
Notes of Meeting

Minutes of the Disability Equality Duty Steering Group
6 Middle Street, London EC1A 7JA
Wednesday 12 April 2006

Present

John Cartledge, Chair
Dolores Keane, Steering Group Co-ordinator
Paul Kasozi, Accommodation Officer
Jane Sugarman, Health and Safety Officer (Agenda items 1-3)
Bryan Davey, Director, Public Liaison
Dan Taylor, Staff Representative
Adam Kirkup, Fire Officer (Agenda items 1-3)
Vincent Stops, First Aider (Agenda items 1-3)
Greg Hargest, note-taker

1. Apologies and Introduction

The Chair thanked those present for their attendance. Apologies were given for those who were unable to attend on this occasion.

The meeting was introduced with an explanation of the new Disability Equality Duty as having its origin in the emerging Commission for Equality and Human Rights (which is the result of an amalgamation of the Disability Rights Commission, the Commission for Racial Equality and the Equal Opportunities Commission).

It was explained that our involvement was voluntary at this time, in contrast to the GLA which has a statutory duty to comply. Within the Duty, the GLA has a specific requirement to meet, while London TravelWatch has 'volunteered' to consider the general duty.

Staff were asked to be involved in respect of their specialist roles which were relevant to the implementation of the DED.

An outline of forthcoming meetings was given with an explanation of the roles of SMT members in leading in their particular areas.

The group was told that their aim in these meetings was to ascertain best practice in our engagement with disabled people, and that part of this would be the collection of a library of relevant documents for reference and from which to help consider future improvements.

It was noted that the DDA (Disability Discrimination Act 1995) remains in place giving our legal obligations in this area, including those updated in the 2005 Act

2. Action points from the meeting of 15 March 2006

From the May meeting onwards, Action Points will be numbered for ease of reference.

Point 1

Discussion centred around the question of the potential of London TravelWatch to accommodate certain disabilities. A suggestion was made for a list of disabilities that we could not accommodate but it was explained that though there was an infinite range of disabilities and degrees of severity, we were obliged to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate them.

Point 2

It was agreed that it was too early to discuss the budget implications of implementing the DED, but confirmed that applications for funding would have to be submitted in July for the autumn presentation.

Points 3 and 4 have been completed.

Point 5

Regarding liaising with the GLA, DK informed the group that she was also working with the LDA, the DfT and any others that may be possible.

Point 6

It was noted that Gail Engert and Jo deBank would be involved with the implications for the External Relations Panel.

Points 7 and 8 are covered in 1 and 2 above.

Point 9 is on the agenda for this meeting.

Point 10 Any action needed as a result of this meeting would be implemented.

Point 11 is on the agenda for the July meeting of the group.

3. Staff specialist roles

First Aid

It was suggested that those trained in First Aid would need further training in how to deal with specific disability issues, for example, epilepsy and diabetes.

It was suggested that we would have to look to certain people who could be called upon for training. Appropriate budgets would have to be made available.

Visitors and staff with disabilities

It was said that reasonable modification of fixtures and fittings could be made, for example, the height of door handles and desks for wheelchair users. JS has information on this. AK has a H&S cd-rom on the subject. Equipment could be obtained fairly quickly and the cost may be funded by the Access to Work scheme run by the Department for Work and Pensions. JS thought that people with disabilities had to be registered to qualify for this funding. She is to check this.

Candidates for employment could be asked about their needs, but their recruitment must be exclusively on merit.

It was explained that communication issues were the same, with the provision for Braille transcription for blind people and induction loops for deaf people.

Information for visitors with disabilities could be included in meeting notes, recruitment packs and our website. This would include information on nearby blue badge parking, accessible toilets and physical access to the front door of the building. Similar provision could be included on a sheet for external meetings.

Fire safety

The Fire Officer mentioned the place of fire safety in the induction process and suggested that recruits sign or otherwise authorise a sheet of procedures. He said that plans were in place for a refuge area and for the evacuation of wheelchair users.

He pointed out that fire regulations were general for the building and that discussions would need to be held with the other tenants of 6 Middle Street regarding issues such as the provision of an evacuation chair.

