

DISABILITY ACCESS ADVISORY PANEL 21 NOVEMBER 2023



Present:

Councillors Brown, Collings, Purnell, Robertson and C Thompson
Philip Bell, Involve
Andrea McCombie-Parker, The Ark

1. Welcome and Introductions

Attendees were welcomed to the meeting and given a chance to introduce themselves.

It was noted that:

- By working together, the group could make changes for the better with the people of the borough, invite guest speakers and facilitate learning.
- Councillors were already supporting people with disabilities and anything that could be done to address issues for people living with disabilities would be brilliant.
- The meeting relaunches the Disability Advisory and Access Panel with a new membership, and Terms of Reference.

2. Apologies

No apologies were received however a number of council officers who are part of the membership were not invited to this first meeting and will be sent the invitation to the March meeting.

3. The Role of the Panel

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The Panel reviewed and discussed the groups Terms of Reference and membership. The main points of discussion on each item were:

Item 1 - Terms of Reference

Subject to the following amendments:

- Visible and invisible disabilities to be included as there are a lot of people who have a disability that you cannot see.
- There are other disability forums, and a link should be made those, such as the Learning Disability Partnership Board.

- The purpose of the group would be facilitating the voice of people with disabilities to be heard and as an access and advisory body on issues related to disability and access.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Terms of Reference would be confirmed.

Item 2 - Membership of the panel

The Partnership reviewed and discussed the membership. The main points of discussion were:

- Many trustees of the Ark Trust CIC had disabilities; it was agreed that two representatives would represent the Ark Trust CIC on the panel; Andrea plus a trustee with a disability.
- **ACTION** – Andrea to forward contact details of a Trustee nominated.
- Reasonable Adjustments would be offered to any panel member to enable them to fully participate in meetings.
- **Action** – Panel to inform Harjit Hunjan should any panel member require reasonable adjustments.
- To be equitable, for the first meeting Involve and Bracknell Forest Council had put out a general invitation as an opportunity for VCS groups to join the Panel.
- There had been some expressions of interest received (Everyone Active and Support Horizons CIC), however no direct approaches had been made to specific groups. Involve would be happy to do so going forward if required.
- The voice of carers could be covered by the Ark Trust CIC/Signal for Carers.
- **Action** – Involve would maintain an ongoing 'live' invitation for disability representative groups and other interested parties to join the panel until other organisations come forward.
- There may be some capacity issues for smaller user led VCS groups to join the forum.
- Council meetings generally were held in the evening to allow working colleagues and Councillors to attend. It was noted that for some smaller groups early afternoon would be the best time. Some disability groups may also not want to meet at night-time.
- **Action** – Panel members to feedback to Harjit and Abby views on the timing of future meetings.
- It was important to offer a hybrid meeting option to extend the invitation to more groups.

4. **Resident Engagement Event(s) to Inform Priorities for the Group**

The group agreed that an annual resident engagement event should be held with people with disabilities so that they could raise issues and inform the priorities of the group.

Several points were raised in the discussion:

- Was the council aware of issues that people with disabilities and those struggling with communication faced accessing council and services?
- The Ark Trust CIC had undertaken internal access audits and implemented measures to improve accessibility. Some improvements had benefited one group but had a negative

impact on another. It was sometimes about making small changes.

- The council was not aware of all the people in the borough with disabilities as they tended to interact only if eligible for services and the threshold was quite high.
- The panel should involve colleagues from health as they have access to GPs /records and can put out text messages to people that are flagged and coded on their system. Action: Harjit to discuss further with Abby/Heema/Grainne to identify who to invite to join the panel and attend the March meeting.
- The Primary Care Networks each have a business manager or coordinators working on specific areas that can be approached.
- Some people with disabilities found it difficult to access services, may not have people to help them, needed to be braver and learn how to ask for help and were frustrated if they were disadvantaged in being able to access services.
- The Ark Trust CIC was working with Frimley ICB on flagging reasonable adjustment on the notes of people with autism. These may not be what is expected and are dependent on the needs of people. A user group was being set up to help with the consultation.
- A resident event annually would be a good opportunity for hearing directly the voice of people with disabilities and their experiences would be unique to them and even established groups did represent the views of all people with disabilities.
- The Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Community Cohesion are very keen to give people the opportunity to raise their issues.
- An event could be structured to be either thematic e.g., access to the town centre, transport, or an opportunity to raise general issues. It was up to the panel to shape it.
- A good example of an inclusive event was one held in Easthampstead Baptist Church in 2011 that focused on plans for the development of the new town centre and led to some real changes made.
- There may be some unifying themes for an event e.g., socialising the new council plan or the first meeting could be more generic breaking into groups to hear about the local issues to be developed in future events.
- In terms of location, this would have to be an accessible central location. Some people may have negative feelings about the Time Square as venue if they have had social care experiences.
- Bracknell Leisure Centre or the Open Learning Centres maybe more suitable venues but would need to have hybrid technology.
- A BSL signer should present even if not specifically requested.
- The event could ask for volunteers to help with Access Guide surveys e.g., accessibility of car parks or participate in mystery shopping.
- An area of focus could be looking at the accessibility of local green spaces for people with disabilities.
- The availability of public toilets was an issue for older people and those with disabilities restricting access to some places/venues.
- **Action** - The planning for the event could start after Christmas. Abby and Harjit to identify suitable venues.

5. Items for Future Meetings

The Panel reviewed and discussed items for future meetings. The main points of discussion on each item were:

- Employment and Citizenship Supportive
- Volunteering opportunities and programmes

6. **AOB**

- An issue was raised about the Learning Disability and Autism Partnership Board. There may be a cohort of people who are not represented and there may need to be two separate boards created.

7. **Date of Next Meeting: 20 March 2024, 7.30 pm**

20 March 2024, time to be confirmed.

CHAIRMAN