



Open Door

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SDEF
Scottish Disability
Equality Forum

Convenor's Report

Welcome to the latest edition of Open Door. As usual, we have much to report and hope the various articles and updates are helpful and interesting to you.

As mentioned in the last edition, we have been fortunate in securing funding for a new post within the organisation. As you will read elsewhere, the new member of staff is Ms Liz Rowlett, who joins us as Policy, Information and Parliamentary Officer. Liz has been very busy already and has contributed to a number of consultations and initiatives, as well as linking with the Disability Rights Commission to set up an e-panel, a group of members consulted electronically on various issues of significance to people with disabilities.

Following our Annual General Meeting in December, we welcome two new Directors to our Board. They are Mrs Margaret Simpson and Mr Gordon Mungall, who bring a wealth of experience on disability issues. Elsewhere in this edition you can read their brief details. Members also returned Mr Peter Ingram-Monk, who will be well known to many of you.

Peter has been with us since incorporation and has worked hard on a range of issues, not least the establishment of an Access Auditing Course at Heriot-Watt University. The elections bring us up to full strength, with nine Directors from diverse backgrounds.

We hope you enjoy this issue and remember, readers are more than welcome to send in their submissions for later editions. If you have something you want to share please, send it in.

Best wishes

Ron Skinner MBE
Convenor



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News

Website launched to help disabled people live independently

www.thehousekey.org provides details of support services which can benefit older people, people with physical or learning disabilities, or with mental health problems.

It aims to provide good quality information to the public about services to help them in their day to day living at home. As well as this website, a series of printed directories will be available shortly, and a telephone Advice Line is also planned.

Services listed in The House Key are provided by Local Authorities as well as independent organisations. They include specialist services (for older people, or people with disabilities, for example), as well as many service available to anyone who needs them.

Local Authorities may help you pay for a housing support service, and The House Key provides guidance on how this works, and who you should contact.

Talking Cash Machines Go Live Following Successful Trials.

Yorkshire Bank is the first English bank to introduce talking cash machines to its branches, following successful trials of the technology. The new machines will be phased in as older equipment is replaced.

The bank has deployed a talking cashpoint at its new flagship branch in Albion Street, Leeds, following trials at two other branches in Leeds and Hull in July 2005 and trials at sister banks, The Northern Bank, Belfast and The Clydesdale Bank, Glasgow. More branches are expected to follow, according to a Yorkshire Bank spokesperson.

Talking ATMs (automated teller machines) enable vision-impaired customers to hear details of their accounts and transactions spoken through a standard set of headphones when plugged into a socket on the front of the machine. To ensure privacy, customers are given the option of switching off the visual screen while carrying out transactions.

Inaccessible Web Sites 'Could Lose Billions'.

Web site owners stand to lose billions of pounds worth of business if they fail to tackle basic accessibility problems, according to research from technology access charity AbilityNet (www.fastlink.headstar.com/ability1).

The charity surveyed the internet habits of 100 people with disabilities including vision impairment, and found that they tended to go to mainstream web sites for information, shopping, banking and leisure, rather than to web sites specifically focused on their disability. The top ten most popular web destinations cited were:

The BBC,
Nationwide Building Society,
Google,
eBay,
Amazon,
The Guardian Newspaper,
TheTimes Newspaper,
Lastminute.com,
Premierleague.com
and Yahoo.

Blind Computer Trainer Named Volunteer Of The Year.

A blind volunteer from Somerset in the UK has won a prestigious national award for his work training vision impaired people to use computers, assistive technology and other electronic devices.

David Godly, who is a committee member for the charity Woodspring Association for Blind People (WABP www.wabp.org.uk) in Weston-super-Mare, North Somerset, was one of just five volunteers selected from more than 2,000 volunteer nominees to receive an award, winning in the 'Inspiration' category.

David has spent the last four years providing home training for vision- impaired people, many of whom are older or isolated, to help them to install and use specialist technology, including screen readers, screen magnifiers and adapted keyboards.

SDEF Annual General Meeting

SDEF held its 2005 Annual General Meeting (AGM) at the Stirling Management Centre, University of Stirling on 21st November 2005.

Unfortunately, the Minister for Disabled People, Mrs Anne McGuire MP, had to call off as a speaker at short notice, as pressing parliamentary business required her attendance in the House. She expressed her disappointment by letter at being unable to attend, particularly as the meeting combined her two interests of Minister and constituency MP for Stirling. Anne was, however, addressing Parliament at the Second Reading of the Equality Bill and this was clearly a key development.

SDEF was most fortunate that the speaker scheduled to speak in the afternoon kindly agreed to come earlier. Marieke Dwarshuis, the Head of Charities at the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) gave an illuminating address on the new regulatory framework and the responsibilities placed on charitable bodies in Scotland. She described the process of developing the charity register and the criteria and procedure for bodies to register. She brought much material and also referred delegated to the OSCR website for further information. Her speech was most warmly received and appreciated.

