

Northampton Borough Council

Northampton Disabled People's Forum

Tuesday, 22 February 2011

People at the meeting:

Officers at the meeting

PEOPLE AT THE MEETING:

Barbara Barber	Individual
Larry Barber	Individual
Phil Bayliss	NBC
Sandra Bell	Doddridge Centre
Madeline Boys	Individual
Sue Campling	NHS
Gary Crane	Individual
Chris Grethe	NAB
Noor Homayoun	Individual
Beverley Mennell	Individual
Martin de Rosario	Individual
Ann Timpson	Individual
John Wood	NAB
John Wright	NAB

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the forum and requested a minute's silence be held for Chris Swinn, who had been an active and well-respected member of the Disabled Peoples Forum.

The Chair then welcomed Phil Bayliss for agreeing to update the Forum on Taxi Driver Training.

3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 4th January 2011 were agreed following minor amendments to be noted after the meeting.

Beverley Mennell noted that the Council marked with respect the death of Councillors, former Councillors and Mayors and suggested that the death of members of the public who had contributed to the Council's engagement arrangements such as the Forums and Tenants Participation meetings should also be acknowledged.

Madeline Boys commented that she believed that every person should be sent an application form for the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG). The Chair commented that should people want forms and information that they should contact their Ward Councillors who will be happy to assist. Beverley Mennell informed Madeline Boys

that the DFG were available in the One Stop Shop and that if people were unable to collect one from the Guildhall, forms would be posted out on request.

4. COMMUNITY INFORMATION EXCHANGE

Chris Grethe (Northamptonshire Association for the Blind) reported that there would be changes to the Disability Living Allowances and asked forum members to sign the template letter, which was available, on line as a means of lobbying government with regards to the benefit system which was due to change in 2013. For further information, people were advised to log onto www.nab.org.uk

Madeline Boys argued that some older and disabled people were currently not being well looked after and any further cuts would have detrimental effects on those people and on their families.

Chris Grethe reminded the forum that the County Council were due to hold their budget meeting on Monday the 28th February and the NBC budget Council meeting would be held on the 28th February 2011.

Beverly Mennell spoke in regards to taxis being supplied by the Council for people who wish to be involved in local politics and referred to the fact that there was not a policy in place which outlined who was entitled to transport.

Sue Campling (Northampton General Hospital NHS) explained that their four-year plan was currently being written and requested that if people had views or comments for her she would be able to feed the information back. In answer to a question, she commented that it would not be necessary to hold further meetings for this but that there would other means of communicating through other means such as Facebook.

Noor Homayoun commented that he was concerned about the budget cuts from County Council that would affect not only himself but also care staff and other people with disabilities.

Councillor PD Varnsvery suggested at the next meeting, once a true understanding of the budget cuts and it's implications, a Post Budget Review could be held to update people.

5. DISABILITY, EQUALITY AND AWARENESS TRAINING FOR TAXI DRIVERS

Phil Bayliss (Principal Licensing Officer) spoke on the training that is offered to taxi drivers with regards to assisting those with disabilities which is run approximately every six weeks. He informed the forum that post 2008 an induction course had been introduced which offered training to taxi drivers, which raised awareness on how best to assist people with disabilities – which it was explained, was not conducted in many Councils. The training included gaining practical knowledge of wheelchair use and making drivers more aware of disabilities that are not easily

visible. A number of lectures to highlight and compliment the practical information being offered were also given.

The forum were notified that the training being undertaken was carried out with two disabled people, who were offering advice, not just about with regards to wheelchair users. Drivers were given the opportunity to fold and unfold a wheelchair along with being given information with regards to sensory impairments such as loss of sight and hearing, which also had an impact on those who were sometimes dependant on taxi's and private hire vehicles.

In response to a question, Phil Bayliss informed the Forum that the training course lasted for one and a half hours. Some of the forum members suggested that this was not long enough and more time should be dedicated to making taxi drivers more aware of the needs of disabled people. However, the Licensing Officer and those involved in the training argued that the time allowed was adequate and that should it be extended by any considerable amount of time would be counter productive due to the fact that some people would become disinterested and a high impact, short and informative approach worked well.

A number of the forum members asked if the training could be extended to Bus Drivers as there had been a number of issue with disabled passengers not being able to access buses that were carrying large numbers of push chairs. The Licensing Officer commented that he would be happy to write to the bus companies to remind them of their obligations. He also informed the group that if a taxi driver fails to stop and pick up a passenger due to their disability then they are committing an offence and that should a complaint be made, action would be taken against the driver.

The Licensing Officer explained that whilst the amount of time could be increased in terms of training, the training alone had improved the situation. There had been no negative feedback from taxi drivers who had undertaken the training. He also reported that a large focus of the training was to with awareness and attitude and changing stereotyping and inconsistency.

He further commented that should anyone experience any problems with taxi drivers, he would like to be contacted by the forum members and made aware of the situation:

(For comments or information, please contact Phil Bayliss on 01640 837099 or email him at pbayliss@northampton.gov.uk)

6. ITEMS FOR NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS

It was agreed that the next meeting would include an update on Post Budget Review and the effects of it on disabled people and care management.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on 22 June 2011.

The meeting concluded at Time Not Specified

15 Feb 2011 - EU agrees new rights to benefit disabled and older bus passengers

The missing link on passengers' rights under EU law was finally put in place in Strasbourg on Tuesday when the European Parliament adopted new rules laying down greater rights for bus and coach passengers.

After two years of tricky negotiations, Parliament and the Member States have agreed on rules covering all long-distance scheduled services (250 kilometres or more), whether national or crossborder, starting in spring 2013.

Compensation

For such services, the new law provides for compensation of 50% of the purchase price as well as a full refund of the ticket, if an operator cancels a service and cannot honour the transport contract, even by other routes or means of transport, following a delayed departure of at least two hours. Passengers who prefer not to go ahead with their trip following a cancelled departure or a two-hour delay will be entitled to a full refund.

If there is a delay of over 90 minutes according to the timetable, passengers must be given snacks and refreshments. If a trip is broken or if there is an accident or a delay requiring passengers to spend the night on the spot, the operator will also be required to offer up to two nights in a hotel at a maximum price of €80. The operator can only be exempted from these obligations if the problem is caused by natural disasters or weather conditions that prevent the journey taking place under safe conditions.

In addition, the operator must provide for a refund with a ceiling of no less than €1200 if luggage is lost or damaged. In the event of death or injury as the result of an accident, the operator will be liable for payment of up to €220,000 (or more, if national law so provides).

To enable smaller firms to adjust to the new rules, Parliament voted to allow Member States to exempt certain regular national services or those where an important part of the service is provided outside the EU, for a maximum of four years, renewable once.

Fundamental rights

At the same time, thanks to MEPs a package of twelve fundamental rights was approved which will apply to all regular services regardless of distance. These rights include information before and during a journey and the needs of people with disabilities or reduced mobility. Non-discriminatory access to transport is guaranteed, with full compensation if wheelchairs or other mobility equipment are lost or damaged.

Staff training

Bus and coach staff must be trained, under the regulation, to provide appropriate assistance to reduced-mobility passengers who make a request at least 36 hours before a departure. If an operator is unable to provide suitable assistance, a reduced-mobility passenger will have the right to be accompanied at no extra cost by a person of his/her choice.

"This agreement is very important for transport and tourism. It embodies a strategic balance, as it protects smaller firms and will make life easier for people with disabilities", said Antonio Cancian (EPP, IT), who steered the legislation through Parliament.

Parliament adopted the legislation today under the co-decision procedure (third reading conciliation agreement) by 504 votes to 63 with 89 abstentions.