



The Disabled Users Group

Meeting Friday 12th December 2008

**Held in the Conference Room at the Council House
Burcot Lane, Bromsgrove**

Present	
Ann Batchelor	Bromsgrove resident and carer
Mr and Mrs Briellat	Bromsgrove Disables Access Group
Mr and Mrs Crossland	Bromsgrove Disabled Access Group
Robin Edwards	Bromsgrove resident
Patricia Hackett	Mencap and Bromsgrove resident
Eileen Mulhall	Bromsgrove resident
Councillor Stephen Peters	Councillor for Hollywood and Majors Green
Phil Street (Chair)	Executive Director, Bromsgrove District Council
Fiona Scott	Equality Officer, Bromsgrove District Council
Stephanie Sergeant	Rednal resident

Attending as guest speakers	
Emma Matthews	Supporting People, Worcestershire County Council
Hugh Bennett	Assistant Chief Executive, Bromsgrove District Council
Karen Shakespeare-Jones	Customer Service, Worcestershire County Council

Apologies	
Mary Collett	Bromsgrove resident
Jenny Lammas	Padstone Day Centre service user
Wayne Knighton	Bromsgrove resident
Margaret Norton	Bromsgrove resident
Claire Reynolds	Padstone Day Centre (staff)
Joe Scott	Bromsgrove resident
Granville Baker	Alvechurch resident

1. Minutes of meeting held on 10th October 2008

Agreed as accurate.

2. Matters arising

- (i) **Ann Batchelor** asked about the Shopmobility users town centre map. **Fiona** confirmed that this work is in progress and that she will get an estimate on completion date in time for the next meeting of the Disabled Users Group.
- (ii) **Patricia Hackett** reported that a meeting had taken place with Steve Martin about the location of the disabled bays in the New Road car park and an agreement had been reached that they will be moved at the first opportunity to do so.
- (iii) **Gwyneth Briellat** emphasized the dangerous nature of the dropped kerb at the end of Windsor Street where traffic turn in from the left by the tyre sales garage. It is a death trap as traffic coming down the hill cannot see people in mobility vehicles who are crossing the road there. **Phil Street** will have a word with **Steve Martin** about this.

Ann Sloan stated that from a driver's point of view, the person on the scooter can't always be seen.

- (iv) Regarding the refurbishments of the town centre toilet facilities, **Richard Savoury** is in charge of this project but unfortunately he has had a major car accident although he has recovered well. This has had the effect of delaying the project slightly. At the moment it is being costed by the quantity surveyors and it will be 3-4 weeks before it goes out to tender.
- (v) **Eileen Mulhall** reported that she and others use the Chadsgrove School heated swimming pool to develop their swimming skills and they are now ready to go up to a larger size pool for further tuition but the Dolphin Centre have refused to increase the temperature of the pool. **Ann Sloan** stated that there isn't a good rail to hold onto to get out of the pool.
- (vi) **Bromsgrove District Housing Trust** have had the introductory meeting of their **Aids and Adaptations Focus Group**.

3. Blue Badge Application Process and Eligibility Criteria Karen Shakespeare-Jones – Worcestershire County Council

Karen reported that finally had the feedback has come through from the long running consultation and the results of this cover very much the things put forward by this group.

There will be Blue Badge reform strategy over the next 5 years and there are a number of areas to be taken forward. These include dealing with Blue Badge applications and changes to the eligibility criteria.

The changes include extending the eligibility to :-

those with the most severe and disruptive mental problems,

those with temporary conditions lasting for more than one year in some specific circumstances will qualify for a Blue Badge for a limited period,

children under the age of 3 with specific medical problems including those who need bulky equipment,

those with specific war disablement entitlements for ex services personnel.

No dates have been set for these changes.

The 3 hour parking on yellow lines is not going to change. This will still be operated through Local Authorities.

There will be a lot more focus on extending the enforcement on the use of Blue Badges. Worcestershire didn't become a Centre of Excellence as they had hoped, mainly because they need to do more on enforcement. Birmingham and Coventry did get this recognition (which means they get money to support what they're doing) so they will take the lead and establish good practice.

Worcestershire however, had recognised that it needs to raise awareness of misuse and plans to do this over next 5 years. They will also be trying to get some consistency with other countries in Europe so that UK Blue Badge holders can be confident that they will be treated in the same way in other European countries.

