

BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN AND WEST NORFOLK

WEST NORFOLK DISABILITY FORUM

**Notes of a Meeting of the West Norfolk Disability Forum held on
Tuesday 22nd May 2012 at 2.30 pm in the Committee Suite,
King's Court, Chapel Street, King's Lynn.**

PRESENT:

Representing the Borough Council:

Councillors Stephanie Smeaton, Michael Chenery of Horsburgh
(Substitute for Councillor Sandell) and Councillor Peter Cousins
(Substitute for Councillor Harwood)

Officers:

Allison Bingham and Rachael Edwards

Representing Disabled People:

Wendy Blades, Jill Darling, Pat French (Chairman),
Genene Henshaw, Sylvia Pomeroy and Kathy Warner

By Invitation:

Karen O'Hara – Norfolk County Council

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillor David Harwood, Councillor Lori Allen, Councillor Tony Bubb,
Councillor Michael Langwade and Councillor Garry Sandell
Christine Bond, Tess Gilder, Sue Smith, Trevor Smith and
Eddie West-Burnham

		ACTION
1.	<u>ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN</u> It was proposed and seconded that Sylvia Pomeroy be elected Vice-Chairman for the meeting.	
2.	<u>MINUTES</u> The minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2012 were agreed as a correct record.	

<p>3.</p>	<p><u>MATTERS ARISING AND NOT COVERED ELSEWHERE ON THE AGENDA</u></p> <p><u>Disabled Toilet – Gaywood Library</u></p> <p>Genevieve Henshaw updated the Forum on the situation with regard to the disabled toilet at Gaywood Library and explained that it had been confirmed that it was not a public toilet but one designated to staff. They did not have the resources to clean the toilet on an hourly basis which was a requirement in order to make accessible and open to the public.</p> <p><u>Public Toilet – Multi-Storey Car Park</u></p> <p>Sylvia Pomeroy raised the issue of the poor condition and lack of facilities (no bin, no paper) at the public toilets situated in the multi-storey car park. Councillor Peter Cousins agreed to raise it with Councillor Pope (Portfolio for Assets) and it was also agreed the Executive Director, Leisure and Public Space would be notified.</p>	<p>Action</p> <p>PC</p> <p>JM</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p><u>BLUE DISABLED PARKING BADGE SCHEME</u></p> <p>Karen O’Hara, Norfolk County Council gave a presentation on the Blue Disabled Badge Parking Scheme. She explained that Norfolk County Council were in charge of administering the Blue Badge scheme and issuing badges. The team was based in Norwich although the building was not accessible to the public.</p> <p>She explained that as part of the UK Government’s reform programme, a new Blue Badge Scheme had been launched on 1 January 2012. The Government was responsible for the legislation that set out eligibility, the design of the badge and the enforcement framework. However, it was for all local authorities to assess eligibility and issue badges. Most badges were issued for a period of 3 years.</p> <p>There were 2.56 million valid blue badges issued in England with 4.9% of the English population holding a blue badge licence. Approximately 36% of badges were automatically issued and approx 63% issued were after applicants had been assessed.</p>	

