

Re-action

Hastings & Rother Disability Forum
Newsletter Spring 2006—issue 7

Closure of Public Toilets in Rother

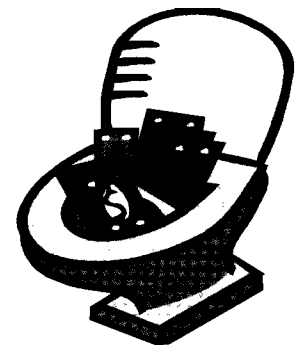
Following Rother District Council's recent decision to close a number of public toilets across Rother, the HRDF committee decided to hold an Open Meeting to enable disabled people to present their views on how this decision affected them to Councillors and Council Officers from Rother District Council. We chose to hold the meeting in Bexhill following contact from the Bexhill Chamber of Commerce and Tourism, and the large amount of publicity in the Bexhill Observer. We felt that the closure of the toilets was actually a human rights issue and had repercussions for disabled residents and visitors alike.

As well as 21 people attending the meeting, we received around 30 completed questionnaires containing disabled people's views of how the closure of toilets in Bexhill affected them. The meeting was chaired by Councillor Wilson, who had chaired a working party looking at the closure of public toilets across Rother. Others involved in speaking on Rother District Council's behalf were Councillors Dodge, Clarke and also Sue Spice from Bexhill's Chamber of Commerce and Tourism, who presented the situation from the point of view of tourism and trade in Bexhill. Following

presentations from the Council and Bexhill Chamber of Commerce and Tourism, I talked about the reason for calling the meeting and then the rest of the meeting was opened up for questions from those attending to be answered by Rother District Council.

This meeting was timed so that these Councillors could hear the views of disabled people, in order that those views could be considered at the Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of Rother District Council on Monday 23 January. I attended that meeting, along with Paul Borthwick, Kevin Towner and James Kemp. Councillors recommended to Cabinet that the Channel View East toilets in Bexhill should be re-opened and money should be identified to finance them. Regarding the public toilets throughout the rest of Rother, a number of Parish Councils have been approached regarding the possibility of them taking over the running of the facilities in their areas, and so Councillors agreed to wait for responses from each of those Parish Councils before any further consideration is given to those toilets.

by
Theresa Hodge



Change of address

From: 1st February 2006

From: 1st February 2006

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DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING? LIVING IN BEXHILL OR HASTINGS?

The East Sussex Hearing Resource Centre **provides a FREE service** in Bexhill and Hastings to aid Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people and their families.

The meetings give an opportunity to meet other people and chat in an easy-to-communicate atmosphere. We explain communication tactics, display/demonstrate environmental aids and give advice, information and support. Most of the meetings have a speaker on relevant deaf issues and recent topics have included how to hear more easily on the telephone and how to improve listening to the television.

Meetings are held at Bexhill (25 Sackville Road), **on the fourth Wednesday of every month (2pm-3.30pm) and at Hastings** (Hastings Voluntary Action, 31a Priory Street, Hastings on the first Friday of every month (10.30am-12noon)

Everybody welcome so put a note in your diary.

For further information please contact East Sussex Hearing Resource Centre, 8 St Leonard's Road, Eastbourne, BN21 3UH. Tel: 01323 722505 (voice, text, fax) email: info:eshrc.fsnet.co.uk

www.eshrc.org.uk

Cuts to Train Services

By Theresa Hodge

A few weeks ago, I woke up to hear the commuters of Bexhill being asked by Arrow FM what they thought of the proposed cuts to rail services from Bexhill station. This rather shocked me as I'd heard nothing about this anywhere else, so I wondered where I could find out more. I thought little more on the subject until stumbling across an article on the Bexhill Observer website earlier this week, entitled "Direct Link to London Unsustainable: Savage Cuts to London Rail Line". Being a regular user of the trains, I naturally read on...

The finalised Brighton Mainline Route Utilisation Strategy proposes trains running from Hastings via Eastbourne to Victoria be "withdrawn east of Eastbourne." Apparently there is insufficient demand to justify the running of more than two trains per hour between Eastbourne and Hastings, and it is felt that the introduction of the fast Brighton to Ashford service should serve those travelling on that part of the line well. The Department for Transport point out that "London passengers would normally travel via the main line to Charing Cross from Battle)". They suggest that those wishing to travel between Hastings and London (including Gatwick and East Croyden) can do so easily with a simple change at Eastbourne.

It is planned that a small number of morning and evening trains from Hastings to London via Bexhill and Eastbourne will continue to run "when they are most needed". This basically means a morning and an evening service. I feel that an important consideration here is the need for us to change trains. Many disabled people require the assistance of railway staff to get on and off trains, and therefore, to have to arrange assistance for yet another part of the journey is inconvenient. As a visually impaired person I've used this service myself, and on numerous occasions it has not worked – with staff at my destination not being informed that I'm coming – so I'm left stranded and so have to grab the attention of a member of the public either to assist me themselves or find me a member of staff to help. So the less changes I can make in a journey, the better.



