

Disability Advisory Group Meeting Notes

10.30am, 29 January 2016

Room 30, Parliament Buildings

In attendance:

Maria Bannon (Chairperson)	Northern Ireland Assembly
Roisin Mooney (Secretary)	Northern Ireland Assembly
David Lynn	Northern Ireland Assembly
Chris Taylor	Northern Ireland Assembly
Donna McWhirter	Autism NI
Rhona McAuley	Cedar Foundation
Patricia Bray	Disability Action
Eilís Mulholland	Leonard Cheshire Foundation
Elaine McGarrity	Leonard Cheshire Foundation
Fiona Cole	Mencap
Dermot Ferris	REAL Disability Network

Opening and update

Maria Bannon opened the meeting with a background to the Disability Advisory Group for the benefit of new members, outlining how it had been established in 2009 to enable the Assembly Commission to engage more fully with disability groups in the development and delivery of policy with respect to disability. Maria also highlighted the range of ways in which people could engage with the Assembly, including through Assembly Community Connect; 'How the Assembly Works' sessions; and visits facilitated by the Education Service.

Accessibility of the Assembly website

Chris Taylor, the Assembly's Web Manager, told the group that the Assembly is keen to continue efforts to make the website more accessible and user-friendly, above and beyond the legal accessibility requirements. He said that he would particularly welcome feedback on the website. Patricia Bray suggested that a one-off meeting with user groups may be helpful. Maria said that this was a proposed action in the draft Disability Action Plan 2016-21, and that a similar approach with past projects had been very productive.

Eilís Mulholland said that she, and the groups she works with, tended to use the Assembly's twitter feed rather than the website to get information. Chris said that, in November 2015, a social media campaign was undertaken to increase people's understanding and awareness of Assembly business and procedures. However, he said that there were concerns about the accessibility of some aspects of social media and that he was keen to find out more about the user experience. He asked

group members to complete the Assembly's social media survey and to circulate to user groups, where possible.

Action: Chris to provide link to social media survey:

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/about-the-assembly/corporate-information/social-media-survey/>

Eilís said that consideration could be given to the links used in Twitter to ensure that any linked document is accessible and in 'easy read'. She felt that it was not necessary to make every document available in 'easy read' but that it would be very helpful where they relate to relevant issues, for example, disability or welfare reform.

Fiona Cole said that Mencap would be more than happy to get a group together for feedback purposes, and that it would be really helpful to have agendas, etc., in 'easy read'.

Patricia mentioned the group currently involved in Disability Action's 'Age No Barrier' project and suggested that, as an existing group, they would be in a good position to give feedback on the Assembly website.

Action: Chris to contact disability organisations for feedback as work on website progresses

Potential reasonable/proactive adjustments to Parliament Buildings

David Lynn, the Assembly's Head of Building Services, updated the group on proposed plans for adjustments to Parliament Buildings. He gave a brief background to previous alterations to the building, including a programme of works in 2006 to comply with DDA legislation and the addition of the ramps to the front of the Building in 2012. He highlighted recent changes, including the additional disability parking spaces in the upper car park, the temporary ramp in the Chamber; and adjustments to the counters in the Business Office and Office Resources (Stationery).

David said that there were challenges in renovating a listed building, and he outlined options for proactive adjustments to the building that are being explored (subject to Assembly Commission approval). These include the lowering of part of the counter in the Members' Bar; the possible relocation of the Assembly gift shop to provide ramped access for people with mobility issues; automatic opening of corridor doors; and potential alterations to lifts to improve facilities for emergency escape.

David was keen to hear from group members about their experience of automatic opening for corridor doors, and to get some examples of effective systems. Patricia suggested that David contact Orla McCann from Disability Action, who has worked closely with organisations on disability access arrangements. Fiona said that Una Brown, project manager at Mencap, would also be a useful contact.

Action: David Lynn to contact Orla McCann and Una Brown about electronic access arrangements.