The Blue Badge Scheme is to be extended for temporary conditions e.g. stroke/ or when a joint replacement is needed – before and after an operation.

Assessments for entitlement to Blue Badges will be done through a medical process. This will apply even where people may have already been assessed. However, this should be fairer as at present the discretionary award is made by non medical people.

The Blue Badge holder is likely to be fined if the Badge has been misused but if it's been stolen it should be reported to the police and a crime number allocated. In this case the holder will get a replacement and will not be liable for misuse.

It is common to see cars occupying Blue Badge spaces in supermarket car parks and this is not something that can be enforced. **Ann Sloan** thought that a supermarket would have to get permission from the Local Authority to be able to enforce this themselves. This was not clear – **Phil Street** explained that it depends on the status of the land – if its private land the Local Authority can't enforce anything.

There are some proposals to support the Retail Consortium in the application of Blue Badge scheme on private car parks.

Charging for the Blue Badge may increase from £2.00 which has been the same since 1983.

Stephanie Sergeant stated that Badge holders have to pay for the Blue Badge and questioned why they should have to pay for parking as well? **Eileen Mulhall** stated that the Badge holder also have to pay for the photograph although this is now held on file.

Karen went on to explain that there is now data sharing between Government Departments and Councils. This will only happen where it's relevant and important and will help stop fraud. There is now a note on the Blue Badge application form to say exactly what information will be shared.

Stephanie has received her Braille copy of the Blue Badge guidelines which has been really helpful to her.

Eileen asked why the Blue Badge can be awarded for children aged up to up to 3 years of age when, for example the students at Chadsgrove School are of all ages and obviously sufficiently disabled to qualify.

Karen explained that there are slightly different criteria and that children over the age of 3 are not excluded from the scheme.

Karen will be happy to answer any questions that this group still has in the future – they can be forwarded by Fiona to Karen who will reply.

Phil thanked **Karen** on behalf of the group.

4. Sheltered Housing Provision in Bromsgrove

Emma Matthews – Supporting People, Worcestershire County Council

There has been anxiety about the changes to sheltered housing provision and this group has had detailed discussions at two previous meetings.

Emma explained the “Supporting People Programme” in Worcestershire.

Central government give funding of approximately £14 million a year – this is used to support people with various needs – mental health, learning disability, homelessness, HIV amongst other things.

The money funds low level housing support. This helps people maintain a tenancy, stay in their own home and improve their lifestyle. The support is usually short term but they also traditionally fund low level support in sheltered housing on a longer term basis.

In the past, because of the way this funding has been tied up in contracts it hasn't been possible to fund support for people in their own homes. In addition, a large number of people living in sheltered housing were paying for something that they didn't want or need at the same time as other people had those needs in their own homes but the funding wasn't available to support them.

This is reason for changing to floating support which is not tied to a particular type of tenure. Previously, the amount of support available worked out at an average of 15 minutes per person. It is very difficult to achieve any outcomes in just 15 minutes. Under the new arrangements this allows an 1 hr of support up to a maximum of 3 hrs with flexibility for more support when it is need.

There will be more flexibility in the contract so that temporary needs e.g. a hospital discharge can be met for a short period of time. This will also give people a choice of provider. For example, where the support was provided by someone who is also your landlord it might be awkward for someone if they have debt problems.

It also means that more specialised needs can be supported e.g. alcohol abuse or mental health needs.

These changes have also made it easier for sheltered housing to be accessible to older people who don't need support and other people e.g. disabled people under the age of 65, who will also be able to access support from the sheltered housing provider. Approximately 1/3 of residents in some sheltered housing schemes in Worcestershire are under 65.

Some providers have chosen to no longer provide 24 hour support via the traditional, live-in warden model. The Supporting People Programme has never instructed providers to end this type of support, providers only need to demonstrate how support can best be delivered to cover everyone's needs and achieve the best outcomes. Everyone receiving support will be offered a community alarm.

Ann Sloan asked if the community alarm is available for people living in their own homes?

People living in their own homes will be able to access floating support as it is available regardless of tenure.

Ann Batchelor asked about the entitlement for someone aged under 65?

