



# Hastings & Rother Disability Forum Update

## Introduction

For some time now HRDF has been producing Re-action, its newsletter, on a quarterly basis. However, we've been finding that there is often information that we want to pass on to our members and local organizations that just can't wait! So as Chair of HRDF, I've decided to write a "Chair's update" every quarter, to slot in between the production of the main newsletter. So, this is the first one – read on ...

## Come and Have Your Say!

Many of you will know that for some time now, several of the public toilets in Bexhill have been closed. Bexhill Town Council say that this is a financial decision, but we feel that for disabled people who either need to use the toilet frequently or need to use an accessible toilet and so don't have the choice of using a toilet in another venue, this could be the difference between them visiting Bexhill or passing it by completely.

So, we're inviting key officers from Rother District Council to come to an open meeting on **Thursday, 19 January 2006, 7.00-9.00pm at St Peter's Community Centre, Church Street, Old Town, Bexhill**, to hear from disabled people about how this affects them and to ask them to re-consider their decision. Please come along and get your views heard!!

At a meeting of Rother District Council's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 23 January, feedback will be given from their working group which has been looking at the Council's provision of public toilets across the

region. So, it's important that we ensure that the voice of disabled people is fed into that meeting. We're sending out a questionnaire to everyone we invite to the meeting, the results of which will be collated and presented to Rother District Council along with a report of our open meeting on 19 January.

## Minute Taker Wanted

The HRDF Access Group are looking for someone to take and write up the minutes of its monthly meetings. The meetings are quite informal, and the group normally meets on the second Tuesday of the month, from 6.00pm till around 7.30/8.00pm at Hastings Town Hall.

If you are interested in taking minutes then please contact the HRDF office on 01424 201201 or e-mail [enquiries@hrdf.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@hrdf.org.uk).

## Open Meeting on 12 October 2005

Following the success of our open meeting on parking in Hastings, we held our second open meeting for members. The meeting was split into two halves:-

During the first half of the meeting, Claire Debenham (Equalities Officer) and Imran Yunus (Policy Officer) from East Sussex County Council, came to talk about an Equality Impact Assessment being carried out by East Sussex County Council, and to hear members' views on what improvements could be made to Social Services.

Around 20 people attended the meeting and spent a busy 45 minutes raising their concerns. These included long waiting times for assessment and

carrying out of adaptations through Disabled Facilities Grants, the poor quality of work carried out around those adaptations, and the lack of choice disabled people have when care agencies are employed,

The time went very quickly and we could have spent the whole two hours just talking about people's concerns with Social Services. It is intended that further meetings of this sort take place, and we hope that this will be the start of a meaningful dialogue between Social Services and HRDF members.

The second half of the meeting was spent with Justine Fallis, Direct Payments Development Worker from ESDA, telling members about her project, looking at different ways of individuals and groups using Direct Payments. The aim of the project has been to look into how people could use Direct Payments as a group rather than individually. The project runs until March 2006. So far a lot of issues have been raised regarding the use of Direct Payments as a co-operative and the need for registration with the Commission for Social Care Inspectorate. Some parents of disabled children and people with mental health issues have looked into setting up activities as a group.

### **International Day of Disabled People**

On the evening of 3 December, HRDF chose to celebrate International Day of Disabled People by having a party! But this wasn't the only event held to celebrate the day. East Sussex County Council held a number of events across the county to look at access to the countryside, and a number of our committee members attended some of these events.

IN the morning Paul went to Pebsham for a guided tour of the bird life in the reeds. He found the session great fun as everyone had to listen for the birds instead of looking for them.

East Sussex County Council have been working at Rye Harbour Nature Reserve to improve access for disabled people. International Day of Disabled People was chosen as the day to hold an open day to show the work to members of the public. Kevin and Paul went along. The event was very interesting, and the Access Group are to be asked to work with East Sussex County Council to further develop the nature reserve at Rye Harbour.

Meanwhile, Graham and I spent the day over at Cuckmere, enjoying a countryside walk and giving our ideas, along with several others, about what would improve our access to the countryside. The idea of the day was not to particularly concentrate on physical access, but to look at other aspects such as way marking, transport, what information people might need if they were going to visit the countryside, etc. Our countryside walk involved us getting completely drenched in a huge down-pour – so we were grateful for the ability to do the rest of the work in the warm and dry!

HRDF finished the day by holding its own celebration - a party at the Marlborough House café. We spent an enjoyable evening celebrating with some existing members and others who came along for the first time. The day had been a long one for all those who had taken part in other celebrations across the county, but it was well worth it!

So – how do you think we could celebrate International Day of Disabled people in the future? We want to be really organized and start planning next year's celebration now! But we want your ideas – so come on ... let's hear from you.

### **Contact Details**

Hastings & Rother Disability Forum,  
Bridge House, Britannia Enterprise  
Centre, Waterworks Road, Hastings, East  
Sussex TN34 1RT. Tel: 01424 201201.  
E-mail: [enquiries@hrdf.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@hrdf.org.uk)