

Notes from Disability Backup Forum 31st May 2012

John Thornton facilitated. 38 members attended.

Katie introduced on the Taxicard Service, funded through London Councils by the Boroughs and the Mayor of London. The service has 160,000 members in London and has recently concluded a new 3 year contract with Computer Cab, 800 members join every month. The service costs £19m pa. There are 3,700 members of the scheme in Hackney. 30 new members join every month and 4,700 trips are taken per month. Numbers have doubled in the last 5 years. Contractors from mini cab firms as well as black cabs. Hackney has the 12th highest trip numbers in London (Harrow and Redbridge have the highest number).

Members queried their experiences of trying to book a cab as soon as possible and none being available; money already on the clock of the cab when they are picked up; not being contacted with updates on cab arrival. Members should be contacted every 10-15 minutes to update on arrival times. The running charge capped at £3.40 from the start of a job was abolished on 1st April 2012 and now should be no more than £2.40. If any higher charge is made, clients should ask for a receipt and contact London Councils. Katie promised to look into the issue of mini cab overcharging and acknowledged that the service needed to become more personalised in response to complaints that update calls were a recorded message and it was not possible to respond if the call was missed and that no call back would take place if a job was queried. She promised to take these matters up.

Diana Boyce introduced on the Blue Badge service. She explained eligibility criteria (receipt of DLA or war pension with mobility component) or a permanent/substantial impairment lasting at least 3 years, which could arise from a physiotherapy assessment. More information could be obtained from www.gov.uk/blubadges or from Hackney Council on 020 8356 6262. Clients can also make inquiries in person at the Service Centre in Hillman St, or can book an appointment. No home visits are available, but information on people's experiences was welcome – also use of the complaints system.

Joyce Mamode, Head of Passenger Services for London Dial-a-Ride, explained that she welcomed complaints when a problem was going on (joyce.mamode@tfl.gov.uk 020 3054 4358). She explained that the service was a supplement to public transport and free to eligible clients. Every year more journeys are carried out, with a static budget. In the last financial year there were 1.4m trips in London, a 2.3% increase on the year before and a 5% increase in journeys in Hackney. She suggested that flexible use was key. New modern buses had been introduced with a single entrance, in response to customer feedback.

Queries were raised about not being able to get through on the 'phone and language difficulties. She acknowledged that it was difficult to get a same day service and suggested that Dial a Ride worked best as a pre-booked service. In response to problems being raised by uncertainty as to postcodes, she explained that call centre staff are now able to look up destinations on a map. A queue is unavoidable on the 'phone at peak times. She suggested that people wait to call until after 10.00am, when it would be easier to get through and places would still be available. Quality of service had been a problem with some sub-contractors. However there were now

only two providers in the City fleet, not ten as formerly. Some companies were no longer used as a result of customer feedback. Whilst congestion was likely during the Olympics, Dial a Ride intended to continue the service as usual. Attendance at Local Area Panels provide an opportunity to give direct input. These are held twice a year, with the last one in Hackney ten days ago, which some members present had attended.

In answer to a member who said she had been told that attending church was 'not a priority,' she explained that there were no priorities. No judgements were made about requests, which were dealt with on a first-come-first-served basis. She apologised and suggested that a rolling two week a head booking was made. A complaint that a destination was sometimes not recognised by the computer, she suggested that the present system was a great improvement on the bits of paper formerly used and that it was a commonly used system for scheduling here and abroad. She invited members to visit the centre in SE1 and see how the computer was used. She promised to look into the exact location issue. It was a very personalised system with notes on individual needs. Compiling such information was however a slow process, with a lot of information on particular passengers to be transferred from people's heads to the computer.

A complaint that even advance bookings could be difficult and repeated refusals had been experienced, she explained that a tranche of drivers had recently retired. Recruitment took time, since CRB checks were required. Cabs were being used as a result. Such difficulties should reduce. In answer to complaints that a bus might come for a customer, but their neighbour had been refused – or a cab came separately for each, or that a long way round was used for the journey to complete another job, she acknowledged that there were real problems and that the system cannot spot them as a human could. She asked members to report their problems, so that she knew where intervention was necessary. A member who was told she could not book for a single journey, with no return, was told that this was not necessary. All regular bookings were logged, so problems with regular bookings can be traced. A member who complained that she had been required to leave early, or the bus would go, was told that a 15 minute window was operated by Dial a Ride because of the need to factor in flexibility, given variable traffic conditions, but a precise time could be fixed.

Hackney Community Transport did not supply a speaker, despite having confirmed one would attend. This had happened before.

Olympic Torch and Paralympic Torch There would be a stand for disabled people to view the procession outside Stoke Newington police station on 21st July. There would be no parking arrangements for the Clissold Park area. The Paralympic Torch would be carried from Stoke Mandeville to the Olympic Park on 29th August. Samantha Fontaine, a Manager for the Olympic Park offered to assist disabled people with access to the Games.