

**BRACKNELL FOREST ACCESS GROUP
6 MARCH 2019
7.30 - 8.50 PM**



Present:

Councillor Michael Brossard (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Jan Angell
Councillor Ian Leake

Also Present:

Mrs Isabel Mattick, Red Diamonds

In Attendance:

Anna McCafferty, Assistant Community Services Manager
Bobby Mulheir, Assistant Director: Customer Experience
Samantha Wood, Community Engagement & Equalities Officer

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillor Clifton Thompson
Ray Edwards MBE
Laura Mitchell

98. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes from the meeting of 20 June 2018 were approved as a correct record.

Matters arising from the minutes were:

- Emily Edgar had circulated to the Group usage data of the new Disabled Go App.

Sam Wood updated the Group on the re-branding and usage of Disabled Go.

Disabled Go had been re-branded as AccessAble (accessible.co.uk or via the BFC website) with a new website and App. Users were able to search for venues such as coffee shops, restaurants and leisure sites and learn whether there was level access, the height of tables, whether the venue had background music, etc. Users could download the App and save their personal settings such as 'needs level access' so that future searches were intuitive to their needs.

Sam said the new website would be promoted, including on DORIS and a press release would be issued jointly with The Lexicon. Sam said she would check that a link for AccessAble would be on the Help Yourself website.

(Action: Sam to check link was on the Help Yourself website)

Sam said that the website had 1,254 users and the Access Guides had received 2,267 views with the average time spent on each page of 55 seconds. It was agreed that usage data would form part of all future updates.

Sam informed that it would be possible to add up to 10 new Access Guides to the website per year and asked the Group to advise her if they were aware of any venues which were not yet included.

The Group were advised that the Guides could only be accessed via the website and no printed versions were available.

99. **Update on access to Council services**

Bobby Mulheir gave a presentation on access to Council services.

Bracknell Forest Council's website had met the AA accessibility standard and was tested by The Shaw Trust who were able to advise if something was not working and suggest a fix. Key aspects of digital access included:

- The website was mobile friendly and would automatically re-format, as would the embedded forms, dependent upon what device was being used to access it.
- The website was accessible to those using assistive technology.
- Once a user had created an account, their information was stored and would populate into other forms.
- Householders were able to view their Council Tax account online.
- An easy-read website had been created enabling users to click on the imagery or vocabulary of their desired service.
- The 'Help Yourself' website included a Wellbeing Planner which was aimed at helping those with additional needs.
- The 'Listen' tool had the ability to adjust the volume and stop/start and users could read the text alongside listening to the voice. The voice was computer generated but the Group were advised that it was quite good in terms of replicating the human voice.
- The e+ card could be used for proof of age, as a bus pass as well as for library and leisure membership.
- Users could take part in a live web-chat with a customer services advisor if they ran into difficulties and doing so would not mean they had to abandon the page they were on.

The widely publicised contact centre number – 01344 352000 – received hundreds of calls each day and staff had been trained to deal with callers with autism, sensory needs and dementia. E-mail contact had also proved popular with regard to issuing reminders for things which were due or overdue and had proved more effective than using post. Text messages were also used for overdue payments which had resulted in less people being issued with a Court summons for non-payment of Council Tax, for example.

Payments to the Council could be facilitated by DD, online and pre-paid cards. Work was being undertaken to facilitate payment being made via chip and pin and contactless in the near future.

The use of social media – Facebook, Instagram and Twitter – had increased and allowed customer services staff to monitor traffic and the reasons for using those platforms as well as respond to any issues raised.

In order to increase digital inclusion for those starting at the beginning of using a computer/device and accessing the internet, free courses were being held in libraries and the Open Learning Centre. The courses included basic computer skills, how to

browse the web, sending an e-mail and online safety. The Group were informed that the Good Things Foundation and Silva Homes were also involved in helping those needing to learn basic digital skills.

Self-service kiosks in libraries – which were felt to be easier to navigate than supermarket self-serve terminals – could also be used for paying fines. In the future it was intended that library users would be trained to access their library when it was unmanned – this was already underway in Binfield with 50 registered users and 40 already using the facility. The Group were advised that the self-service kiosks used bar codes and had proved very reliable and could be used to return up to 10 books at a time. Birch Hill and Sandhurst libraries were moving towards extended opening hours and Harmans Water was due to go extended imminently.

