

Public Disability Meeting

11 May 2009
Review



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Objective of the event

The objective of the meeting was to involve local disabled people in preparing the new Disability Equality Scheme (DES) by identifying priorities and actions. The new DES will run from 2009-2012 and go across three organisations: Herefordshire Council, Herefordshire Primary Care Trust (PCT), and Hereford Hospitals Trust.



Who was there?

Around 35 members of the public attended the event, most of whom were disabled. There were also carers, and some people representing local disability organisations.

The 22 officers who attended the event were either speaking, helping to scribe or facilitate, or representing a particular Council or Health service. The service areas represented included:

- Property Services
- Corporate Diversity Team
- Information & Communications Technology
- Human Resources
- Hereford Hospital
- Primary Care Trust
- Social Care
- Sports Development
- Public Transport
- Education and Lifelong Learning
- Learning Disability Team
- Housing

The speakers

Councillor Mrs June French, the Deputy Leader of Herefordshire Council, opened the event. She said that this meeting was an opportunity for disabled people to tell us how to improve Council and NHS Herefordshire services, and also to talk directly to staff who provide public services.

Annie Faulder, Deputy Chief Executive of Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire, emphasised the commitment of Herefordshire Public Services to disability equality.

Harriet Yellin (Diversity Officer, Herefordshire Council), looked back at the 2006-2009 DES, and listed some of the actions which have been successfully completed.

Carol Trachonitis (Equality & Diversity Manager, Herefordshire Council) told people about the process for putting together the new DES, and that it will be published in November. She asked people to come up with practical ideas for what Herefordshire Public Services could do to improve services for disabled people, but emphasised that we can't do everything because we have to prioritise funds. Also that some issues which are important to disabled people cannot be enforced by us, such as enforcing the Disability Discrimination Act in private businesses.

Tony Featherstone, Chair of the Council's Disability Working Group, talked about the meeting which was held in Withington in March. At that meeting, the delegates (who were invited representatives of local disability organisations) came up with the following priorities:

1. Transport
2. Toilets
3. Training
4. Attitudes
5. Inclusive Communities & Services



Workshop 1

What specific, practical steps could Herefordshire Public Services take to improve Herefordshire for disabled people, based on the 5 proposed priorities above?

Some of the suggestions for improvements were:

- Put on accessible buses between Newton Farm and the city centre.
- Reduce the cost of parking at the hospital.
- Consider using loading bays as disabled parking bays outside regular delivery hours.
- Provide specialist public toilet facilities (eg. "changing places") 24 hours a day in market towns.
- Improve signage for public toilets.
- Introduce disability equality training into schools.
- Hospital staff need to listen to patients' needs, and read information about them when it's provided.
- Council should proactively celebrate good practice in public and private sectors.

Workshop 2

Some of the suggestions were:

- GPs to advertise that longer appointment times are available if people need them.
- Improve the wheelchair service by cutting down on waiting times, and reviewing if a new wheelchair is needed, rather than just altering the existing one.
- Public services to remember that not everyone has access to a computer, so need to consider how to make information and services available to everyone.
- Hospital to get some electric wheelchairs for people to borrow while there.

What other challenges do you face in your day-to-day life, and what could Herefordshire Public Services do to make things better?

What are the main issues?

Tony Featherstone challenged each group to come up with one big idea each which could make a big difference to their lives. The ideas were:

1. Put all bus drivers on disability awareness training.
2. Increase independence, eg. access to a social life, where you live and who with. Networking for disabled people such as starting a paper Facebook.
3. Challenge discriminatory or uncaring behaviour by both staff and public.
4. Tackle isolation.
5. Build an inclusive community; a society where equality is real and diversity celebrated.
6. Whatever is decided upon, make sure that officers are accountable for their actions and that good intentions are followed up on, and that actions are reported to stakeholders. DELIVER!



These ideas largely match the priorities which came out of the meeting in March, so there is already a clear focus for our Scheme.

What happens now?

1. A draft Disability Equality Scheme will be written. This will incorporate feedback which we have received at this event, at the March meeting, through public and employee questionnaires, and through other channels.
2. It's important to remember that some of the actions recorded are not within the power of Herefordshire Public Services to change, but we will use our influence wherever possible to make improvements.
3. A copy of the draft Disability Equality Scheme will be sent to everyone who took part in the meeting for their feedback.
4. The final Disability Equality Scheme will be published around November 2009.
5. The Council, PCT and Hospitals Trust will drive and co-ordinate the actions identified in the Action Plan to really make a difference to the lives of disabled people living and working in Herefordshire.
6. The Disability Equality Scheme will be reviewed each year, and a report published.

Thank you to everyone who took part in this event!

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