<p>Karen O'Hara highlighted that there could be an approximate additional 650,000 badge holders over the next 10 years under the existing eligibility criteria because of the ageing population. She explained that applications could be made on-line, over the telephone or in writing.</p> <p>Pat French explained that she had applied on-line for her and her husband's blue badge but their applications had been refused. However, when she applied in writing, she had received her badge within 3 days.</p> <p>Karen O'Hara acknowledged that in some instances, in relation to on-line applications, that this may occur because more information in some cases was provided when applicants applied in writing. However, applicants were required to send in a photograph and payment when applying in writing and if refused these had to be returned, whereas when applying on-line no payment would be taken until the application was accepted. Karen O'Hara explained that a new supplier, Northgate, were now responsible for producing the badges and improvements had been made. Previously applications were taking up to a period of 6 weeks, but the new supplier had undertaken to turn around the badge within a period of 5 days, with the total application be processed within 10 days. If necessary applications could be fast-tracked. An example of the new badge was circulated.</p> <p>Karen O'Hara outlined the application process and explained that applicants were given an immediate decision on line or over the telephone. Applications were either refused, passed for a decision or approved. Applicants could request a review of the decision.</p> <p>There were some applications that were eligible for approval without further assessment such as those applicants in the receipt of the higher rate of mobility component of DLA and those that were registered blind. Some applications were eligible for further assessment such as those applicants who had a permanent and substantial disability which caused inability to walk or very considerable difficulty in walking. Those who drove a vehicle regularly and had severe disability in both arms and were unable to operate all or some parking meters would also qualify under this category.</p>	Action
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<p>Previously assessments had been assisted by liaison with Occupational Therapists and GP's to ascertain suitability to be issued with a blue badge. However, as a result of a review by the Department of Transport future assessments would be either desk based or independent mobility assessments would be carried out by qualified Occupational Therapists either face to face or based around clinics around the County. Members of the Forum were requested to give consideration as to whether there was a suitable facility for a clinic to be based in the west of the county.</p> <p>Karen O'Hara explained that she was currently undertaking a review of the process of issuing blue badges which included ICT and how the unit/team operated. The review would also consider the customer's journey and improvements in the communication process. She explained that an improvement in joint working on enforcement issues was also underway and initially meetings had taken place with the relevant officers at the various District Councils. Karen O'Hara explained Enforcement Officers had no powers to seize blue badges if they were being misused, however they could ask the holders to hand them in. The Police were reluctant to get too involved in what they considered to be minor offences but again discussions would be held to improve joint working.</p> <p>Members of the Forum highlighted instances of mis-use of the blue badges (e.g. supermarket car parks) and the lack of disabled parking bays.</p> <p>In response to further questions from Members of the Forum, Karen O'Hara acknowledged that the health of the applicant could vary from day to day (i.e. the weather, medication) which could potentially effect an assessment but these issues were taken into consideration when it was being conducted. It was also confirmed that the new badge would not include a readable chip.</p> <p>It was highlighted that some applicants were not comfortable or able to apply on-line for a badge and were more comfortable talking to someone over the phone. Karen O'Hara provided the call centre number for Members of the Forum (0300 800 8020) and confirmed that this was charged at a local rate.</p>	<p>Action</p> <p>ALL</p>
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	<p>AGREED: 1) That a questionnaire/survey be circulated to Members of the Forum to ascertain feedback to inform the review of the current Blue Badge scheme.</p> <p>2) That Karen O'Hara be invited to attend a future meeting of the Forum to feedback results of the review.</p>	<p>Action</p> <p>ALL/JM</p> <p>JM</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p><u>OPPORTUNITY AWARDS</u></p> <p>Members of the Forum expressed that they wished their appreciation be recorded to acknowledge Allison Bingham's efforts and her hard work in organising the recent Opportunity Awards event at the Corn Exchange.</p> <p>Allison Bingham acknowledged the input of the Working Group which had been formed in relation to the Awards and explained she had received very positive feedback from a number of the individuals/organisations that had been recognised. She also highlighted that Councillor Crofts had been kind enough to donate the winning trophy and that Councillor Sandell, at very short notice, had delivered the opening speech. Approximately 90 people had attended and it was agreed that the Corn Exchange offered a more suitable venue to hold the event (as opposed to Lynnsport).</p>	
<p>6.</p>	<p><u>BUDGET AND FUTURE EVENTS</u></p> <p><u>Celebrate-Ability Awards 2012</u></p> <p>The Celebrate-Ability Awards would be held on 3rd September in the Corn Exchange from 2 pm – 5 pm. A few enquiries had already been received from organisations wishing to have a stand at the event. Advance space had been booked and allocated on the Council's own website and a request had been made to the Council's graphics section to design a poster. PR was important to promote the event and Members of the Forum were requested to give consideration to any good news stories with a "human angle" from the event held in 2010 to help raise awareness, otherwise standard PR would not kick in until the end of August.</p> <p>Information packs would be available w/c 18th June which would include A5/A3 posters available from reception and Members were encouraged to display them in the community.</p>	<p>ALL</p> <p>ALL</p>

	<p>A Working Group had been formed to work on the event and it was hoped an initial meeting would be held in June.</p> <p>Genene Henshaw agreed to contact Jill Bennett of Radio Norfolk and to display posters at the Norfolk & Norwich Association for the Blind. It was also suggested that the event was advertised at “private cinemas” such as the one at Watlington and Downham Market. Allison Bingham highlighted the importance of timing the advertising/PR exercise to co-incide with the publication of as many as possible Parish Magazines.</p> <p>It was suggested that an invitation be extended to the event to Jody Cundy, who had enjoyed success at the previous Paralympic Games and was local.</p> <p>Any ideas for posters/promotion material from Members of the Forum would be welcomed.</p> <p><u>Support for Elderly in the Winter</u></p> <p>Councillor David Harwood had previous raised the issue of holding an event to support the elderly in the Winter and it was suggested that this be put on the Agenda for the next meeting of the Forum.</p>	<p>Action</p> <p>GH</p> <p>SP</p> <p>AB</p> <p>ALL</p> <p>JM</p>
7.	<p><u>SECRETARY’S CORRESPONDENCE</u></p> <p>There was no correspondence to report.</p>	
8.	<p><u>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</u></p> <p>There was no other business.</p>	
9.	<p><u>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</u></p> <p>The next meeting will be the Annual General Meeting of the West Norfolk Disability Forum scheduled on Thursday 19th July 2012 at 2.30 pm in the Committee Suite, King’s Court.</p>	

The meeting closed at 3.50pm.