

DISABILITY AND INCLUSION FORUM

Monday 12 December 2022

Present: Angela Clark (Chairman), Lisa Hughes (Vice-Chairman) and Peter Haley

Present virtually: Sharon Bunce, Tim Clare, Dominic Manley, Robin Pemberton, Habibah Tariq, Jatinder Singh Rakhra, Victoria Holt and Councillors John Bowden and Gurpreet Bhangra

Also in attendance: Councillor Samantha Rayner

Also in attendance virtually: Councillors Mandy Brar, Helen Price and Donna Stimson

Officers: Becky Oates, Ellen McManus-Fry, Julia White, Wendy Allum and Kirsty Hunt

Officers in attendance virtually: Anna Murphy, Chelsea Bridges and Daniel Crampton

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed all to the Forum.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Ian Brazier-Dubber, who was due to present on agenda item 'Maidenhead Regeneration'.

MINUTES FROM THE LAST FORUM

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting on 3 October 2022 be agreed as a true and accurate record.

ACCESS ABLE

Julia White, Visitor Manager, stated that the Visit Windsor partnership was a partnership of the leisure, tourism and hospitality businesses across the borough, primarily in membership for the marketing benefits that Visit Windsor could offer. There was a partnership board that was headed by Chris French until December 2022 and would be headed up by Nick Day of the Crown Estate as Chair from January 2023 onwards.

In January 2022, Visit Windsor received a presentation from the divisional director of Legoland to detail the work that had been ongoing to make their rides more accessible. Andrew Douglas from Parallel Lifestyle also attended the same meeting, with the organisation bringing Parallel Windsor to Windsor Great Park in 2023. There was a large amount of work ongoing that needed to be promoted as this was something that hadn't happened in several years. Funding had been received as part of the welcome back funding through the covid response and recovery scheme, a proportion of which was being used on access information. RBWM had gone out to tender to find a company to deliver this project, which had been carried out by AccessAble.

More funding would be received through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, with the aim of developing access guides for Maidenhead and Ascot. In 2023, work to promote Windsor and Maidenhead as good destinations to visit would be underway.

Julia White stated that as her position sat within the economic growth team, one of her colleagues worked with employment schemes. This work was being joined up with looking at how the borough could work with different groups in order to enable residents with disabilities to join enjoyable or gainful employment. This included working alongside Parallel Lifestyle, with the Parallel events serving as an opportunity for businesses to showcase employment opportunities.

David Waterman, Senior Partnerships Manager at AccessAble, gave a presentation of the access guides to the Forum.

David Waterman described the background of AccessAble. Gregory Burke, the founder of the company, found himself a new wheelchair user after a stay in hospital. He noted that he didn't feel disabled while in hospital or at home – it was when he went out into society that he found difficulties with accessibility in places such as restaurants. After consulting with disability groups, the first guide was launched in 2002.

One of the particular issues with accessibility was the 'death of spontaneity', which was an issue that AccessAble were trying to solve. This referred to being unable to just show up at a restaurant, hotel, theme park etc without first consulting that it would be accessible.

The access guides had over 1000 pieces of information per building, which was information that was completely objective about the accessibility of a building. This included data such as the width of doors or the distance from the front door to reception. Over 100 engagement visits were conducted every year, in person, to gain feedback on the access guides. The guide for Windsor was now live on the website, with the guide for Eton being currently quality checked.

The access guides had many accessibility features which enabled users with disabilities to navigate the pages more frequently. The guides themselves had a number of filters which users were able to select in order to find information about issues that were relevant to themselves, such as level access, blue badge parking or accessible toilets.

The Chair thanked David for the presentation and for making the effort to drive down from Lincolnshire to present to the forum. The Chair asked if it was possible to suggest to businesses which were not accessible that this needed to change.

David Waterman explained that there was a cost to setting up these access guides. One of the key issues he noted was that 80-90% of disabled people had left a venue that they were hoping to visit due to access information being wrong or facing some kind of access issue. AccessAble spoke to as many businesses as possible to explain these issues and ways to rectify these. Unfortunately, not all areas would see the benefits of access guides straight away.

Lisa Hughes, Vice-Chair, echoed the Chair's thanks and stated that she had had the opportunity to view the access guide for Saville Garden which was great. Lisa Hughes stated that these facts were hugely important and gave people the confidence to go out and spend money at local businesses.

Lisa Hughes asked David Waterman if RBWM or the venue themselves were able to go in and amend information within the guides, or if this had to come through AccessAble.

David Waterman stated that this came through AccessAble, but was an easy exercise to conduct. Third parties were able to email AccessAble if something simple had changed, but if something physical had changed, this would need to be re-surveyed as it was important to be as objective as possible.

