

Minutes of the Meeting of the Disability Advisory Group held on Tuesday 23 March 2010 at 10.00am in Room 29

Present: Ms Maria Bannon (NI Assembly- Equality Manager)
Mr Peter Wilson (Cedar Foundation)
Ms Paschal McKeown (MENCAP)
Mr Andrew Dougal (Chest Heart and Stroke NI)
Ms Kelsey McQuaid (RNIB)
Ms Clare Lavery (RNID)
Ms Karen McGrath (Disability Action)
Ms Orla McCann (Disability Action)

Apologies: Lady Christine Eames (Cedar Foundation)
Ms Monica Wilson (Disability Action)
Ms Ann Madden (Chest Heart and Stroke NI)

In Attendance: Ms Cathy McGowan (Secretary)
Ms Christine Watts (present for Item 2)
Ms Tracey Wilson (present for Item 3)
Mr Micheal Arlow (present for Item 4)

1. Introduction

Ms Bannon welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited members to introduce themselves.

2. Front Entrance and Signage Issues

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. Ms Watts informed the group that a paper was currently being drawn by the Head of Estates and would be submitted to the Commission for consideration before the summer recess.

Ms Bannon undertook to arrange a meeting between the Advisory Group and the Head of Estates in relation to progressing signage and to discuss access audit issues and further detail on the front entrance.

Action: M Bannon to arrange meeting date between the Head of Estates and the Disability Advisory Group.

3. Commission Web Project Update

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. She

highlighted the difficulties arising from the current web site such as the streaming of live debates and the inclusion of legislative tables. She further spoke about the content management system, the specifications concerning the web project and the involvement of the Disability Advisory Group's users within the process.

The group agreed that 'user testing' was an excellent method of obtaining feedback on the content and usability of the site but requested that consideration should be given to the costs for any volunteers required to take part within the testing which should also include transport costs and the Commission should ensure that the testing is accessible.

It was agreed that all group members would be informed of the successful company following the completion of the tender exercise. Ms Wilson informed the group that the project should be completed by December 2010 and that she would liaise with Ms Bannon concerning user dates for testing.

Action: Ms Wilson to confirm participation costs (including transport), the successful contractor and anticipated dates for the Advisory Group to participate in the process when available.

4. Youth Assembly

Ms Bannon welcomed Mr Arlow to the meeting. Mr Arlow provided the group with an update on progress achieved on the establishment of a youth panel in preparation for the establishment of a Youth Assembly. He highlighted that the panel was made up of 30 young people aged 16 – 18 years and that 5 places had been made available for young people with disabilities. He informed members that the panel was scheduled to hold their first residential in the coming weekend and that he hoped to gather information on the range of training needs required to support the effective functioning of the panel. Mr Arlow agreed to provide a further update on the main outcomes of the residential at the next meeting in June 2010.

Ms McKeown raised a range of issues in relation to the practical difficulties that a young person with a disability may face in their participation. She drew the groups attention to the age range applied for the panel and suggested that further consideration should be given to expanding the upper age limit for a young person with a disability to 25 years.

Mr Arlow also informed the group that Assembly Education Service had developed a DVD as a contemporary method of displaying information about the workings of the Assembly. Mr Arlow highlighted that the DVD was due for completion and viewing within the next few weeks. Mr Arlow confirmed that the DVD included subtitling. The group noted that the current DVD had no provision for signing. Ms McGrath suggested that consideration should be given to the inclusion of audio descriptions and signing provision in all future updates of the resource tool. It was further agreed that an Assembly Education Officer should contact Ms Lavery to gain advice on the provision of signing within any future update.

Action: Education Officer to contact Ms Lavery, RNID.

5. Guide for Witnesses appearing before Assembly Committees

Ms Bannon thanked the group members for their comments in relation to the guide for witnesses appearing before Assembly Committees. She informed members that the guide had been changed to reflect the comments received and was now a visible and working document within the Committee Office.

Action: Ms Bannon to issue finalised version of the guide to the Group.