Emma confirmed that the decision will be based on housing benefit or pension credit. People who do not receive either of these benefits will still be able to access support but there will be a charge.

Emma emphasised that those receiving support will have a choice over who provides that support. Different providers will be more appropriate for different needs.

Bromsgrove District Housing Trust are contract to support people over 65 but they do in fact support people under this age.

Councillor Stephen Peters stated that people living in the Ward of Hollywood and Majors Green are still living in sheltered housing provided by Bromsgrove District Housing Trust and have expressed anxiety about the services.

Bromsgrove District Housing Trust is assessing people at the moment. Are there any other providers and how many? **Emma** confirmed that there will be other providers - Redditch Borough Council, Rooftop, Festival Housing, Wyre Forest Housing Trust and Worcester Community Housing who will be providing a floating support service.

This is still work in progress and the next stage is to work with the smaller providers. From next April there will be more choice and hopefully the range of choice will continue to grow. It was noted that residents don't seem to be getting this information.

Emma handed out a card that gave details of the provider directory. These cards are available in the Hub and the directory is on the Supporting People website.

Eileen asked whether the information will be available from the Hub and **Emma** confirmed that the Hubs can help you to access the directory and provide more information about the floating support services which will be available in April.

Ann Sloan asked for clarification of which benefits would enable someone to qualify. **Emma** confirmed that it will be those benefits that are awarded based on income, for example pension credit, housing benefit but not Disability Living Allowance. **Ann** further queried whether someone would be excluded from support services because they are not on those benefits? **Emma** confirmed that anyone can still access the services but they will have to pay a charge.

It was noted that accessing community alarms can be confusing.

Emma stated one of the next pieces of work for the supporting people team to do is to improve access to these services.

Cllr Peters asked whether it is worth residents joining Lifeline if this is to change? It was confirmed that yes, it is worth while joining as the service will continue.

Patricia Hackett asked if a provider for a community alarm could be based outside of Worcestershire. **Emma** responded that although the person who picks up the call may not be based in Worcestershire, the response service will be based in Worcestershire. It was noted that local knowledge is very useful for this type of service.

It was noted that there is still some anxiety about the wardens being withdrawn and the changes to the level of service.

Cllr Peters stated that some Housing Associations still employ wardens e.g. Housing W21 and they haven't told anyone that they have to get rid of their wardens.

Emma stated that if a provider feels a service can best provided by wardens and if that service is funded by Supporting People and they can evidence that it achieves great outcomes, meets peoples needs and is value for money then they are happy to continue to fund it.

It was agreed to have a future item on the Agenda on lifeline services.

5. Community Transport Working Group – Feedback

Hugh Bennett – Assistant Chief Executive, Bromsgrove District Council

Hugh emphasised that the need for a community transport scheme originated from feedback from the Equality and Diversity Forum. Hugh's own experience during national volunteer week also brought home to him some of the problems disabled residents face with transport and access to services. This is why the Community Transport Working group was set up.

In relation to the bid for funds it has not been quite approved but we are almost there. It has gone through the Council's Executive Cabinet and will be heard by Full Council in January 2009.

The bid is for £75,000 capital. The bid was made as high as possible as we don't want to have to go back to Council for more money. This money is to buy a new vehicle that is fully wheelchair accessible and Hugh wants this Group to be involved in the decision as to what vehicle to buy. If it proves possible to buy a suitable second hand vehicle, Hugh will return the spare budget to the Council's balances.

There are associated costs. There is £25,000 to underwrite the scheme which will cover staff and fuel costs.

There is likely to be a charge of approximately £2.50 per journey, but further work with the WRVS and potential service users will be required to determine the exact fare structure. Hugh envisages that residents will not be able to ask for the service for free, as a concession, because the Council is already heavily subsidising the service through the £75,000 capital outlay and the £25,000 revenue funding to underwrite the scheme.

Legally, the proposed service is not allowed to run routes, as this would compete with private providers. Instead, it will operate a series of “clubs”, for example, the Thursday ASDA club and will pick up residents from their houses that want to go to ASDA on that date. Hugh is intending to hold an event with potential users, to work out what “clubs” are required. It will be a limited service as we can’t run a Dial Ride Service to Hagley or Wythall just to collect one person.