Dominic Manley stated that this was very pleasing as back in 2019, conversations between the Forum and AccessAble had been ongoing, but these were put on the backburner due to

Covid. He was pleased to see that these guides had been created and applauded the amount of work that had gone into them.

Councillor Rayner thanked the forum for its help in producing these access guides. The forum had opened her eyes to the possibilities and the opportunities within the borough about what could be achieved through allowing accessibility in a better way.

Councillor Price stated that she was conscious that a number of residents were elderly but may not consider themselves to be disabled. She asked if this information could be widely disseminated to all residents as it would be helpful to all.

Julia White explained that an official launch was planned for February 2023, which involved a communication plan in order to ensure that connections were made between the AccessAble, RBWM and Windsor.Gov websites.

Councillor Price asked how people would be able to access this information if they didn't use the internet.

Julia White stated that the event would be held in person at Windsor Castle, with information being shared through the borough's communication channels, as well as AccessAble's marketing team. The guides could be accessed from libraries for residents who didn't use the phone or internet.

Councillor Bowden explained that many of Windsor's accessibility issues related to the historic nature of the town.

Julia White stated that the information on the Windsor.Gov made it clear that Windsor had inherent problems with many buildings have some kind of issue with accessibility. A difference could be made by working with people who worked in local businesses to change their attitudes and build their confidence when it came to making a difference to somebody's visit.

David Waterman added that the point of the access guides was not just to point out accessible buildings, but to let people know what the accessibility of a building was like before going, so they could make a decision for themselves.

YOUNG CARER'S SERVICE

Sarah Collin, Project Manager at Family Action Carers, gave a presentation to the forum about the work that the organisation undertook as a commissioned service from the local authority.

Family Action was a national organisation which had a range of projects including children and family services across the entire country. The Young Carer's service worked hard to ensure that the needs of families were fully understood. A young carer was defined by someone under the age of 18 who helped to look after someone at home in their family who was ill, disabled, or misused drugs or alcohol. Data from the 2011 Census indicated that there were 177,000 young carers in the UK, though this data may be unreliable as most families wouldn't recognise the label of carer. Furthermore, children wouldn't be filling out the census which meant they would not have the opportunity to self-identify.

Further research had found that one in five school-aged children took on a caring role at home. In a borough the size of Windsor and Maidenhead, this would equate to around 6000 children.

The UK was a global leader in terms of recognising young carers and offering support. Rights were given to young carers and their families under the Children and Families Act 2014, the Care Act 2014, the Health and Care Act 2022 and the Equality Act 2010. With regards to the role of local authorities, the Children and Families Act 2014 stated that local authorities must identify young carers in their area and access and identify the support needs of young carers.

RBWM had a carer's needs steering group, which had members from Optalis, NHS Frimley, NHS Berkshire Foundation Trust and Achieving for Children among others. This group met bi-monthly to talk through the needs of carers within the borough.

Family Action had three main key performance indicators (KPIs) that were reported back to the local authority every quarter – the young carer friendly community, young carer assessment and the offer of support. In terms of the assessment stage, Family Action had an open-door referral route which means that young people were able to self-refer, as well as any agency, educational provider or healthcare organisation being able to refer.

Assessment itself was a two-stage process. The first stage was to meet with the family in order to recognise the carer's role and establish what the young carer was doing and how they were providing practical care. The second stage was to look at the impact that this had on the young carer themselves in terms of physical and emotional health, education and finances.

After the assessment was complete, Family Action created a support action plan based on the carer's role and the impact this had on their lives. Post-assessment, young carers were offered six one-to-one sessions which gave them the space to explore what being a young carer meant.

The Chair thanked Sarah for the presentation and stated her surprise that there may be up to 6,000 young carers in RBWM but was reassured to hear the ways in which they were being supported.

Lisa Hughes thanked Sarah and asked if there were any statistics on the number of young carers that had been identified in the borough.

Sarah Collin explained that Family Action's target was to have three referrals per calendar month, but this was normally exceeded by double. Looking back through their database, Family Action had around 300 young carers registered. There were many barriers in place which prevented young carers being referred to the service, one of which was parental consent.

Lisa Hughes stated that it would be important to include the needs of young carers in the Children and Young Person's strategy which was being developed as part of the Integrated Health and Care Partnership between NHS Frimley and RBWM, and she would bring this up as she was part of the task and transition team.

SAFEGUARDING

Daniel Crampton, Safety Assurance Manager, introduced himself to the Forum and explained how his role involved managing the safeguarding partnerships in Windsor and Maidenhead. These partnerships included key professions and individuals within these professions such as the police, Achieving for Children and Optalis.

Daniel Crampton explained how going forward, the service would like its work to be better co-produced so would welcome the participation of forum members to talk about the most important objectives regarding safeguarding.