Social Services Cuts

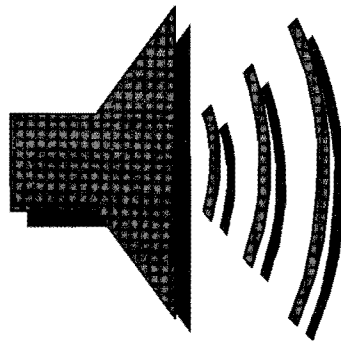
By Kevin Towner

In case you hadn't noticed yet, disabled people in Hastings and Rother are facing some seriously hard times – and it's about to get much worse!!

The Cabinet of East Sussex County Council have agreed drastic cuts to Social Services budgets. Organisations who will be affected include: the mental health charity Rethink, Crossroads – who provide respite for carers, Active Arts – an arts project for people with learning difficulties, and Home Call – who support visually impaired people to remain independent. East Sussex Disability Association is also facing funding loss as a result of these cuts when they are made.

Hastings Voluntary Action is holding an emergency meeting at Horntye Sports Centre on 21 February. I will be attending this meeting and will keep you posted on the outcome in our next newsletter.

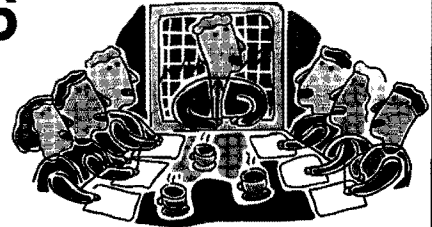
We need to make our voices heard!!



Editor's note: I find it really interesting that HRDF are consulted over all sorts of service provision by service providers in order to make this accessible to disabled people as a community. However, we are never consulted when devastating cuts are being made to our services and are never asked how these cuts are affecting us. In order that we can feed back your views to Social Services, please let us know how these cuts are going to affect your everyday life and especially whether you feel that they are potentially putting you at risk in any way.

**Hastings & Rother
Disability Forum
are
holding their
Annual General Meeting
on
24th March 2006**

At 6.00 pm

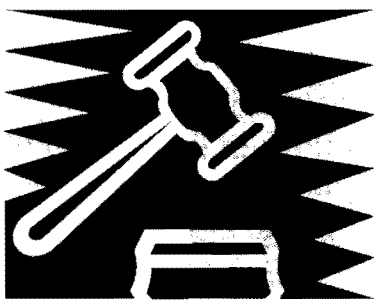


We are revising our Constitution and need as many members as possible to vote on the proposed changes. Come along and meet people and hear what the Forum has been doing to represent your voice in the wider community.

Surprise guest speaker

There will be some light refreshments

Marlborough House Café
2nd Floor, Marlborough House
23—29 Warrior Square
St Leonard's on Sea
East Sussex.
TN37 6BG



HRDF is a branch of the East Sussex Disability Association (ESDA).
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Proposed Incapacity Benefit Reforms

By Kevin Towner

So, Michael Foster has "spoken out" over the Secretary of State's announcement on Incapacity Benefit reform in the House of Commons. He says that he is concerned that "the cut-off benefits creating insecurity when entering employment can be a disincentive to take the plunge".

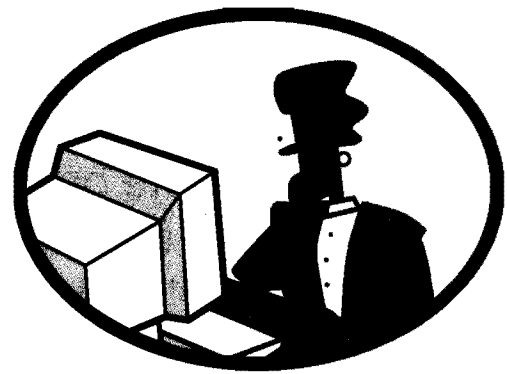
Actually, the real problem is that the scheme, like many others before it, is really only aimed at "soft targets" – people who have minor industrial injuries who can be fairly easily reintegrated back into work. Disabled people who have never been able to access work because they cannot secure the in-work support and flexible working practices they need in order to become economically productive will probably end up having their benefits reduced or withdrawn some incentive!!



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. We may be able to provide payment for this work.

If you are interested in taking minutes then please contact us on 01424 201201 or e-mail: enquiries@hrdf.org.uk.



(Editor's note:

This picture is not intended as a sexist statement—it is just that I couldn't find a picture of a man typing or even taking notes! I, in no way mean to suggest that the position is only open to women!)