In the afternoon formal business was carried out, this including announcement of the results of the postal ballot for three places on the Board. There had been four candidates: Mr Peter Ingram-Monk was returned as a Director and Mrs Margaret Simpson and Mr Gordon Mungall were welcomed by the Convenor as new Directors.

An amendment was also passed to Article 29 of the Memorandum & Articles of Association. This allows Office Bearers to be elected at the first meeting after the Annual General Meeting of 2006 and at the first meeting after each third AGM thereafter.

The Annual General Meeting also presents an opportunity each year to canvass the views of the membership on priority areas for future development. The Convenor opened the floor to delegates to air their views and proposals for further action.

A wide-ranging discussion ensued, embracing such diverse areas as: orthotic and wheelchair services; video conferencing to aid consultation; the possibility of regional meetings for members; insurance for member groups; concerns over the Blue Badge scheme; the progress of existing pieces of work; and issues around sensory impairment. Attention was drawn to "HomeZone" a useful publication for people with a visual impairment, available from the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE).

The Convenor thanked everybody for their attendance. In all, nearly forty delegates had travelled from all over Scotland including the northern and western islands and many were accompanied by carers. Our thanks are also extended to all for a successful day.

Wyn Merrells

New Directors

Gordon Mungall has been a volunteer and Board Member of Disability West Lothian for over ten years and the Chairperson for the past five. He is also Chair of the West Lothian Access Committee and works closely with other disabled members, West Lothian Council and other groups, to improve access for all.

As a member of both Disability West Lothian and the Access Committee he has been able to help lower the physical and attitudinal barriers disabled people meet in society today via disability awareness raising.

He is a youth worker and runs the Bathgate Phab Club for young people, with or without disabilities, aged fourteen to twenty five. For the past four years he has jointly co-ordinated the club's Youth Exchanges in Scotland and Germany.

Margaret Simpson has been disabled for over thirty years and active in the disability movement for the past twenty. Over the past two decades she has been involved with Arthritis Care, delivering courses on challenging arthritis and helping others to cope and move on. During this time the focus has switched to more user-led organisations and she is committed to ensuring that this continues.

She was Vice-Convenor of the Borders Disability Forum and a committee member of the Borders Voluntary Community Care Forum and Chair of the Disabled Persons Housing Service (Borders), which is now responsible for hosting the Access Panels in the Borders. She has been working with the NHS at local and national level to bring users of the service into the operational and strategic levels and sees SDEF as a vehicle for driving this agenda in the future.

New team member

Liz Rowlett has recently joined SDEF as Policy, Information and Parliamentary Officer. Liz joined SDEF from the Stirling Health and Well-being Alliance, where she was Information Resources Worker. Previous experience includes a stint in the Scottish Parliament Information Centre, Sessional Internet Tutor for Voice of Carers Across Lothian (VOCAL), Assistant Editor at Reuters and various positions in a number of small business consultancies. She has also been involved in voluntary work for the Princess Royal Trust for Carers, PDSA, Shelter, MS Society and in a holiday home for children with special needs.

Access Panel News

Inverness Access Committee

'Basic Service Level Agreement.'

Inverness Access Committee is pleased to note that as a result of meetings with Highland Council last year, nominal grants and some IT equipment are now available to all the participating Access Panels in Highland who accept the negotiated terms of a basic Service Level Agreement. The Committee continues with its panel work and meetings with planners promoting improved access for disabled people.

'Children sang most encouragingly.'

There was concensus on the Inverness Access Committee that a visit by the IAC to Raigmore Primary School was a highlight and definitely worthwhile. Challenging logistics, on a very cold November morning the IAC team of six, in three accessible taxis, all arrived on time. The Headteacher's preparatory work on disability enabled IAC to introduce the Disability Discrimination Act, an outline of Access Panel work in Inverness and to demonstrate IT equipment and the positive aspects of living and working with a disability. They presented a local inclusive video on train access and wheelchair/dancing skills to a receptive audience of about 100 schoolchildren. One pupil volunteered for a solo turn in a sports wheelchair and there were 'Questions and Answers'. Everyone, including the teachers, were so absorbed that the proceedings were allowed to continue into a school break!

Children sang most encouragingly to open and close the Assembly and each IAC member received a Certificate of Achievement. School photographs recorded the event.

Consultations

Recently, members of IAC were also interested consultants in the selection committee for a new Lead Artist to the Inverness Public Art Project. Other IAC members have given Email feedback on the NHS Scotland's Wheelchair Services and Special Seating Review and are involved in numerous written consultations relating to inclusive access.

