all building users are removed safely from the building if the need arises.

5. Searches

Mr Mc Aleer updated the group on the procedures currently in place with regards to the search/security procedures for visitors to Parliament Buildings, any visitor coming to the building will have to go through security, either by entering through the magnetometer, or at the discretion of the ushers a handheld detector can be used.

The handheld detector may be more suited for wheelchair users, if this is the case agreement will be sought from the visitor and the search will be carried out in a private room behind reception. It will always be done with two people present and the visitor will never be separated if they are accompanied by another person.

Ms Bannon informed the group that the current policies are being looked at with a view to ensure that all visitors can be accommodated, although still in draft form the group agreed to look over any policies and provide comments and feedback.

6. Computer Tablets for Tours

Ms Bannon informed the group that the Northern Ireland Assembly wanted to ensure that all adaptations are in place for ad-hoc visitors to the building; one of the adaptations currently being looked into is to have the public tour that is available signed and put on a tablet computer for those with hearing difficulties. Although the development stage of this is unknown the group will be kept updated on any progress.

7. Disability Action Plan – 5 Year Review

Ms Bannon advised the group that the 5 year review of the Disability Action Plan went to the Equality Commission. They confirmed they are content with the outcomes. The review is available on the Northern Ireland Assembly website for members to view.

8. Text Relay/Mobile Phone for Consultations

Ms Bannon discussed with the group the possibility of the Northern Ireland Assembly using mobile phones for consultation purposes, it was agreed that further information would be gleaned from other organisations that are currently using this method of communication to assess the effectiveness. Ms Bannon will return to the group with any further information that is compiled for members input.

9. Any Other Business

8.1 Annual Equality Report

Ms Bannon informed members that Annual Equality Report has been placed on the Assembly's website and encouraged to members to have a look at it.

10. Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed the next meeting would take place on Wednesday 18th June 2014 at 10.30am in the National Autistic Society, Malone Road, Belfast.

Meeting ended at 11.25am

Maria Bannon
Equality Manager