

# LAMBETH PAN DISABILITY FORUM (LPDF)

## “GETTING OUR VOICE HEARD”

### REPORT OF AN OPEN MEETING HELD ON

MONDAY 9<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 2015

#### Key speakers - Open Session

**Sean McGovern - Chair (LPDF)** gave an overview of the work of the Forum. In recent years it has struggled to gain momentum and is actively looking to increase membership and for skilled people to become additional committee members.

**Roger Lewis – Treasurer (LPDF)** has over 20 year’s experience of campaigning for the rights of disabled people through movements such as “Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC)” and “Rights Not Charity”. Despite legislation such as the Disability Discrimination Act and the Equality Act, disabled people are increasingly facing harassment and discrimination and hate crime incidents have increased.

As well as discrimination, disabled people are less valued, and they are facing cuts in critical services such as housing and street maintenance, as well as social care. The aim of today is to share experiences, skills and to re-launch the LPDF.

**Lianna Etkind - Campaigns and Outreach Coordinator (Transport For All)** Transport for All (TfA) has been championing the cause of accessible transport in the capital for over two decades. TFA was formerly known as Dial-A-Ride and Taxi-card users (DaRT) and was formed through the amalgamation of the user groups of these two services.

London now has the largest wheelchair accessible and inclusive bus fleet in Europe. However there are still many issues for disabled passengers e.g at tube stations only one in four has step free access. On 10<sup>th</sup> March they will be visiting Stockwell Bus Garage to speak to staff. TFA has seven demands which they will put to Parliamentary candidates leading up to the May 2015 Election. They also want to involve users in influencing future provision of the Taxicard service which is up for contract renewal in Autumn 2015.

#### Operation Disabled Vote (ODV)

Lianna spoke on behalf of Ellen Clifford (inclusion London) who is involved in coordinating ODV. This came out of the Operation Black Vote campaign and is aimed at disabled people in the UK. It tackles issues related to inclusion, access and benefits. Voter registration has changed since the last election. Registration is now recorded individually and not by household, so there is a risk of someone dropping off the voting list.

Research carried out by Mencap shows that 17% of learning disability voters were turned away from polling stations. There have also been issues about blind people being able to vote without a proxy as they have to place an X on the paper. There are reports of physically disabled people who have been told to vote in the street because of step barriers (ODV cards were circulated amongst the audience).

### **David Strong - Director Disability Advice Service Lambeth (DASL) Hate Crime**

This is a big issue which is under-reported. It can include abusive language, name calling, harassment, bullying, physical and other violence. Work with adults with learning disabilities (such as the Big Police Day) is being done by Healthwatch Lambeth Hidden Voices project and the Lambeth Learning Disability Assembly (supported by Voiceability) but this needs to be broadened out. The Lambeth Council Hate Crime Prevention Coordinator (Mark Healey) is leading work across the five hate crime strands. A well-attended event (Disability Hate Crime Workshop) took place in October. Key issues people told us included: Bad experiences / attitudes, lack of awareness, barriers to reporting and there is a need for training of the police and other professionals and joined up services.

The Disability Hate Crime Partnership was formed out of this workshop. The groups involved, working with Mark, are: DASL, We are 336, Age UK Lambeth, Lambeth Mencap, Healthwatch Lambeth, Certitude, the Metropolitan Police and Victim Support. The Lambeth Pan Disability forum (LPDF) is a key member. Work is happening towards developing a Disability Hate Crime Reporting Centre at 336 Brixton Road. A recent funding application has been submitted by DASL on behalf of the Partnership to the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) Victims of Crime Fund.

### **Key issues from the floor**

- § 1. A participant said she had no help from the Council with her late husband who was a wheelchair user. She raised concern about the cut in Council services. She suggested getting volunteers to be wheelchair pushers e.g. The young and old could work together. Look at using retired nurses to provide personal care.
- § Sean responded that the Lambeth Pan Disability Forum welcomes people attending meetings to help to develop ideas.
- § 2. The housing crisis is getting worse and many disabled people don't feature on Council and government records.
- § Sean advised that all these policy issues should be collated and presented to the Council.
- § 3. The Blue Badge application and renewal system is unclear and it is bad that the charge has increased to £10. There is a lack of clear information.
- § Sean - Lack of information is the same across the Council and it is compounded by the navigation difficulties and lack of information on the new Council website.

