

Classification: OFFICIAL
ACCESS AND DISABILITIES WORKING GROUP MINUTES - 30
NOVEMBER 2017

Present:

Councillors Eden (Chair), Williams, Khan

Also in attendance:

Diane Goodlock	Reading MS Society
Helen Bryant	RBC - Access Officer
Nina Crispin	RBC - Information and Engagement Officer
Carolyn Jenkins	RBC - Landscape Design Officer
George Baptiste	RBC - Playground Officer
Trish Wright	MS Therapy Centre
Bob Bristow	Reading Association for the Blind
Clive Wood	Guide Dogs
Ron Larkoh	Manager, Berkshire PhAB
Lisa Bamsey	Readibus and Service User
Alice Carter	Parent/Carer Trustee of Peapods & Reading Family Forum

Apologies:

Cllr Grasshoff	
Liz Cheyney	Member of the Public
Brian Oatway	Member of the Public
Carol Froud	Member of the Public
Liz Johnson	Readibus
Tisha Buckle	Member of the Public
Nigel McAlister	Member of the Public

1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on June 2017 were agreed as a correct record.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Item 5: Nina reported that she had tried to contact the MPs but had not, as yet, had any response. Cllr Eden said that she was chasing one of the MP's PA's.

Cllr Williams said that she had gone to visit the Houses of Parliament; she had seen the tiny offices. Cllr Williams said that she had seen quite a lot of The Right Hon. Matt Rhodda MP since he had been elected.

It was noted that Fridays were constituency days.

The Working Group wished to lobby MPs on policy, and issues of interest and which impact on disabled people, and so a wide meeting was needed and members of several Working Groups should be invited. The Working Group was an open forum, and so anybody was welcome.

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If members of other groups said that they were willing to attend it may incentivise MPs to come and talk to the Group.

Cllr Khan said that we should try to find out how many invitations had been sent to Mr Sharma MP so far.

AGREED: That the position be noted.

That members of other Groups be invited to an open meeting when a date is decided, to meet the local MPs.

3. CHILDREN'S PLAY EQUIPMENT

Carolyn Jenkins and George Baptiste came to talk about the accessibility of children's play equipment in Reading. Some residents had raised the issue of young people who have disabilities and how much of the equipment in Reading was available to them.

Historically there had been some play equipment which was accessible; this was mostly in ERAPA - East Reading Adventure Playground - at Palmer Park. There was not much diversity in what was there; it was just for wheelchair users.

Recently, a more inclusive approach had been taken. Not every bit of kit could be used by everyone, but the equipment was not distinguishable from any other.

Carolyn said that there were firm surfaces.

Adults could play with their children; there were double slides and so on.

The last sizeable amount of funding was received between 2008 and 2010. Section 106 money had been used to fund some equipment. This had been used in 19 sites over 3 years.

Some sites were not suitable for disabled children; such as Robert Hewitt Park. However, most had good transport links, such as Christchurch Meadow, Palmer Park and John Rabsons.

Christchurch Meadow was a day out destination for children and their parents/guardians.

There were gondola swings, adult and child slides, textured play, sand and boulders to scramble over; the area had a seaside feel. Some isolated play equipment was available for some children who found crowds challenging and threatening. Picnic tables were available so that parents could watch their children playing. There was easy parking.

At Palmer Park there was parking available outside the stadium.

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Some equipment was in a wildflower meadow and there were lots of apparatus for children of mixed abilities.

At John Rabsons there was a seaside theme, with a ship and other such items.

Resources were now scarce.

Six sites had been evaluated by parents with disabled children. Items such as variety of play equipment and maintenance scored highly.

It was noted that gates needed to be able to be latched in order to stop children from running off, but children also needed to be able to escape easily if they needed to.

Carolyn said that there were evaluation sheets that the Working Group could look at.

There were some playgrounds that were not accessible; some were dated and the surfaces were not suitable. Equipment was being refreshed with Section 106 money. Choices needed to be made; if no money was made available then equipment could not be replaced.

Every year one or two playgrounds which had softfill had this replaced with a more suitable surface; rubber crumb.

It was reported that Tesco had said that they were willing to give money to put towards local play equipment. An appeal could be set up using their token voting system.

Disabled adults with children found play areas difficult to access: it was not possible to get to the basket swing in Palmer Park - sand and bark chippings were impossible to wheel on. It was hard to get into.

The Council's website needed to be updated with information such as surfaces and so on. This information used to be on the website. Lots of less-visited pages on the website had been taken down. The Working Group would push to get the information needed about accessible play onto the website - or a site - somewhere.

In Earley at Sol Joel Park (leased to Earley Town Council) there was a new inclusive play area, with a roundabout, wobbly-wobbly bridge and an adapted slide, among other equipment.

In Newbury there was "Swings and Smiles".

In Twyford there was a zipwire, bikes and other items.

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Cllr Eden said that she took her children to the playgrounds and it can be difficult to lift some children. Independent play was important.

No funds were available from the Government.

It was reported that rubber crumb surfaces needed to be prioritised; e.g. at Prospect Park.

The question was raised of the possibility of having a parental reference group.

There were groups that worked with the Council, including the Families Forum and the Parent Carer Network.

Peapods was a charity offering parent-to-parent support for families with physically disabled children and it was possible that they could do some fundraising activities, as well as some schools.

Invitations could be extended to Reading Families Forum, Peapods and Brookfields School to have a discussion at a future meeting. The meeting could be held after schools had ended for the day. The Avenue School might also wish to join.

Carolyn told the meeting that the average cost of equipment was £30,000.

Adult play was also raised; this is popular in some areas and countries.

