

Minutes of Forum Meeting 23 October 2008

1. Introductions

Catherine welcomed the group. Everyone introduced themselves.

2. Group discussion 'What do the Council actually DO?'

Services:

- Provides public services- administrates public money
- Charges us taxes
- Leisure services
- Social services
- Libraries

Structure:

- Complex administrative setup
- Evolving
- Has too many temporary staff and high paid, short term consultants
- Has elected Councillors
- Is inaccessible and has poor communication
- Institutional
- Never see the same person twice
- The Council is restructuring but not reorganising
- Services for Disabled People are hidden. Not clear where to go / who provides services for disabled people

Attitude:

- Staff assume they know the ability of the individual before getting to know the person
- Staff humiliate Disabled People, e.g. having to be observed walking along a corridor to receive companion badge.
- Alienate people
- Make Disabled People feel like they don't exist and have no rights
- Acts like Disability Issues are a high priority when in reality they do little for Disabled People.
- Have no education/awareness regarding Disability, e.g. understanding what 'degenerative' means
- Staff have the power to assess but are not medically trained
- Have no communication skills
- Only make access to services available for Disabled People during working hours so Disabled People who work cannot access, making the assumption that disabled people don't work
- Make you repeat yourself / your case again and again
- Don't recognise people with invisible Disabilities

3. Services from Hackney Council

Simrat Dhaliwal from Hackney's Equality and Diversity Team gave a brief talk about the Council's commitment to the forum. The forum has been funded by the Council to engage with disabled residents and to represent their needs and interests. Simrat explained that Hackney takes Disability issues seriously and acknowledged that there had not been enough user involvement in the past.

A brief list of Council services was written on the board:

- Assessment and Care Management
- Direct Payments
- Hackney Recruitment Partnership (assisting those with learning Disabilities to access work)
- Learning Disabilities Service
- Mental Health Service
- Adult placement team
- Mobility
- Emergency Respite
- Leisure/ Parks
- Library
- Regeneration

4. Group discussions

A: 'What should the Forum focus on first?'

The group was divided into 3 smaller groups to discuss these issues.

Group 1 Topics to be focussed on in order of importance:

- Access to leisure facilities (financially and physically)
- Dial-a-ride services/taxi cards and companion badges
- Housing
- Planning, e.g. home alterations and public services/places
- Education- adult education and the disadvantages of being Disabled and seeking employment. Work to provide training and reduce unemployment.
- Support for carers
- Planning, e.g. home alterations and public services / places
- Youth services, access and availability
- Communication from Council to Disabled People, current methods are patronising, e.g. Hackney Today
- Long term provisions, services that are needed but not available e.g. Physiotherapy

Group 2

- The Forum should first focus on Assessment and care management at the Council.
- Mobility issues, e.g. blue badges, dial a ride
- The Forum should focus on all areas of the Council and find out about the services

Group 3

- Access team
- Adult and Children's services
- Highways and contractors, repairs and getting about
- Parking Badges
- The Council in general and why there is inconsistent customer care

B: How should the Forum run? How can it improve the above services?

Group 1

- Senior officers from the Council should be invited to attend the group and listen to what the group has to say
- Notes and results from the Forum should be sent to the relevant departments and Cabinet
- The Forum should be available online
- The Forum should raise awareness within the Council and community by publicising through youth services, GP's and Libraries
- Large meetings should be organised
- Smaller specific groups should meet to discuss specific issues
- Diversity needs to be represented
- The Forum should have the power to influence changes and decisions
- Positive dialogue between Forum members and Disabled People who might be isolated
- Empower Disabled People to take action
- Make people take notice of Disabled People and understand what it's like to be disabled in Hackney.

Group 2

- Relevant Council officials should come to the group to talk about the service that they represent.
- Specific focus groups should be established to allow for people to focus on different topics.
- The sessions should be around understanding the Council services and knowing what they are aiming to achieve.
- The Forum should bring better understanding
- The group should have targets, action plans from every meeting and long term goals

Group 3

- The Forum should be a network, not a group. The influence of the Forum should go wider than the meetings themselves
- There should be a brief terms of reference agreed by the group
- There should be good communication between the Forum, its members who don't access the meetings and the community
- Inclusive, collective
- User led, community focussed
- People representing themselves not organisations.
- Forum should be considered as 'critical friends' not 'critical enemies'

5. Feedback and close of meeting

Catherine gave some feedback from a project that she and Ebony (Forum member) have started on. Ebony raised some issues regarding youth projects in Hackney, how there are not enough accessible services. Catherine has taken a list of youth services from the COMIS section on www.Hackney.gov.uk and written and emailed to each asking them the following questions:

1. Are your premises/services wheelchair accessible?
2. Do your staff have Disability awareness?
3. Are your premises/services accessible for someone with a visual impairment eg blind or deaf?
4. Is your service accessible for Disabled Youth with a Learning Disability?
5. Would you like support and guidance on how to become more accessible to Disabled People?
6. Do you feel supported by Hackney to become more accessible?

To date, Catherine has received 2 replies. Once it is established which services are accessible and what needs there are, the work will be made into a final report to take back to the Council. Catherine welcomes any interested parties to assist with this work and will keep everyone updated.

The group agreed that there will be another meeting before Christmas, first it needs to be identified what time/day would be most accessible for the majority of people.

Action points:

Catherine to write and circulate the minutes and next newsletter
A date for the next Forum - with accessible venue- to be agreed and circulated.
Setting up agenda for next forum and circulate.

Catherine thanked everyone for attending.

Meeting closed.