

Minutes of Forum Meeting 19 August 2009

Present: 38 people

Apologies: 3

1. Introduction - Everyone introduced themselves and said their favourite colour.

2. Equality and Diversity Team

Simrat from the Equality and Diversity Team talked about working with local businesses to make them more accessible for disabled people, their carers, family and friends. This could be done by making a business case, promoting examples of good practice or developing a guide on simple changes that can be made to improve services. This would give local shops and services the opportunity to be praised/ recognised for their good access. Forum members were asked to comment/ give ideas on the proposal.

Response from Forum Members:

- It sounds like a good idea but poorly timed. We should encourage businesses to be accessible, but the Council services themselves should be prioritised first, and Hackney Council should get its own house in order before challenging others.
- Hackney Council should be striving to get the best for all its residents and disabled people are currently receiving a worse service than other residents.
- We should highlight good services more than challenge bad services.
- One forum member felt that Hackney is one of the worst boroughs when its access to services for disabled people - since the DDA this has not improved and we do not have an Access Officer unlike other councils.
- Some Council buildings are still inaccessible.
- The new service first centre should improve things compared to now, but attitudes still need to change.
- Access should be common sense - some new developments are making things worse, for example street scene is making shared spaces/cycle tracks and moving lampposts in the centre of pavements.
- The approach should not be about disabled people having problems; but about the Council and other service providers delivering on what they should, by law, be providing.

Forum members recommended that the broader issue of how the public space in Hackney is managed in terms of disabled access would provide a better focus. Rosalind gave examples of where Hackney Council has improved but there is still work to do which is why they commissioned Disability Backup to provide this forum to improve equality for disabled people. The Council is pleased with the way this group gives specific feedback on examples of changes that are being recommended. Rosalind from the Equality and Diversity Team suggested that the Council could work with Disability Backup to identify examples of the key challenges facing forum

members on the accessibility of public space so that recommendations could be made to the appropriate council officials.

Simrat thanked Forum members for their feedback.

3. Choice in Hackney

Hac from Choice in Hackney came to talk about their access to employment training. They are offering a 10 week access to employment training which results in a 6 week placement.

Q. Will the course be accredited with an NVQ?

A. No, it is not an NVQ but we can look into this

Q. Will there be paid expenses and some reimbursement for the job placement?

A. we are working with the Job Centre to develop the placements, there will be no reimbursements but there will be support after the placement, we don't just leave you after the 6 weeks.

4. Language Code

Catherine discussed a draft language code that Disability Backup could use as a 'disability charter' The idea would be to develop a petition type document which people could sign up to show their commitment to using appropriate language and to improve equality.

Catherine asked the group if they liked the idea and what the point of it would be, members responses were as such:

- 'It would improve equality'
- 'It would make people feel better'
- 'It would make a statement'
- 'It would be show how we feel'
- 'It would make people more aware'
- 'It would stop us from having to say the same things over and over'

Catherine discussed some of the language on the draft flyer and the group agreed that Catherine would send a draft to all the members for approval.

Catherine asked the group to think about its 'image', how members would like the group to be perceived. We discussed different models of disability:

Medical, 'is there a cure' 'what's wrong with you' 'are you sick'

Religious, 'if you pray you will be healed' 'you must have upset God' 'it must have happened for a reason'

Charity, 'poor you' 'you must suffer so badly'

Social, 'I am dis-abled by society' 'it is not because I am in a wheelchair that I cannot get into your shop, it's because your shop isn't accessible'

The group agreed that the image of the forum should be the social model and that we are working towards equality for disabled people. There was discussion about wanting an equal service; the DDA gives disabled people the right to be treated more favourably to ensure they receive a high quality service. We are not campaigning to get the same services as everyone, but to receive disability services which aid us, for example parking bays in useful locations.

Any other business:

- Next meeting is 18th September- Topic is the Olympics
- The October meeting will mark 1 year of meetings
- Members asked for us to have name labels in future so we can chat to each other more
- Members asked for a longer meeting so we don't rush
- Andrea discussed the idea of having social groups where members can share hobbies, interests etc. This would improve the quality of life for people who do not get to socialise as much as they would like and give members the chance to get to know each other better.

Catherine thanked everyone for coming. The meeting ended.