

CABINET DECISION

Access and Communities – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor David Coleman

DISABILITY ADVISORY GROUP (DAG) REPORT

1. Summary

This report is to advise Cabinet of the work undertaken by the Disability Advisory Group (DAG). The DAG has been in operation since 2006 and has during this time supported the Council to improve services for people with a range of disabilities. In the past year there have been a number of key projects across the Borough that the DAG has been supporting and this report details this activity. The agenda for the DAG meetings is informed by issues DAG members raise themselves, scrutiny agendas and potential service and policy changes.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- a) Note the report and the work undertaken by the DAG.
- b) Note the information will be shared through SGM's about the role and purpose of DAG to ensure they are involved at the start of future consultations/ policy changes.

Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

It was agreed by CMT to highlight to Cabinet the work which is being carried out by the Disability Advisory Group (DAG)

4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members) should consider whether they have a personal interest in any item, as defined in **paragraphs 9 and 11** of the Council's code of conduct and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with and/or taking account of **paragraphs 12 - 17** of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest, as described in **paragraph 16** of the code, in any business of the Council he/she must then, **in accordance with paragraph 18** of the code, consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest and the business:-

- affects the members financial position or the financial position of a person or body described in **paragraph 17** of the code, or

- relates to the determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission or registration in relation to the member or any person or body described in **paragraph 17** of the code.

A Member with a personal interest, as described in **paragraph 18** of the code, may attend the meeting but must not take part in the consideration and voting upon the relevant item of business. However, a member with such an interest may make representations, answer questions or give evidence relating to that business before the business is considered or voted on, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under a statutory right or otherwise (**paragraph 19** of the code)

Members may participate in any discussion and vote on a matter in which they have an interest, as described in **paragraph 18** of the code, where that interest relates to functions of the Council detailed in **paragraph 20** of the code.

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

It is a criminal offence for a member to participate in any discussion or vote on a matter in which he/she has a disclosable pecuniary interest (and where an appropriate dispensation has not been granted) **paragraph 21** of the code.

Members are required to comply with any procedural rule adopted by the Council which requires a member to leave the meeting room whilst the meeting is discussing a matter in which that member has a disclosable pecuniary interest (**paragraph 22** of the code).

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

15TH JANUARY 2015

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

DISABILITY ADVISORY GROUP (DAG) REPORT

SUMMARY

This report is to advise Cabinet of the work undertaken by the Disability Advisory Group (DAG). The DAG has been in operation since 2006 and has during this time supported the Council to improve services for people with a range of disabilities. In the past year there have been a number of key projects across the Borough that the DAG has been supporting and this report details this activity. The agenda for the DAG meetings is informed by issues DAG members raise themselves, scrutiny agendas and potential service and policy changes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- a) Note the report and the work undertaken by the DAG.
- b) Note the information will be shared through Service Group Management Teams (SGMT's) about the role and purpose of DAG to ensure they are involved at the start of future consultations/ policy changes.

DETAIL

1. Stockton Disability Advisory Group (DAG) was established following Stockton Council's consultation on its Disability Equality Scheme in 2006. It exists to facilitate a dialogue between the council, disabled residents and representatives of local disability organisations to support, shape and improve access to council services to meet the needs of disabled residents and service users.
2. The aims of the group are to provide:
 - Members of the group with information about council services
 - A forum for discussion with council services about ways to improve service delivery and meet the council's responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.
 - An opportunity for disabled people to influence and shape policy development through working closely with council officers and departments
3. Membership of the group is open to any individuals with an interest in disability issues in Stockton-On-Tees, including representatives of local disability community groups, individuals, organisations and partnerships. Members have a range of physical, sensory and mental disabilities and they are self-selecting to the group. There are currently in

excess of 70 people included on the Disability Advisory Group, with approximately 25 people who regularly attend meetings; this is very much dependent upon the topics that are subject to consultation/ discussion. The meetings are held quarterly and usually at Stockton Central Library.

4. The activity of the DAG is reported to the Access and Communities portfolio holder during regular briefing sessions.

Over the last 12 months DAG has been actively involved in a number of projects and activities, detailed in paragraphs 4 – 11 below.

Parked cars on pavements

5. Members of DAG raised concerns regarding off-road, pavement parking. In response, members of the Anti-social Behaviour Team, Care For Your Area (CFYA) and the Police were invited to a DAG meeting to explore ways forward to address this issue. Similar issues of parked vehicles have also been raised by members of the general public, local residents and ward members. As a result the community safety team have revised a number of policies for parked vehicles on pavements, contravention of yellow line parking, removal notices for vehicles deemed to be parked in an obstructive manner using Decriminalisation of Parking offences 2005 & Traffic Management Act 2004. Also in partnership the other three local authority and Cleveland Police had set up a "task and finish" group, members of DAG were represented and a public awareness campaign was rolled out regarding the issues of vehicles parking illegally on pavements. Stockton Council Enforcement team will now be issuing obstruction notices where 'Hot Spots' have been identified by members of the public causing any form of illegal obstruction.