We are looking to run the service in partnership with WRVS but don’t want to compete with Rural Rides. WRVS will hopefully provide the drivers, Redditch Community Transport will maintain the vehicle and provide a back up vehicle if needed.

First stage of the project was to bid for the funding, the second stage is the implementation. Hugh needs the input of this group to agree the routes and be clear about what people want, plus the decision on which vehicle to purchase.

Eileen Mulhall suggested that **Mary Collett** would be a suitable person to test the appropriateness of the vehicle.

Ann Sloan asked where the service is it going to operate?

Hugh confirmed that we want to cover the whole District but don’t want to cross boundaries. We’ll start with what we know is needed in the District and develop the service as issues become identified.

Ann Batchelor confirmed that it is better to small and grow the service from there.

Cllr Peters thought there would be no problem with charging for a journey. We will need to make people aware of the service but also need to be quite strict.

What are the criteria for use of the service?

The service will be for anyone who is mobility impaired. Medical appointments are not likely to be included – there is a Red Cross service which can sometimes be accessed for that purpose.

Eileen asked whether there will be someone to ensure that wheelchair users are clamped in? This will be covered in the recruitment and training of the drivers.

Ann Sloan explained that she has a car and can usually drive but sometimes is too ill to drive but was excluded by Rural Rides because she has her own car.

How will the service be policed? This will be in accordance with a policy which will set out the criteria. We are likely to “borrow” Redditch’s policy. The drivers will “police” this policy.

Gwyneth Breillat knew of someone who wanted to get the Red Cross service but they couldn’t get a commitment in advance and as a result had to cancel a hospital appointment.

Eileen confirmed that Rural Rides also can’t confirm a journey in advance.

Hugh explained that no matter what we can offer through the new Community Transport service we can’t ever take out the need to use taxis, family and friends. Nevertheless this will be a big step forward.

Gwyneth said that she hoped that the vehicle won’t be left in the garage.

Hugh agreed, but felt this unlikely.

Cllr Peters asked whether there will be a user/ management group?

Hugh confirmed that we want to offer the service as a part of a range of options. Unlike the WRVS we will be paying the drivers.

It was agreed that the service will need a marketing campaign. **Hugh** has an income target and needs to generate use of the service.

Ann Sloan asked how many the vehicle will hold. It is likely to be 12 seats including wheelchair users. Redditch Community Transport will help with choosing the vehicle – they will be on the implementation group.

Gwyneth asked whether the bus would go out for one person in one area? This depends – this will have to be looked at. We need to offer as many routes as possible. 70% of the Redditch service is routes.

Will the Bromsgrove service include going into Redditch? No.

We still need to understand the nature of the demand more and this group will be asking **Hugh** to come back to a future meeting.

The service is due to start on 1st July 2009 (supplementary – the lead in time for the vehicle means this date is likely to be put back).

6. Dates and items for meeting 2009

It was agreed to defer the item on the Bromsgrove railway station development until further notice.

Jon Fraser has agreed to come to the April meeting so a full agenda item on Highways will be on the February meeting agenda so that the group can compile a list of issues to send to **Jon** for him to address at the April meeting.

Lifeline/ Telecare – **Rachel McAndrews** will be able to tell us more about this service including the security aspects.

The next meeting will also have an item on access to Leisure Services.

The group still wants an Agenda item for a guest speaker from Building Control.

7. Other items

Choice Based Lettings - there was a brief discussion about this service. If you want to move you have to bid for a property. This is now an item for a future meeting.

Bromsgrove Disabled Access Group – the minutes of the Group have been circulated for information. There are not many members now and they want more people to get involved.

Highway Code for Mobility Scooter Users – it was noted that this Code is guidance only and cannot be enforced. Members of the group commented that the issues are also about pedestrians and those driving on the main highway. Apparently in the United States of America, some people have been deliberately walking in front of mobility scooters in order to make a claim for compensation.

Just before the meeting closed **Eileen** stated how good these meetings are and how she feels very well informed as a result of attending. She thanked the Council for arranging these meetings and stated that she felt that we are really making progress.

The meeting closed at 12.00 pm.

Time, Date and Place of next meeting

10.00 am to 12.00 pm

Friday 6th February 2009

The Committee Room