Chelsea Bridges, Assurance and Policy Officer, stated that her role was to oversee and ensure that the borough was ready for the Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspections which were being introduced as part of central government's reform of adult health and social care.

The framework for the inspection was still in draft format, but it would be available to be shared once finalised. The inspection regime was due to begin in April 2023, and the borough was aiming to become ready by using a series of quality assurances, self-assessments and

good governance by attending forums such as this one. Chelsea Bridges offered to return to the forum to provide updates on how things were progressing.

Daniel Crampton explained how work had been ongoing with RBWM Youth Council in order to make sure the language used on the safeguarding partnership website was straightforward and easy to understand. The website was available at www.rbwmsafeguardingpartnership.org.uk. The annual report would be published in time for the New Year, which would be available to read.

The Chair thanked Daniel and Chelsea for their time and stated that it would be very helpful if they could return to the March forum.

Councillor Stimson asked if any issues in housing associations would fall under the remit of Daniel's team.

Daniel Crampton stated that any concerns would be passed on to the relevant body. In many instances issues didn't fall directly under one team's remit, so this would result in many people working together to manage any safeguarding incidents.

2023 LOCAL ELECTION PROVISIONS

Kirsty Hunt, Service Lead for Electoral and Democratic Services gave a presentation on the provisions that were being brought in by the UK government to make changes to the oversight of the Electoral Commission. Elements of the Elections Act 2022 were being introduced in various phases.

The two main issues that were relevant to the forum were improving accessibility at polling stations, and new voter ID requirements. There was a national campaign ongoing from central government to explain the new voter ID requirements. In addition, while there had been significant improvements in the voting experience for people with disabilities, there was still more to be done.

Photographic ID would be a requirement to vote at polling stations going forward. For those who didn't have any form of photographic ID, a Voter Authority Certificate would be made available by applying through a central government website which would be launched in January 2023. In addition, outreach opportunities would be offered for any community groups who would struggle to use the internet to apply for the Voter Authority Certificate. The regulations had always required returning officers (ROs) to provide certain devices such as chairs, magnifiers, large pencils and pencil grips. The Elections Act 2022 had not detailed specific requirements, but instead stated that reasonable adjustments would need to be made, including additional training for staff.

Kirsty Hunt asked if there were any particular issues that had been missed off with regards to making polling stations more accessible, and any ways that the experience could be improved.

Regarding polling place reviews, Kirsty Hunt explained that this looked at identifying suitable places and alternative venues to vote. The next review was due to start in October 2023, and it would be useful to ascertain any issues in existing venues in order to find remedies for these issues.

The Chair thanked Kirsty for the presentation and stated that postal voting would be a useful alternative for those who didn't have voter ID.

Kirsty Hunt echoed these comments and stated that it was a matter of trying to strike a balance so that voting in person would be easy for all.

Peter Haley asked what would happen if someone arrived at a polling station to vote but had forgotten their ID.

Kirsty Hunt stated that voters would be encouraged to return home and collect their ID. Across the country, polling stations would be asked to keep a record of the volumes of people who didn't bring ID with them. People would not be allowed to vote if they had forgotten their ID.

Lisa Hughes stated that she was pleased when reading through the Elections Act 2022 as previous acts had not included provisions for accessible voting. She stated that she lived in Furze Platt, and her previous polling place had been a Scout hut. There were multiple issues with this polling place, including parking and entering the front door, which could have been largely solved by staff awareness and training. In addition, people with learning disabilities and autistic people were probably less likely to have a form of Voter ID, so it was important to ensure that these people were able to participate.

Kirsty Hunt thanked Lisa Hughes for her comments and stated that training would be one of the key elements in making sure that everyone was prepared. With regards to any specific issues with polling stations, people could email Kirsty at Kirsty.Hunt@RBWM.gov.uk to feed these issues back into the elections team.

Councillor Price raised concerns with the polling place on Gratton Drive, St. Leonard's Hill. The polling station was a portacabin on a private road with no lighting and poor condition of the road.

Kirsty Hunt explained that the team were always keen to hear of alternatives as portacabins were used in certain places if there were no good alternatives.

Wendy Allum, Electoral Services Team Leader stated that a full review occurred every five years, in which all venues were visited. Wendy Allum welcomed any suggestions for alternative venues.

Councillor Price asked if any of these visits occurred in the dark as this was a time when particular issues became more prominent.

Kirsty Hunt stated that the time of day that a venue was visited was crucial and welcomed any volunteers from the forum to attend visits as they may be able to highlight particular issues.

Victoria Holt stated that she was pleased to hear that people with carers were being supported. Victoria Holt explained that she worked with adults with a learning disability and additional physical disabilities, and asked Kirsty Hunt if she could share her details with Caroline Waites, a colleague who chaired the Advocacy People.