6. Information Leaflets

Ms Bannon drew the group member's attention to the final versions of the Section 75 and Equality Working Group information leaflets. Ms Bannon sought the groups views in relation to expanding the current portfolio of photographs used within Assembly publications which depict individuals with a disability. Ms McGrath highlighted the importance of obtaining a written permission sheet prior to any photographs being taken and agreed to forward a sample to Ms Bannon. The group agreed that they would inform Ms Bannon of any future opportunity where a photograph could be taken when they have members visiting Parliament Buildings.

Action: Ms Mc Grath to issue consent form to Ms Bannon. Ms Bannon to issue consent form to the Commission photographers for use.

7. Placements for students with disabilities

Ms Bannon informed the group that she and HR were currently in early discussions concerning the development of placement programme for students with disabilities. She highlighted that if this programme was agreed that a pilot programme for 5 students to be placed within the Secretariat would take place. The Group agreed that there needed to be a strong focus on making the opportunities useful for the students.

Mr Dougal suggested that Ms Bannon contact the Employers Forum on Disabilities to take advice on how to progress the pilot programme.

Following discussion on the duration and mechanisms required to support students with disabilities, members agreed that the next step in moving the programme forward would be for the arrangement of a further meeting between Secretariat HR and 'employment services' staff from each of the organisations represented on the Disability Advisory Group.

Ms Orla McCann left the meeting.

Mr A Dougal left the meeting.

Action: Ms Bannon to provide update of discussions to HR and contact the relevant organisations as discussed in due course.

8. Speaker's Event

Ms Bannon informed the group that the Speaker's Office was currently exploring the development of an event for people with disabilities in line with the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3 December 2010.

Ms Bannon informed the group that the Speaker's Office had requested their advice on the timing of an event and on the selection of a 'theme' for the day. Members agreed that although a date of June 2010 had been suggested, they were of the opinion that the timings of an event should tie in closer to the date for the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

Ms McGrath asked for clarification in relation to the costs of the day and the availability of a budget to cover travel costs for the participants. The Group discussed a range of potential themes, including; Information / Communication (Web Project); The Youth Assembly; Employment Issues and agreed to give further consideration for discussion at the next meeting.

Action: Ms Bannon to confirm availability of costings with the Speaker's Office and table the issue at the next meeting for further discussion.

9. Disability Action Plan

Ms Bannon drew the member's attention to the current version of the Disability Action Plan 2008 – 2011 and provided the group with an update on progress that had been undertaken as part of the plan. Members were content that the progress report for the Northern Ireland Equality Commission would be based on the existing Action Plan and actions not met would be prioritised on the plan for the 2011-2014 period.

Ms McKeown suggested that consideration should be given to the inclusion of an early warning facility i.e. green/amber/red against the actions detailed. She also proposed that consideration should also be given to a section on 'reflective learning' within the new plan. Following further discussion on content and format, Ms Bannon agreed to issue the new draft plan when available for comment to each of the group members.

Ms McKeown noted that there were already discussions occurring in relation to a changing place facility within Parliament Buildings but requested that it be considered within the new action plan.

Ms Bannon also informed the group that the Good Relation Action Plan was due to go out for consultation at the start of April 2010 and included actions in relation to access (communication based) for people with disabilities.

Action: Ms Bannon to issue Draft Disability Action Plan for the 2011-2014 period for comment during its development stage to group members.

10. Any Other Business

10.1. Review of Front of House Services

Ms Lavery sought clarification in relation to the review of Front of House Services. Ms Bannon provided an update in relation to progress which had been achieved. She informed the group that the recruitment competition had closed and that training requirements for new Front of House staff were currently being discussed with HR side. Ms Bannon also reported that work was to be undertaken in Committee Rooms to install loop systems.

10.2. Language Policy

Ms Lavery gave information in relation to the Language policy. Ms Bannon provided an overview of the policy content and application and informed the group that the draft policy was due to be considered at the next Commission meeting on the 25 March 2010.

10.3. Future meeting format and location

Ms Bannon asked the group members to give consideration to the format and location of future meetings of the Disability Advisory Group.

11. Date of Next Meeting

Members agreed that the next meeting would take place in June 2010. Date to be confirmed.

Meeting ended at 12.05pm

Maria Bannon