The Time Square customer service area had undergone improvements, including:

- The removal of physical barriers to provide more open space and more turning space for those using wheelchairs and scooters.
- Touch-screen computers which could be used by those with no mouse or keyboard skills. The next step could include voice-activated computers that responded to users in the same way as Alexa or Siri, which would be particularly useful for those with additional needs.
- Telephones were available for customers to make internal calls to other departments and services.
- Three meeting rooms were available for confidential contact and 2 areas had been screened off to afford some privacy but also allow for staff to be seen by their colleagues.

Following questions and discussion the following points were noted:

- Customer service staff would not know if someone contacting the Council had a mental health condition, for example, unless that person told the staff member. If that was the case, the staff member may make a note of it for future reference.
- For security purposes, biometric voice recognition would be used so that the voice had to be recognised first before proceeding to the login stage. This would prevent anyone attempting to impersonate someone else.
- The question of security and ethics would be looked into and worked through before voice recognition was introduced.
- It was noted that in the past, simply removing your name from the electoral roll afforded privacy whereas now supermarket loyalty cards, e+ cards and contactless payment cards left behind a footprint of an individual's movements. This made information gathering easier and could lead to identity theft.
- Data suggested that most customers did want the technology available for them to be able to create accounts and access services easily and the next step may be that citizens held their own personal data and gave public services and other institutions the ability to view/permission to share their information.
- In the meantime, only necessary information was asked for and customers were told what their information was used for and how it was stored. Customers could request at any time to have any information held about them removed from the Council's databases.
- Staff had to be trusted and any data breaches would be dealt with; all information security training was undertaken by all staff regularly.

- The majority of information stored about individuals was not linked to other members of their family or household except in the case of those living at the same address for Council Tax purposes and for safeguarding purposes.

Most people did not use cheques anymore to make payments and the use of this method of payment was being phased out. This was due to the fact that there was no longer a cheque guarantee card so the cheque could bounce leading to a delay in revenue receipt, as well as the high cost of processing cheque payments. Payments made by credit or debit card could be received immediately or rejected immediately, reducing the lengthy and expensive process of chasing people for monies owed.

100. **Discussion on car parks during cold weather**

Councillor Mrs Mattick informed that one day during the snow and icy weather she went to Waitrose and found the car park to be sheer ice, so she had to go elsewhere. On speaking to a Manager at Waitrose she was told that the maintenance of their car park was the responsibility of Britannia Parking. Later the same day Mrs Mattick went to the Red Diamond swimming club to find that the disabled area of the leisure centre car park was solid ice. Mrs Mattick said she spoke to the duty manager who told her that because cars were already parked in that area, the sun hadn't reached that part of the ground in order to melt the ice. The duty manager then proceeded to cone the area off but as it was by then 6pm it was too late to make a difference and Mrs Mattick felt it should have been coned off as soon as the first staff member arrived on duty.

Mrs Mattick said the following day she spoke to the Council about what had occurred and they gave her the phone number for the HSE. When she went back to Waitrose they told her they had complained to Britannia but when she told them she had the number for the HSE they then came back to her and said the responsibility for the car park did in fact sit with Waitrose. It was noted that Waitrose had grit bins and therefore the car park should have been gritted.

Discussion took place that it was difficult for the leisure centre to do anything about icy conditions on the ground if cars were already parked, however, it was agreed that whoever was first on shift should cone off the affected areas so that people didn't have a chance to park on them and that they would deal with the dips in the ground as they said they would. It was noted that Everyone Active were not responsible for the car park at the leisure centre.

Bobby said she would consider how these issues could be monitored and recorded in the future.

(Action: Bobby Mulheir)

101. **Any Other Business**

Councillor Mrs Mattick said she was disappointed at the turnout for the Access Group meeting and wondered whether it was due to the change made to the original date of the meeting. It was noted that previous meetings had always been much better attended and it was proposed that the Group were consulted about what they would like to see on the agenda prior to each meeting.

It was discussed that the Terms of Reference for the Group should be reviewed to clarify the purpose and relevance of the meetings and what was hoped to be achieved by holding them. However, the Group all agreed that the meetings did have value. Councillor Leake said Health and Safety was embedded in the management of the function and likewise Accessibility should be the same with no subject being treated as distinct from another. Councillor Mrs Mattick said she would like the

meetings to be about information sharing and to include people who used the services.

Sam suggested future meetings could be conducted more along the lines of a forum as opposed to a formal meeting with representatives of organisations attending in order to give their views.

102. **Items for Future Meetings**

No items were suggested for future meetings.