Tim Bellenger and Jo deBank were confirmed to be the designated fire marshals for the third floor of this building.

The question of a fire alarm for deaf people was discussed, as was the possibility of a visual signal or vibrating pager, but it was felt that this would not be necessary. DK pointed out that we would have to be able to state why.

4. Telecommunications and Information Technology

Bryan Davey presented a paper outlining the issues for disabled people covering telephones, text phones, portable loop systems, IT and website accessibility.

Telephones

He explained that our present phones were hearing-aid compatible and our new phones could also be used with headsets. Specialised equipment could be ordered if required.

He explained that Minicom equipment is quite cheap and that the experience of Passenger Focus who had a set is that they could not recall it ever being used. Often deaf people preferred to use other means of communication such as email. DK mentioned the Typetalk service and that we had an active account that could be used with appropriate staff being trained in its use.

Induction loop

It was confirmed that we have an induction loop in our meeting room and that its availability could be advertised. However, we do not have a portable system for use at our external meetings. Also, for external meetings venues, we do not currently check beforehand for their provision of this facility. The induction loop at the reception desk was discussed, and the signage confirmed to be in the correct position for any users.

Minimum requirements and means of assessment

It was suggested that we clarify the current procedures for booking external meetings which is already in place, with a view to creating a checklist. It was pointed out that the only requirements mentioned were wheelchair access and wheelchair accessible toilets. The group was reminded that, ideally, we have to ensure that an external venue is as compliant as our own.

IT equipment and website accessibility

It was pointed out that website accessibility is a specialist area and that, while the site designers had adopted issues of best practice such as site map and accessibility guidelines, an audit of the website would be likely to suggest improvements. In particular, the site has not been tested with the use of screen readers for blind users, and consideration may also need to be given to the use of keyboard alternatives, the format of documents (e.g. *.rtf* and *.pdf* files) and "Easyread". There are standards set for accessibility, in particular the Website Accessibility Initiative guidelines were mentioned, and there would be cost implications of achieving the required standard.

The chair thanked BD for this presentation and said it formed a useful agenda for future activity.

Comments by member Tracey Proudlock

DK distributed a transcript of comments made by phone earlier that day.

The group accepted her first point that not all deaf people considered themselves disabled. Her query about Minicom had been covered in discussion.

Her invitation to conduct an access audit of London TravelWatch offices with the Accommodation Officer was accepted.

Her query about our website accreditation was referred to Bryan Davey, who confirmed this was an ongoing issue for consideration.

Her classification of spending on this provision into "contemporary" (value for money) and "emotional" (users' feelings) was examined and agreed that it would be best to check with the individual before investing in equipment.

Her request for staff training in the use of hearing loops was raised and the possibility of refresher training for relevant staff. The introduction of additional labels pointing out the existence of hearing loops was discussed. The requirement for annual equipment checks and the availability of headphones were also discussed and confirmed to be in place.

5. Future meetings

Jo deBank will be giving a presentation at the May meeting on internal and external communications and publications. The implications for site meetings and casework-related meetings will be covered, as will two-way communication and e-mail. It was said that it was good practice that communication be made in a way most convenient to the individual disabled person.

Tim Bellenger will be leading on his SMT area of Research and Development in the June meeting.

There will be new Group members attending (subject to topic and availability) from the June meeting onwards: Gail Engert, Valeria Coots and Virginia Rounding

6. Any other business

No items of any other business were received.

Summary of Action Points from this meeting	Owner
Budget implications are to be discussed. Funding submissions by July	Paul, SMT
Liaison with GLA and other bodies	Dolores
Implications for External Relations Panel	Jo deBank, Gail Engert
Human Resources update in July	Patti
Training for relevant staff in dealing with disability issues	Patti, Line Managers
Update fire safety procedures and acquisition of evacuation chair	Adam, Jane
Estimation of modifications needed for fixtures and fittings	Paul, SMT
Production of information sheets for disabled visitors	Jo, Bryan
Portable induction loop procedures	Bryan
Screen readers for the blind and website accessibility	Bryan
Check if people have to be "registered disabled" to qualify for Access to Work	Jane/Patti

End of Notes