- § Lianna Etkind (Transport For ALL) confirmed TFA provides an advice and information service Monday to Friday (10.00 – 5.00 pm) and can also answer questions about Blue Badge and Freedom Pass issues. They can also take up complaints.
- § 4. Concern was raised about parked cars on pavements as a dangerous hazard to disabled pedestrians and wheelchair users.
- § 5. The new Transport For London (TFL) Journey planner is worse than the previous version.

Marsha De Cordova (SELVIS) re-stated the importance of all the information identified as being needed by disabled people being available in accessible formats. Thomas Pocklington Trust has a befriending service for visually impaired people and can share good practice.

Sean reminded the meeting that the Forum was for people from all impairment groups and that it wanted to work closely with other user-led disability groups to increase impact and build a stronger voice.

## Feedback from workshops

Four discussion groups spent time talking about key issues and fed back key points:

### Workshop A

- § **Community Transport** – reduction in the level of community transport has led to disabled people being unable leave the home and get out and about to events. Would like to see more community transport and escort provision being offered by the council.
- § **Personal Assistant (PA) pay rate** - The hourly pay rate for PA's should be increased to the Living Wage and there should be an enhanced pay rate for weekend work. Have a campaign to get the Lambeth Council to increase the current hourly pay rate of all PA's.
- § **Access to goods and services** – All restaurant, bars, coffee shops and other service providers should be fully accessible to disabled people i.e. food and drink menus available in alternative formats such as large print or Braille.

### Workshops B and C

- § **Streetcare issues** and Council services are big areas for complaints e.g. The Council bin men should return dustbins to their locations rather than leaving them on the pavements. Some roads have many overhanging trees e.g. Poplar Walk. Dogs mess is getting worse and is a nuisance for disabled people.
- § **Buses and transport** – i) Drivers need training particularly when they change over. li) Bus stop layouts and not good in some cases when a disabled person

has to get off the bus. Iii) Going into tube stations is difficult. Iv) It may help to have a picture of a guide dog in an appropriate area of the bus.

§ Improvements are required for public transport e.g. Road safety, buggies on buses. There need to be more beeping traffic lights. Have penalties for cyclists going through red lights.

§ Have **accessible information and co-production**.

## **Workshop D**

**Housing** is a big issue e.g:

§ The lack of affordable housing

§ There need to be rent controls, protection against eviction

§ Many transfer offers are unsuitable for disabled people.

§ Repairs are not done properly e.g. Wet rooms and adaptations. Now that Lambeth Living is being taken back in house we need to see if housing management and allocations and repairs improve.

§ The Forum should think about what housing issues it wants to raise with the Council and send a delegation to meet the Cabinet member.

**Schools** can be problematic regarding physical access. It can be stressful for disabled parents to travel long distances to schools out of the area. There is evidence that schools cherry pick students to boost their exam results which is discriminatory against students who need additional support.

**Social Services support** is problematic e.g.

§ Only in cases of desperate need such as a fall or hospitalisation do you come on their radar.

§ There is lack of contact between social workers and clients. SW reviews often produce inaccurate information.

§ Closure of day services means remaining provision is not local (eg of person's elderly mother having to travel from Stockwell to Central Hill)

§ People wanted to know more about what Aspire Wellbeing (formerly Lambeth Resource Centre, West Norwood) can offer disabled people.

**Living income and benefits** are problematic.

§ Impact of Government welfare reform

§ Problems with local benefits administration (eg Housing Benefit)

§ Limited employment and training opportunities for disabled people. As an employer the Council could do more and it could also influence local businesses to pay London Living Wage.

The Election Hustings should ask questions about some of these issues

## **Building the Lambeth Pan-Disability Forum**

Feedback included ideas for how the Forum should work:

- § Not everyone can come to meetings – these people may have different issues which also need campaigning on.
- § What about people who can't fight their own corner (could the Forum develop self-advocacy training and support?)
- § Look for other campaigning groups (local, in nearby boroughs, London, national) to work with or get its members involved in (eg Disabled People Against the Cuts)
- § The Forum must give plenty of notice of its meetings so members can plan ahead
- § Make sure the Forum's membership details include people's preferred method of communication.,

### **Summary - next steps**

Sean Mc Govern said there are plans for the LPDF to organise a Hustings / Question Time prior to Election. The suggested format is to enable people to ask whatever they want. It would probably be late March/early April. Anyone interested in helping to plan this could contact Cathi Blake in Age UK Lambeth.

After Question time an open meeting of the LPDF will be convened to form a committee.

In the meantime, people should publicise the Forum and encourage more disabled people to join.

Participants were thanked for attending