



Re-action

Hastings & Rother Disability Forum
Newsletter Summer 2006 - issue 8

EDITORIAL

The format of this newsletter is different to our last couple in that there is no room for pictures and much more text. The reason for this is that there is a lot more to say at the moment. We are members of the British Council of Disabled People and I have included a recent news bulletin from them as well as a letter from one of our members who wrote to us when the debate about the closure of public toilets in Bexhill was raging. I'm hoping that inclusion of this letter will stimulate more views from our members so that we can include a letters column as a regular feature in future newsletters. I hope you enjoy this newsletter.

Lizzie (Editor)

Letters...

Hi from John Stockley...

I support the campaign for accessible toilets in Bexhill and the dropped kerb for bus stops. However Rother District Council have consistently made it difficult for disabled people to not only access shops, but Bexhill per se. Devonshire Road Post Office car park has been replaced with concrete balls. They have increased places for taxis by removing parking spaces for disabled people and replaced parking spaces for disabled drivers with paths that protrude into the road. Councillor Gubby says: "We can either have plants and concrete balls or toilets". Bexhill is becoming inaccessible to both disabled people and non-disabled. We don't want to send out 'carers' shopping for us - we want to visit Bexhill ourselves!

Friary Gardens...

You may have read recently of the plight of **Friary Gardeners**, a group of people with learning difficulties working at a horticultural project in Hastings. They were particularly visible in the Town Centre recently, holding a demonstration outside the Town Hall to collect signatures for their petition. By the time that you read this, Hastings will have a new council, and I sincerely hope they will listen to what Friary Gardeners have to say and that the planning application being put forward by the freeholders of the site, the Society of African Missions, will think again before making them homeless. We wish them luck.

Access group Update

By Paul Borthwick

Quality of Pavements

Several members of the HRDF committee have recently met with the Seniors Forum to look at issues around quality of pavements. It appears that Hastings Borough Council have some money available specifically for this area of work, so we have agreed to meet with Council staff to discuss how the money can best be spent. We want to make sure that the money goes to where it is most needed, so that disabled and older people can access their communities more easily.

If you have an issue with the quality of the pavements in your area, such as the need for more dropped kerbs or tactile paving, then we suggest you contact both the Highways Department and your local Councillor. Although this particular piece of work is with Hastings Borough Council, we are keen to improve the quality of pavements throughout Rother too, so we would urge anyone living in Rother to do the same.

Wheelchair Accessible Taxis

We have recently received a lot of complaints about the service that some taxi firms are providing to wheelchair users. Having telephoned and booked a wheelchair accessible taxi, when the taxi arrives wheelchair users are being told by the driver that he/she cannot take them as they (the driver) has a bad back or knee and so

cannot assist them into the taxi. Some are being told that they cannot travel without their carer. Another issue is that drivers are starting to run the meter to include the wheelchair user getting into the taxi.

A further issue is that taxi firms say that a wheelchair user's chair has to be clamped in, otherwise the taxi is not insured. This is a problem for taxi drivers, who cannot work without insurance. And for wheelchair users, as accessible taxi's are designed for standard wheelchairs. However, as we all know, wheelchairs are not standard sizes, but are designed to meet the individual's needs.

We have been contacted by Michael Foster, MP, who has been contacted by one of his constituents about similar problems that they are having. We plan to meet with Mr Foster in the near future to discuss these issues. It appears that the issue of insurance is a national one, so local licensing officers are unable to turn this situation around. If you have had any problems with access to taxis in the area, then please do get in touch with us.

Free Bus Passes

The new bus passes, which give free bus use after 9.00am to disabled people and those over 60, are now available. We are currently looking with local Councils at exactly who is entitled to a free bus pass. At present the criteria is that a disabled person must have mobility difficulties or other

NEWS FROM BRITISH COUNCIL OF DISABLED PEOPLE

The Disabled People's Direct Action Network (DAN) recognizes the poverty that most disabled people have to live in. We see current plans to cut back on Incapacity Benefit has an attack on disabled people that will worsen this. We must therefore organize and respond for all our people. We are maintaining a list of disabled activists who would like to get involved in planning a direct action response to this threat.

To join the list email [bacrich154@yahoo.com](mailto:bacrigh154@yahoo.com)

Sheffield Welfare Action Network which is run by disabled people is running a campaign against the Government's new ideas on how to give money (benefits) to disabled people. The network is thinking about going national even though it has started off in Sheffield.

Contact Chris on 07903-453-006

sheffieldwelfare_an@yahoo.co.uk <http://www.swansheffield.org.uk/>

Inclusive Education: The 2020 Campaign to End Segregated Education is looking for support for their campaign against the Conservative Party's thinking there should be more special schools for disabled children. The Conservative Party did not ask disabled people what kind of schooling they wanted.

Micheline Mason: 0207-735-5277

E-mail Address : info@allfie.org.uk

Mental Capacity Act Code of Practise: The 'I Decide' Collation wants disabled people to be looking at the Code of Practise – guidance on how the Mental Capacity Act should be understood. The Mental Capacity Act is a bad law on how decisions should be made on behalf of people who are believed to be unable to make decisions for themselves. The Code of Practise will be available from March 9th.

