



## **Disability BackUp**

Spring 2016

### **Welcome to Disability BackUp's Newsletter**

**Empowering, consulting and informing disabled people**

#### **Welcome – despite the cuts**

Welcome to the Spring 2016 edition of the Hackney DBU newsletter, our first edition since Age UK East London had to give up hosting us last year.

Thanks to cuts - implemented by both national and local government - disabled people in Hackney face a reduction in our incomes and in our services, and a rise in charges and in local taxes, the like of which many of us have never known before.

Unfortunately, we've had no funding to hold Forum meetings or publish newsletters - since Hackney Council withdrew its financial support - but disabled people still make up more than 15% of the population of this borough and, for as long as disabled people continue to be amongst the most marginalised, oppressed and discriminated-against people in Hackney - our work will continue.

#### **Representations as stakeholders**

Since we last met, DBU members have made representations to various Hackney Council departments (Streetscene, Planning, Environmental Pollution, Licensing and Markets) and commented as stakeholders, where consulted. We've also made

representations to Transport for London, the Department of Transport, the House of Commons and the Pan-London Mobility Transport Forum. We've tackled inaccessibility issues on Hackney Council and NHS premises, in our streets and in businesses and services.

#### **Thanks to DBU's friends**

We are grateful for the continuing encouragement and, this month, the direct support of our former host, Age UK East London which - in partnership with Healthwatch Hackney - is the joint sponsor of NHS Community Voice (CV). CV project co-ordinator Sulekha Hassan in particular has enabled us to host a Forum and distribute our newsletter.

#### **QHackney Project Leader for DBU**

We are also grateful for the support of Hackney CVS and Hackney Volunteer Centre who, along with Queen Mary University London, have appointed us a volunteer QHackney Project Leader for 12 weeks. Our Project Leader, Mupi MBiba, is an undergraduate currently studying Accountancy & Management. Mupi will research ways to put Hackney DBU on to a secure footing, which will include research and writing funding bids.



## Could Hackney Licensing help keep our streets clear and safe?

Clutter spread over the footway continue to make it difficult for disabled people to walk the streets of Hackney safely. Recently, Hackney DBU members made a presentation to the Council's Licensing Sub-Committee regarding a particular premises that was causing difficulty for our members.

DBU member Karl Farrell wrote to object to a licence application at the venue at 2 Stoke Newington Road. "I live in the area and frequently walk from where I live to the area of Dalston."

"The area in front of the premises is on a busy footway and close to two controlled crossings. The footway here is not wide so the placing of tables & chairs noticeably restricts the space available to pedestrians. I notice that, when tables & chairs are placed in front of the premises, there is a tendency for people to congregate, with some stopping to talk with those sitting down."

"As a blind person, I'm using a long cane to make my way and, if I hear people talking in a group ahead of me, I will try to avoid bumping into them. However, I also need to avoid moving too close to the kerb so that I don't collide with other street furniture there or rubbish bags or bicycles left there. Generally I am finding an increase in problems walking around Dalston and to shops on the way and this significantly

inhibits me from wanting to walk and shop in the area."

"Allowing premises, such as here to place tables & chairs on the narrow footway is particularly unhelpful to pedestrians such as myself. The space in front of here is all the more unsuitable for the placement of tables & chairs because of their proximity to the controlled crossings with their attendant sets of tactile paving. On many occasions in the past I have found egress to the two sets of tactile paving beside this venue obstructed, due to the placement of tables, chairs and A boards in the vicinity."

Karl's statement was presented at the Council's Licensing Sub-Committee by DBU member John Thornton, who got the opportunity to talk with the venue owner during the deliberation process. On hearing of the difficulties DBU members had experienced, the owner not only promised to keep the footway clear, he also committed to making his venue accessible, including (the next day) the printing of a large print, high contrast menu.

The Committee determined that: "No patrons are allowed to smoke or drink on the street frontage of the premises and this frontage will also be clear of any furniture or other obstructions including table, chairs, A Board signs and plant pots." The result is welcome and, we hope, could set a precedent for future battles with street clutterers.

## Taxpayers money down the pan?

We continue to receive complaints about substandard, inaccessible toilets in Hackney Council properties and Hackney's hospitals, despite all our efforts, including audits, to get them improved.

Most recently we learn Hackney Town Hall which - at great expense, has undergone major refurbishment - has newly installed toilets that are grossly substandard and inaccessible. The new toilet block at London Fields (set in loose gravel!) is also woefully inaccessible.

Lead designers Hawkins/Brown boast on their website of their close collaboration with other parties in their work on Hackney Town Hall and contractors, Geoffrey Osbourne, state on their website that they "ensured that the work complied with Planning Conditions". What's clear is that neither Hackney Council, nor the designers, collaborated or effectively engaged with disabled people to ensure the appropriate toilet facilities were purchased and installed correctly.

What's also of concern is that Hackney Council's Planning Department appears to be giving approval for the installation of sub-standard facilities. Also Building Inspection (if any takes place at all) appears to give the all clear for work which falls below British Standards BS8300 and Part M of the Building Regulations and would be unacceptable within the private sector.



It's highly likely remedial work needs to be done to fix these toilet facilities and bring them up to standard. If Hackney Council had fulfilled its duty to consult and engage with disabled people (as it is obliged to do) this expensive remedial work could have been avoided.

It makes economic sense for Hackney to have an Access Group (just as many other London boroughs have). Inaccessible facilities aren't just unfair, it means that disabled people are much less able to participate in activities and civil life.

## Targeting the culprits with a DART

Please tell DBU about inaccessible toilets and other facilities you have encountered on Council or Health Authority properties in Hackney. But ... do you feel you want to take further action?

The Disability Attitude Re-adjustment Tool "DART" is a guide for disabled people to sue Service Providers for disability discrimination. Its author Doug Paulley has taken more than 40 cases of disability discrimination against services providers.

The free guide is clearly written, well illustrated (with cartoons) and available in many formats.

<http://www.kingqueen.org.uk/dart/>

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## How to contact DBU

With no funding whatsoever at the moment, we don't have premises or a telephone line. However, thanks to their generosity, you can still write to us c/o Age UK East London, 22 Dalston Lane, London E8 3AZ

You can email John (DBU Acting Chair) on [John.Thornton@disabilitybackup.org.uk](mailto:John.Thornton@disabilitybackup.org.uk)  
Web: [www.disabilitybackup.org.uk](http://www.disabilitybackup.org.uk)  
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