Sharon Bunce stated that she would be happy to attend any venue visits. In addition, she asked if the process for applying for a Voter Authority Certificate could be explained in more detail to the forum.

Kirsty Hunt stated that the programme to deliver this was running slightly behind schedule and was due to be launched in January 2023, after which she would be able to provide more detail.

Dominic Manley suggested that polling stations could be included in the AccessAble guides.

The Chair thanked Kirsty and Wendy for their time and welcomed them back to the March forum.

MAIDENHEAD REGENERATION

Ian Brazier-Dubber, Managing Director of RBWM Property Company gave his apologies to the forum.

The Chair stated that she had concerns over the provision of parking spaces for patient at two GP surgeries as there were only 20 spaces which was not enough. She urged Councillor Coppinger and Councillor Haseler as cabinet members of adult services and planning respectively to look at this issue.

Councillor Stimson explained that as Ward Councillor, she would talk with Ian to see what could be done, as this was an important issue to solve.

Dominic Manley asked if Neil Walter, Parking Principal, could be approached on this issue.

The Chair stated that she believed that this car park was no longer so may not fall under Neil Walter's remit.

Councillor Price stated that Rebecca Hatch, Head of Strategy, would be a good option as she was responsible for equalities.

Ellen McManus-Fry, Equalities and Community Engagement Officer, stated that she would take this way to see if any conversations could be held from an equality standpoint.

RESIDENTS' SURVEY

Anna Murphy, Policy and Projects Officer, gave a presentation to the Forum on the Residents Survey which was carried out in July and August 2022. Of those surveyed, 15% of respondents had their day-to-day activities limited by a health condition or illness.

Overall, residents' perceptions of the council were relatively high, and were higher than the Local Government Association (LGA) benchmark. However, there were discrepancies within the residents who lived in Maidenhead, those not in work and those with a disability, as these groups showed lower satisfaction across the three key metrics measured in the survey. 17% of respondents indicated that they would not use online services, and those less likely to use online services included those not working and those with a disability.

The quality of parks and open spaces and access to nature were the top two responses when asked what made the area a good place to live. Disabled residents were the least likely to say it was easy to access green spaces, with concerns about mobility, a lack of parking and not being able to visit without a car being cited as the key barriers.

The top five areas for improvement were focused on transport, waste and high streets. RBWM residents had a strong sense of community, though groups who had lower engagement in community activity included those who were disabled.

One of the key concerns emerging from this piece of work that was likely to be explored further was isolation and loneliness. 12% of respondents stated that they always felt lonely, with 26% of those with a disability stating that they felt lonely always.

With regards to mental health and life satisfaction, 85% of respondents indicated a high level of satisfaction. However, high satisfaction scores were less common among respondents who were finding it difficult financially (54%) or living with a health condition (61%).

Overall, respondents who had their activities limited due to health conditions or illness indicated that they had lower rates of life and local area satisfaction and higher rates of loneliness. Additionally, they had lower rates of community engagement.

The Chair thanked Anna for the presentation but stated her concerns that the survey was not representative of RBWM as a whole.

Councillor Price stated that this information was very helpful when looking at moving towards being an evidence-based borough. When looking at this survey in conjunction with the Corporate Plan and the current budget, it was important to ensure that these were reflective of each other. Councillor Price urged forum members to look at the budget proposal and contribute to the consultation.

Dominic Manley stated that he shared the Chair's concerns and was shocked at how low loneliness was and how high satisfaction was within the borough. Dominic Manley asked what statistical significance the survey had.

Anna Murphy explained that the market research agency that conducted the survey worked to a particular standard with a code of conduct, and would have worked from an appropriate sample size to extrapolate data from. The financial context since the survey was conducted would have changed, and it was important to note that these surveys were indicative rather than being completely accurate. The survey was conducted through random sampling, with the majority being conducted through telephone calls. A small number of face to face interviews also took place. A questionnaire was designed, with professional interviewers asking these questions and having these conversations.

Sharon Bunce asked for more information on why people with disabilities stated that they were unable to visit green spaces without using a car, as she wanted to know if these issues included pavement access and public transport.

Anna Murphy stated that within the survey, some questions only appeared if the previous question was answered in a certain way. With regards to specific reasoning, Anna Murphy stated that she would be able to come back on this point.

The Chair highlighted that the borough had received £587,000 from the government's household support fund to help residents facing severe financial hardship, with around £300,000 going towards helping people who were making difficult choices over household expenditure such as between heating and eating. If any resident needed help, they should contact the borough.

The Chair thanked all for attending and stated that the next forum meeting would be held on Monday 13th March.

The meeting, which began at 11.00 am, finished at 1.15 pm

Chair.....

Date.....