Simone Aspis: 0208-459-5717 or Tara Flood: 0207-385-1124

simone@disabilityissues.freeserve.co.uk tara.flood@virgin.net

Mental Health Bill Campaign

The Emotional Wellbeing has been set up by Collation of groups runs by mental health system survivors. The group will be campaigning against a Mental Health Bill which will take away disabled peoples rights away from living in the community and force treatment. The good news is that the Government is not making a new Mental Health Act. However, the bad news is that the Government wants to change the law we have got already called the 1998 Mental Health Act in the Summer. So watch this space! Ring or email Simon Aspis (details above)

The Campaign against Lord Joffe's Assisted Dying Bill:

Legalising Euthanasia is wrong because it will no doubt lead to the needless deaths of disabled people who are seen by others (and maybe even themselves- due to peer pressure and other external forces) as a burden on their family and friends and a burden on the tax payer. A disabled life is not worth any less than a non disabled life and BCODP believes that more emphasis should be placed on palliative care (designed to help ease the symptoms of terminal illness) as the solution.

During the course of my work on this campaign we have become a member of the Care not Killing Alliance (CNK-the largest group in terms of membership and expertise of all those campaigning against the bill). I have also made contact with Scope, the Pro Life Alliance and Alert, who are all also campaigning against the bill, and taken advice from Jane Campbell (one of the leading individual campaigners against the bill).

One worry though is that CNK are concentrating too much on arguing that palliative care is a better alternative to Euthanasia as opposed to our better argument that Euthanasia is against the rights and welfare of disabled people. CNK themselves have admitted this and want to meet with Disabled Rights Activists to learn from us. I am in the process of arranging such a meeting and have invited Tara Flood, Jane Campbell and Rachel Hurst to attend. At the time of writing Rachel has already said she'd like to be involved.

Incapacity Benefit Reform: I am working on this with Simone Aspis. We are currently reading the newly released Green Paper and keeping a keen eye on the news. I am in charge of researching and writing about Pathways to Work Pilot schemes where people on incapacity benefit have been encouraged to take up work- which has been happening only in certain areas of the country so far as a test. Simone and I are encouraging members to get in touch with us who wish to help us in this campaign (we have sent out a letter about it) and anyone who wishes to do so can get in touch with us by email to either:

Jared@bcodp.org.uk or Simone@disabilityissues.freeseve.co.uk

And now closer to home....

Do you have difficulty accessing health screening at your GP surgery? I am collecting data from particularly women who feel that their health is being put at risk because they have difficulty in accessing cervical or breast screening that most women take for granted. If you have had any experiences that you would be willing to share with me, please email me at: lizzie.hawke@esda.org.uk or write to me C/O HRDF, PO Box 269, Hastings, East Sussex. TN34 9BS

difficulties that stop them from driving. We feel that this could exclude a lot of people who should be entitled to a pass.

If you were unaware that this free bus pass was available to you, or you are not sure whether you can apply, then please contact either Hastings Borough Council or Rother District Council – whichever one covers the area where you live. We would like to hear from anyone who is experiencing difficulties in applying for a free pass.

Re-opening of Channel View East Toilets, Bexhill

You may have seen Kevin Towner (our Vice Chair) in the Bexhill Observer at the reopening of the toilets at Channel View in Bexhill. HRDF has been working hard to raise the awareness of Councillors and staff of Rother District Council

about how the closure of public toilets affects disabled people. We are proud to have been involved in pushing the Council to keep these toilets open. HRDF will be monitoring the situation to see what will happen to the toilets in Rye and Battle, and will also campaign to have the toilets at Town Hall Square in Bexhill re-opened.

Hastings College

Hastings College are looking at how they meet the needs of disabled people accessing college courses and facilities. They would like to know about people's experiences of attending the college, whether there are people who have not used college facilities and the reasons for this, what improvements could be made to college facilities. If you would be interested in getting involved in this area of work, then please contact us.

Reduce the risk of fire for FREE.

Why not take advantage of a free home safety visit, from the East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service? The purpose of the visit is for local fire crews to walk round the person's home and offer safety advice in order to reduce their risk of death or injury as a result of fire or burns. If the crew considers it necessary, they will supply and fit one or more smoke alarms free of charge. These alarms are of the 10 year sealed battery type and therefore only require a 'push the button' type of test once a week.

The telephone number to call to arrange a visit is 0845 230 0252

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TN34 1PP Tel: 01424 781855
Email: JTilbrook@hastings.gov.uk***

The Disability Equality Duty

The Disability Equality Duty affects all public bodies - from local councils to government departments, from universities to hospitals. This is a new legal duty that says they must now actively promote disability equality. A similar duty was introduced on race equality a couple of years ago.

This means a new requirement for public sector bodies to pay due regard to promoting equality for disabled people in every area of their work. It's not necessarily about changes to buildings or adjustments for individuals. Public bodies will need to look at all areas of their organisation and include disabled people, and weave disability equality into their everyday working, particularly in relation to formulating policy and practices around both service delivery and employment. They will also need to consider disability equality in relation to other functions such as setting budgets, making public appointments, funding and regulatory roles.

The duty will not provide new rights to individual disabled people but it will provide a framework for public authorities to carry out their functions more effectively. It will also help them to tackle discrimination and its causes across the organisation in a pro-active way, at the beginning of a process rather than waiting for complaints from individual disabled people after discrimination has occurred.

East Sussex Disability Association will be working to ensure public bodies meet their new duties under the DDA 2005. We will also be helping them by arranging meetings etc with disabled people. We have already gained a contract with Sussex Police to help them devise their Disability Equality Scheme. In addition we are planning a conference on 18 July 2006 at the Floral Hall in Eastbourne. This will be an opportunity for disabled people to meet with representatives from public bodies and tell them how they can best involve disabled people. Disabled people will also get the opportunity to sign up to help public bodies with this continuing responsibility. More information on the Disability Equality Duty can be got from: www.dotheduty.org

More information on the conference will be available from ESDA from 1 June on: 01323 514500 or info@esda.org.uk

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