The group discussed disability parking arrangements at Parliament Buildings. Elaine McGarrity said that it was important to ensure that some wider access bays were available for wheelchair users. She noted that not all blue badge holders need a wider access bay but said that, for wheelchair users and people with particular mobility issues, they are essential. Maria said that staff would look into this issue. At present, visitors may request disability access to the upper car park but individual disability bays are not reserved for a particular user and users are not asked to specify whether they are wheelchair users. Maria said that consideration could be given to the size of bays and the practicalities of reserving bays, as well as to asking visitors if they require a wider bay. Maria noted, however, that, given the volume of visitors to Parliament Buildings and the number of pass holders using disability bays, parking to the wider bays may sometimes be difficult.

Action: Equality and Good Relations Unit to explore with relevant business areas the widening of existing disability parking bays and the possibility of reserving bays.

Action: Equality and Good Relations Unit to consider with relevant business areas amendments to visitors' disability parking access procedures with a view to specifying whether visitors require a wider bay to improve access at Parliament Buildings.

Draft NI Assembly Disability Action Plan 2016-21 (Pre-consultation)

Maria Bannon gave the group some background to the new draft Disability Action Plan 2016-21, which group members were given early sight of ahead of a full public consultation. She highlighted actions which build on previous activity, such as the maintenance and promotion of existing facilities and awards, e.g., the Changing Places facility and the 'Louder than Words' accreditation. She also expanded on a few of the new proposals under the plan, including plans to explore the development of a Parliament for People with Disabilities and sign language initiatives.

With respect to specific actions, Rhona McAuley suggested training for front-line staff on dealing with people with brain injury. Maria said that, over the period of the plan, bespoke training could be rolled out to front-of-house staff to build on previous training. The group discussed signage in the reception area and suggested that the disability services on offer could be better promoted at the front desk.

Action: Equality and Good Relations Unit to discuss with the Assembly's Learning and Development Team provision of training on specific disabilities for front-of-house staff.

Action: Equality and Good Relations Unit to discuss with relevant business areas additional signage around building to promote available services akin to the accessibility symbols on the Assembly website.

Maria talked in more detail about the Assembly Education Service's application for funding for a new youth project, and highlighted the learning and feedback from previous projects. Eilís said that she would like to follow progress on this funding

application as it would be of interest to some of the youth groups she is involved with.

Action: Equality and Good Relations Unit to forward the group contact details of Education Service staff.

Maria said that proposals for work shadowing were not included in the plan but would be kept under review. She explained that, because of the voluntary exit scheme, there were some resourcing issues, and that any future consideration would have to identify work experience/job shadowing that was meaningful for the individual. Patricia said that it may be helpful to get information and advice from Disability Action's employment unit.

Action: Disability Action to send contact details for its employment unit.

The group discussed the proposal to develop a Parliament for People with Disabilities, and Maria provided some detail around format and participation.

Action: Equality and Good Relations Unit to provide the group with updates on development of proposal for Parliament for People with Disabilities.

Maria mentioned that a follow-up report on the recent Digital First EQIA would soon be available on the Assembly website.

Action: Equality and Good Relations Unit to provide link to Digital First EQIA report when available.

Patricia said that she thought that the action plan was very good and that she would consider it further and forward some additional comments. Maria asked the group to send any pre-consultation responses by **19 February 2016** so that any comments could be included when the Assembly Commission considers the draft plan.

Membership of Group

Maria spoke about the action in the draft plan to review the membership of the external Disability Advisory Group. She said that the intention was to widen the membership to include more groups, and she asked the groups to send in any suggestions. She also said that organisations could nominate more than one person to sit on the group in order to allow different members of an organisation to attend depending on the agenda item, and so that, where one member is unable to attend, another may attend in their place.

Action: Equality and Good Relations Unit to provide list of current member organisations and seek suggestions from group members for organisations to approach.

Next Meeting

Fiona offered Mencap's new premises as a venue for the next meeting of the group. Date for next meeting to be confirmed but it is anticipated to be held in May/June 2016.