

Minutes of the Meeting of the Disability Advisory Group held on Thursday 29 September 2011 at 2.10pm in Room 144

Present: Mr James Gilsenan (Chair)
Mr Peter Wilson (Cedar Foundation)
Lady Christine Eames (Leonard Cheshire)
Ms Shirelle Stewart (National Autistic Society)

Apologies: Mr Andrew Dougal (Chest, Heart and Stroke)
Ms Paschal McKeown (MENCAP)
Ms Patricia Bray (Disability Action)
Ms Karen McGrath (Disability Action)

In Attendance: Mrs Nicola Shephard (Secretary)
Mr Richard Anderson
Ms Tracey Wilson
Ms Louise Simpson

1. Introduction

Mr Gilsenan welcomed the members to the meeting. He explained that there has been a limited response to the Assembly Equality Scheme and Disability Action Plan Consultations and asked the members to consider if they have any ideas on ways that the consultation process could be made more accessible, bearing in mind the limited capacity that consultees have. Mr Gilsenan also welcomed ideas on how the Disability Advisory Group could be made more accessible in order to maximise membership and attendance.

ACTION: Mrs Shephard to contact the members following the meeting for feedback.

2. Tours

Mr Gilsenan introduced Ms Simpson to the group. Ms Simpson provided some background information on the tours, and explained that she aims to arrange a session where all of the tour guides meet with various representatives from relevant organisations to provide a further 'mystery shop' of the tour.

Mr Gilsenan pointed out that MENCAP and NICEM have expressed an interest in taking part, and Ms Stewart said that she would also be happy to arrange for individuals to participate.

Ms Simpson commented that the recent work that has been done with the National Autistic Society has been very useful, and the comments received will help improve the tour for all participants.

Mr Gilsenan explained that he is intending to meet with a variety of organisations to discuss access issues etc, in order to try and gather as much feedback as possible.

Lady Eames asked if it is possible to participate in a tour and then meet to discuss a particular key issue with MLA's. Ms Simpson advised that the best approach would be to contact the relevant All Party Group.

ACTION: Mrs Shephard to contact members to arrange a tour

3. Work Experience

Ms Simpson provided the group with background information on the work experience programme. Ms Simpson explained that it relates to school age only. The programme has received very positive feedback from the participants.

Ms Simpson went on to introduce a new Outreach magazine called 'Get Involved', and circulated copies to the group. She also stated that members can subscribe to receive copies by email.

Mr Gilsenan explained that contact has been made with Orchardville in order to investigate the possibility of developing work experience opportunities for young people not linked to formal education. This currently poses problems with regards to insurance.

ACTION: Mrs Shephard to circulate a link to members to subscribe to the Outreach Magazine

4. Website Update

Ms Wilson updated the group on the progress of the implementation of the new website. She explained that every effort is being made to ensure that it is as accessible as possible, although it does present problems as much of it is very much text based. There is a focus however on making these large pieces of text, such as Bills, easier to read and understand.

Ms Wilson then went on to explain that a section will be included on how the Assembly works, including explanations on processes such as the passage of Bills. Ms Wilson demonstrated some test pages of the new site and described the improvements that are being made to navigating the site.

One change will be to attempt to make the site more engaging, for example by including videos clips of MLAs being interviewed about committee decisions.

An initial version will be launched in early December. This will still be altered and amended on an ongoing basis, and so feedback will be most welcome.

It is intended to add in the internal system used by the Assembly, 'AIMS', as it is extremely easy to use with excellent search facilities, and all information is clearly tagged to make it easier to locate.

Mr Gilsenan explained that the ongoing work with the National Autistic Society has helped provide feedback on how best to improve the access information on the site, for example by including an interactive tour so that visitors know what they can expect to happen on their arrival.

Lady Eames asked if the site will be updated daily, Ms Wilson responded that yes it is updated daily and it is updated at every request.

Mr Gilsenan reiterated that feedback will be much appreciated at any stage.

5. Publications Policy

Ms Wilson reminded the group that the publications policy was circulated to all members following the last meeting. She thanked the members for submitting comments and explained that in light of these comments, the policy has been updated. She explained that the list of contacts in the appendix has been expanded, and if any of the members wish to add or remove any details, then please contact us. Mr Gilsenan informed the members that the latest version of the policy had been emailed to members, and that any further feedback would be most welcome.

ACTION: Mrs Shephard to circulate the policy to members again, to request further feedback

6. Access Update

Mr Anderson provided the group with an update on work that has been carried on on improving the physical access to Parliament Buildings.

The Changing Places facility has been installed at the East side of the Building.

Front of House and Events staff are informing visitors of its availability.

Representatives from MENCAP will be attending an event in the building on the 5th of October and we look forward to receiving feedback on the facility.

The RNID Charter Mark was awarded in April, and the certificate is displayed in the Great Hall. Other legislatures have since contacted us for advice on how to achieve the Charter Mark.

Mr Anderson went on to explain that a planning application has been submitted with regards the installation of ramps at the front of the building.

Updates will be circulated to the group as appropriate.

7. National Autistic Society

Mr Gilsenan explained that following on from very successful engagement with Disability Action, RNID and RNIB which led to full access audits being conducted, work has now commenced with the National Autistic Society. A meeting was recently held between Assembly staff and both representatives and service users from the National Autistic Society, to discuss how we can improve access to the building and services from people who are affected by autism.

Mr Gilsenan went on to explain that we would be happy to engage in this way with any other Section 75 group, and that members can request this at any stage.

8. Consultation on Equality Scheme and Disability Action Plan

Mr Gilsenan updated the group on the progress of the consultation on both the Equality Scheme and the Disability Action Plan. The consultation closes on the 14 October. Three responses have been received so far, and very positive feedback has been received at consultation events attended.

Mr Gilsenan explained that the Equality Scheme was submitted to the Equality Commission on the 1 August in order to meet the statutory deadline. However, further consultation is ongoing, and a revised version will be submitted before the end of the year. Mr Gilsenan went on to emphasise that we are happy to facilitate consultation dialogue in any format, such as face to face, over the telephone etc.

9. Good Relations Audit

Mr Gilsenan updated the group on the progress of the Internal Good Relations Audit. He explained that the Audit is now complete, and will soon go to the Assembly Commission for approval. We anticipate that the Audit will inform a Good Relations Strategy in the near future. The Audit identified that some staff have concerns around the building, we hope that ongoing work by the Speakers Arts Advisory Group will continue to 'soften' the look and feel of the building.

10. Language with Section 75 Groups

The Equality Unit have received feedback from staff that they would appreciate some advice and guidance around the current accepted language when discussing Section 75 groups. Staff are conscious that they could mistakenly use a term not realising that it can be considered offensive to some sections of the community. The Equality Unit would very much appreciate any help or advice that members have with this, so that we can publish guidance for staff on the Assembly intranet.

ACTION: Mrs Shephard to request from members any advice or guidance they may possess on appropriate language with Section 75 groups

Meeting ended at 3.15pm

James Gilsenan
Acting Equality Manager