Wheelie bins

6. The 'Care for your Area Team' had a policy regarding refuse collection at the curtilage / boundary of residents' properties. DAG members reported that they were still experiencing problems with wheelie bins obstructing their pathways. This applied to both wheelchair users and also those with a visual impairment. The most common issues were that the wheelie bins were being left in the middle of the pavement by residents or refuse operatives potentially causing a dangerous obstruction. The CFYA team explained that this is an issue that the council have tried to address through a number of programmes such as the 'Up Your Street' project, where leaflets were distributed to residents outlining issues caused by abandoned bins for disabled residents and advising them of the reasons why it is helpful if they return their own bin to within their curtilage/boundary. Following work with the DAG the CFYA team have amended their policy on refuse collection and the operatives now put all wheelie bins back to the residents' curtilage/ boundary. In addition all operatives undertake annual training on this subject and issues experienced by disabled residents will be a topic at the next CFYA development day.

Car parking / Parking meters

7. The DAG was involved in the consultation around changes to car parking across the Borough. Some of the issues that they identified were the size of the disabled car parking bays and access to parking meters. In conjunction with Stockton Council's Traffic and Network Safety Manager and Building Control these issues have been addressed. All machines are now DDA (Disability Discrimination Act 1995 & 2005) compliant in respect of where they are placed, their height, signage and wheelchair accessibility. All disabled parking bays exceed the DDA compliance requirements to meet the needs of some of our local users with larger mobility scooters.

Town Centre High Street Access

8. As part of the Town Centre regeneration a number of areas that were causing disabled residents issues during the High Street works were identified and resolved early in the regeneration scheme e.g. movement of bus stops and ensuring accessible routes through works for those with a visual impairment and wheelchair users. The DAG also raised concerns regarding the identification of the location of the fountain for those with a visual impairment and their recommendation to use textured paving. This led to the Rediscover Stockton Team and the contractor BIRSE working with the DAG to ensure that the High Street when completed is accessible to those with disabilities.
9. BIRSE have also introduced staff training around disabled access e.g. using the toolbox kit, recommended from Guide Dogs North East around accessibility for people who have a visual impairment and/ or mobility issues. A named member of staff from BIRSE, is also available in the Rediscover Stockton shop on a Wednesday 10am-2pm, every week until the High street works are complete for any members of the DAG or for residents who would like to take the opportunity of an orientation session.
10. In addition to the above, there is a commitment to update DAG members regarding the progression of High Street works; this includes fortnightly updates via the Rediscover Stockton website.

Elections Polling Stations and Disabilities Access

11. Staff from Democratic Services came to inform the group about changes to the number of polling stations and consulted them on accessibility issues. They also took the opportunity to explain the new IER (Individual Electoral Registration) system and the postal vote system. Whilst DAG Members agreed that the mobile polling stations was not very accessible, they stated that the staff were very good in supporting people with disabilities to exercise their right to vote. As a result of this work, members of the DAG have registered to vote and have opted for postal voting.
- 12. A summary of other recent activities and events that DAG members have been involved in events and activities**

The DAG has been involved in a number of activities that have supported the development of our policies and services affecting disabled residents including:

- Yarm High street consultation regarding disability access and car parking charges
- The Corporate and Social Inclusion Select Committee consultation review of street café furniture and 'A' boards around providing access for people with disabilities
- Resolving issues with colleagues in the Care for Your Area team around refuse collection for vulnerable disabled people who are house-bound
- Providing supporting information and intelligence, in relation to accessibility, for funding bids for Preston Hall and Park regeneration work on the Main Hall and the Victorian Kitchen Garden
- Park rangers consultation on accessibility issues for parks and walks around the Borough
- Supporting the development of the river wheelie boats programmes and activities and promoting it to potential users
- Promoting the Stay Warm winter campaign, in partnership with Cleveland Fire Brigade

National Consultation

13. Recently the Council have submitted two case studies around disability access and engagement to 'The Accessible Britain Challenge'. As a result of this SBC have been entered into an award for transparency and engagement with our disabled communities and results are expected to be announced during March 2015.

NEXT STEPS - FUTURE ACTIVITY

14. The SBC website developer will be attending the next DAG meeting in January 2015 to ensure that the new website is DDA compliant and accessible for people with differing disabilities.
15. Members of the DAG are working with Libraries and Customer Services to ensure that services and facilities at the new building in Billingham are accessible to our disabled residents and are offering orientation sessions in January 2015 to those who require them.
16. The DAG will continue to support the undertaking of the Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) that support relevant consultation activity around changes to policies and services.
17. They are currently exploring opportunities for DAG members to further support the DDA (Disability Discrimination Act 1995 & 2005) access audits from a disabled community perspective with the relevant council officers.
18. They are also looking at how feasible it is for DAG members to support the delivery of some training programmes for staff in partnership with relevant council officers as testimony from those who are experiencing an issue can be very powerful, this approach has worked in other locations.
19. They are continuing to develop stronger partnerships and links with other local, regional and national disability forums, networks and groups.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

20. The actions are to be met through existing services and budgets and /or secured external funding.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

21. There is a legal duty to meet our responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010

RISK ASSESSMENT

22. N/A

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

23. N/A.

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

24. This report is a progress report, therefore EIA is not required.

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

25. N/A

Name of Contact Officer: Lesley King
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Education related? N/A

Background Papers N/A

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors Not ward specific

Property No property implications