DDA access awareness-raising

In October 2005 an IAC wheelchair-user supporter generously raised funds by competing in the Baxters Loch Ness Marathon 5K FunRun. IAC took a stand in January 2006 at a Disability Fair for All in the accessible Merkinch Community Centre, organised by colleagues in the sector, which was attended by the local MP and the public. This provided a good opportunity for DDA access awareness-raising, producing numerous enquiries and a welcome opportunity for local networking.

Support

Inverness Access Committee is very grateful to SDEF for enabling the Scottish Executive Grant Funding for training and development projects, and for all voluntary support.

Ellen Pips Rivals To Win Apple Award



East Renfrewshire Council architect Ellen De Lombaerde shows off the Green Apple Award won by the council for its access upgrade of Eastwood House in Giffnock.

The Green Apple Awards are awarded annually in recognition of building projects that enhance the built environment and/or protect our architectural heritage.

Ellen is a member of the council's property and technical services team which was responsible for the project to make Eastwood House more accessible to the public. Before the final plans were agreed the team discussed the project with the East Renfrewshire Access Panel with whom they regularly consult on disabled

access issues that affect various council properties.

At Eastwood House a new ramp was installed at the front door along with a lift inside the building, two wheelchair friendly doors at the entrance to the building and a disabled toilet.

Built in 1850, the former family home of the Weirs of Cathcart, was visited by many dignitaries including King George V and Queen Mary, the Aga Khan, Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, Danny Kaye and Laurel and Hardy.

Councillor Allan Steele, community convener said: "It is fantastic to hear the council has won this national award, especially when there was such stiff competition from over 300 other projects."

Robert's Ramblings

Well, Christmas and the winter are at last starting to fade away and we are starting to get longer days and shorter nights.

Not so much travelling this winter as last winter, which is probably a good thing – for me at least.

Since last writing one of these columns, I have travelled up and down Scotland to the Regional Meetings. We held eight of these meetings, and for me it was a great opportunity to meet Access Panel members and get a tremendous panoramic view of what Panels across the country are doing. It was an opportunity for people to meet each other and share ideas, experiences and enthusiasm. In some cases it was difficult to bring the meetings to an end, there was so

Incapacity benefit changes

much to say. We have tried to capture all our learning from how to hold these meetings and we will hold them again in the early autumn of 2006.

We tried audio conferencing for the first time at the Islands Regional meeting in Inverness, although not quite in the way we had originally thought. Jack from Orkney was due to join us on the phone, but couldn't, because a JCB driver had sliced through a cable somewhere near Elgin (??), and Malcolm from Lewis (who had turned up a week early for the plane he had booked) was able to join us by phone instead. So we will continue to pursue this idea, along with video conferencing. However we don't see it replacing face to face meetings, but supporting it.

Since the Regional Meetings I have kept close to base in Stirling, with meetings in Motherwell and Irvine, as well as Falkirk, Edinburgh, Kilmarnock, Greenock and Glasgow. Fiona Grafton from the Uist Panel was in Glasgow in February so I was able to catch up with her too.

In the meantime we have been spending a lot of time preparing for the next Access Panels conference in Falkirk, and I hope to see many of you there.

While SDEF welcomes enhanced prospects for social inclusion and equality, we are clear that changes must be introduced with the support of those affected. Naturally, there will be concern amongst people receiving Incapacity Benefit if they believe that reform is being introduced for reasons other than improving their life opportunities.

The publication of the Green Paper on Welfare Reform marks the start of a 12 week consultation period up to Friday 21 April 2006. The consultation questions are available on the Department of Works and Pensions Website and comments can be forwarded to SDEF.

Changes proposed to the present system involve the creation of a new benefit entitled "Employment and Support Allowance". Claimants will be split into two groups, those judged to be permanently incapable of work and those capable of work with support. They will be encouraged to undertake work-focused interviews, or face benefit cuts. Central monitoring of sick notes by GPs is a feature of the new reforms, with incentives being offered to local authorities and other organisations to lift people off this benefit.

SDEF welcomes initiatives that provide help and support for people with disabilities to take up and maintain employment. However, SDEF has a number of concerns regarding the implementation of the proposed

changes. Care will have to be taken to ensure that:

- People with disabilities are not persuaded into inappropriate employment.
 - Adequate support is provided to disabled employees to continue in employment.
 - There is clarity on the circumstances of people with disabilities who leave employment as a result of poor health or a worsening medical condition. There must be transparency on: the ease with which benefits can be resumed; the potential loss of certain benefits in the interim period; and any additional procedures required of people with failing health to maintain entitlement.
 - Job interviews are conducted by personnel with an understanding of disability issues, including mental health issues, to avoid stress and hardship. The early signs are not encouraging that this will be the case.
 - There is not a perverse incentive for local authorities or employment services to push people into work. Any attempt to persuade people with disabilities into unsuitable employment may create churning, with people forced into a never ending cycle of training schemes and low paid work experience.
- The doctor-patient relationship is not compromised by incentives to GPs to remove people from benefit entitlement. Particular care should be taken not to deter people from seeking help for health problems.