AGREED:

- (1) That the position be noted
- (2) That priorities for changes of surfaces be established
- (3) That the information on the Council's website be updated
- (4) That the possibility of a meeting be discussed with various contacts
- (5) That an onsite meeting be set up, plus photo opportunity
- (6) That fundraising possibilities be explored
- (7) That the issues of parks and play equipment be on the agenda of the next meeting

Diane Goodlock said that it was very difficult to get in and out of Eldon Gardens for various reasons, including cars parked where they should not be, fallen trees and bushes hanging down.

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4. HYDROTHERAPY POOL

This was now up and running and all the alterations to the pool had been done, including to the steps, showers and surfaces.

The MS Society, Arthritis Matters, MPs and all who worked to stop the closure were to be congratulated.

There had been 12 people at the last session and they were very pleased to have the use of the pool once again.

It was reported that once the new pool was operational the old pool would be closed.

The pool would be open for a year. The pool was open until 9pm.

AGREED:

- (1) That the position be noted
- (2) That all involved with the campaign be congratulated

5. CHRISTMAS SHOPPING EVENING

Questions were asked about the timing of the evening; why the start was put back to 5pm, if it was possible to put it back to the original time.

Contrary to what had been said to Helen Bryant by Communications at the time, people from organisations bringing people in vans said that it did not help them.

It was too late to change it for this year. The organisers had changed from previous years.

There had been a leaflet to show what was happening in the town throughout the year. The Shopping Evening had been relegated to just two lines; the Working Group thought that it needed to be more prominent.

AGREED:

- (1) That the position be noted

6. NEXT MEETINGS

A discussion was had as to what should be discussed at the next meetings;

Play equipment

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Christmas Shopping Evening

Simon Beasley to attend to discuss town centre issues

MPs - this would be an open meeting with people being invited from other groups

Reading Buses - this could be the March meeting

AGREED:

(1) That the position be noted

7. AOB

Lisa Bamsey said that she had attended a meeting where the public had had a chance to ask questions of Steve McManus, who was the Chief Executive of The Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust.

Details could be found here:

<http://healthwatchreading.org.uk/public-get-chance-quiz-royal-berks-chief-exec-healthwatch-reading-agm/>

Mr McManus had said that there were changes ahead with personal wheelchair budgets [due to replace the current wheelchair voucher scheme for an estimated 1.2m wheelchair users nationally, to give them more control and choice]. Before any changes were made to the service, it would be important to listen to the views of users of the service to make sure that the clinic would be suitable to meet their needs. This would entail learning from the hydrotherapy service decision, to ensure that the hospital worked with service users, carers and members of the community, to find a solution.

Lisa had said that patients' records were to be digitalised; it was possible to opt out. She was unsure about this idea and had asked Healthwatch to keep a watching brief. Lisa said that she was concerned about vulnerable adults; they may be particularly in danger if their health information was online and the site was hacked.

Mr McManus had said that the Trust was committed to moving from paper to electronic records because it was more efficient. He needed to check the details about any opt-out and would respond at a later date via Healthwatch Reading.

The recent cyberattack on the NHS had not impacted on patient records held by the Trust, and online security was really important.

More people in society interacted online, such as with shopping and banking, and the Trust had had to move with the times.

Councillor Williams said that there needed to be a "push" on voting; some groups were under-registered, such as disabled people and housebound people.

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Reading Vote 100 was to be launched next year, to celebrate the centenary of universal suffrage; some details could be found here:

<https://readinglabour.org.uk/vote-100-plans-already-starting/>

Members were encouraged to get involved and to contact Cllr Eden or Cllr Williams if they wished to do so.

It was reported that, at the last election, some blind and visually impaired people were still finding it hard to vote. Templates had been missing or Officers were unaware of how they were to be used.

It was noted how important it was to ensure that certain groups were not disenfranchised because they were unable to vote or were not registered.

Nina Crispin reported that the Council's Physical Disabilities and Sensory Needs Partnership Board had had a meeting to discuss how to establish a physical hub for people to get information, and especially disabled people.

A subgroup was to be set up.

The minutes of the meeting could be found here:

https://search3.openobjects.com/mediamanager/reading/enterprise/files/1_pdsn_meeting_disability_resource_centre_minutes_13_sept_2017_v1_1_final_.pdf

The Business Improvement District could be approached for sponsorship. Berkshire Disability Information Network had conducted a survey many years ago, but it seemed that nothing had come of it. It was suggested that advice groups might wish to get involved, such as Reading Voluntary Action and so on.

Members of the subgroup could be invited to a future meeting, if progress is made.

The hub would need to make a difference to the lives of disabled people in the town; and perhaps more widely. It was thought that a session once a month might be a good start to the project.

Some possible venues were discussed, such as a café in the Town Hall, which was being refurbished. The 3Bs was coming back.

It was agreed to discuss the Town Hall at the next meeting of the Working Group.

Thames Tower was mentioned as a possible site - the question was asked whether it would be possible to open up some of the ground floor, as there was a coffee shop. It was to be a licensed venue.

There could be a "pop up" area; possibly in the site of the former Waterstones in The Oracle.

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Trish Wright said that she had tried to get a taxi to the meeting but had been refused. She was told that none was available at that time. This had happened 3 times recently.

AGREED:

- (1) That the position be noted
- (2) That members of the Working Group should contact Cllr Eden or Cllr Williams if they wished to be involved in Vote 100 Reading
- (3) That member(s) of the subgroup to establish an information hub in Reading be invited to a future meeting, subject to progress
- (4) That the Town Hall be discussed at the next meeting of the Working Group
- (5) That the Access Officer contact Licensing on behalf of Trish Wright

The meeting closed at 3.25.