Readers with access to our website can also read an SDEF Report on the London Conference on Reforming Incapacity Benefit, posted on 7th February 2006.

SDEF calls for wheelchair service redesign

In its response to the NHS Review of Wheelchair and Special Seating, SDEF called for a redesign of the service and the creation of a separate directorate to manage the service. The benefit to the user of a directorate is that the new body would look specifically after the needs of the Wheelchair Service. There would be sufficient staff resources to ensure a team approach consisting of consultant, occupational therapist and physiotherapist and other professionals where appropriate. The user would also know to whom complaints should be directed and would be better informed as to repair procedures by the existence of area-dedicated repair engineers. Insofar as users of the service are concerned, SDEF considers that the most important parts are as follows:

Mobility is vital for many functions of daily living including participation in vocational, educational and social activities. All of these contribute to an individual's quality of life and capacity to meet personal life goals. They also

impact directly on the quality of life of carers. More widely, there is an economic and social cost to society of not meeting user and carer needs.

All those who need wheelchair and special seating services are entitled to expect that the service they receive is efficient and acceptable and meets the highest standards deliverable within the resources to be provided. Services will need to recognise the lifestyle of the wheelchair user and the needs of carers.

SDEF believes that The Consultation and Draft Reports do not highlight sufficiently strongly and clearly the fundamental issues that are essential to meeting these needs.

In order for the NHS Wheelchair Service to embrace the tenets of the Scottish Parliament's policy on social inclusion then in SDEF's view, the Service will fail to address the main concerns of users and carers if there is not a shift in the following policy areas:-

1. Break away from prescription solely on the basis of medical need and recognise **life style** (which may impact on carers). Most wheelchair users are dependent upon their carers to a greater or lesser degree for the lifting of wheelchairs for transport purposes and carers' needs are currently ignored from the assessment. Research shows that carers find wheelchairs, in the main, too heavy. Fixed as opposed to adjustable handles can also be an issue for carers and attendants.

2. The current policy is for the NHS Wheelchair Service to only issue power wheelchairs to those users who require them for indoor use and not solely for outdoor use. In practice such users are issued with indoor/outdoor chairs while those who do not require to use that type of wheelchair indoors are debarred from being issued with a powered wheelchair for outdoor use.
3. The service should adopt a customer oriented approach. The ethos of the Health Service is to improve the quality of life – a suitable wheelchair does just that. The service should also record unmet need which should underpin funding extension of its Business Plan.

The full text of the SDEF response is available on the website – www.sdef.org.uk

SDEF members have contributed to a number of consultations in recent weeks.

Consultation responses submitted

- Draft Guidance on Regional Transport Strategy
- Transport Strategy Rail Priorities
- Digital Inclusion
- NHS Review of Wheelchair and Special Seating.

On-going Consultations

- Planning Bill. There has been a joint e-panel exercise with The Disability Rights Commission. The Commission has published some briefings and added our information to their newsletter and email distribution list.

- Fair for All – Disability. Strategic guidance to NHS Scotland in mainstreaming disability equality and access into policy and planning
- UK Parliament Welfare Reform

Details of current consultations are posted regularly on the SDEF website and we are keen to hear from members who would like to participate.

Petitions before the Scottish Parliament

Scottish Parliament Committees have been hearing evidence on the following petitions:

PE840 From Judith McCrorie. It calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to review its policy on **traffic-calming** measures, such as road humps and road cushions, in order to ensure that the impact on disabled users and the elderly is adequately addressed.

The Committee noted that Capability Scotland and The Scottish Ambulance Service were frustrated at the lack of consultation. The Committee will return the responses they have received to the petitioner for her opinion. This petition is likely to be referred to the Local Government and Transport Committee for further consideration.

PE909 From James MacLeod, on behalf of Inverclyde Council on Disability Ltd., calling for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to review the Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (Scotland) Regulations to allow for speedier provision and enforcement of **dropped kerbs and disabled parking bays** to prevent their abuse, ensuring greater and easier access for disabled, elderly and other users.

PE908 From Connie Syme. To ensure that traffic regulation orders are applied to all **disabled parking** bays to ensure they are used by registered disabled users only.

The Public Petitions Committee agreed to link consideration of petition PE908 with petition PE909 and agreed to write to the Baywatch Campaign, the Disability Rights Commission, the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland, COSLA, the Association of Chief Police Officers, the AA and the Scottish Executive to discover how widespread the problem is and why blue badge violations are not challenged more often. The Committee has discussed the need for disability awareness training for traffic wardens and noted that traffic wardens might not have any power over disabled bays if no traffic regulation order is in place. A possible solution to this problem might be the use of yellow lines rather than white markings.

