

**Minutes of the  
Central Beds Access Group Meeting  
13th July 2010  
Priory House  
Chicksands**

Present	Roy Storey	CBAG
	Ian Kelly	CBAG
	Mary Walsh	CBAG
	Martin Usher	Access Officer/CBC CBAG
	Steve Nash	Aragon Housing / CBAG
	Sally Aspinall	CPPC / CBAG
	Simon Daize	Beds Police / CBAG
	Charlotte Bonser	LINK / CBAG
	Jean Bird	Guide Dogs for the Blind
	Lorna Walker	CBC, Projects
	Susan Childerhouse	CBC Head of Public Protection / Safety
	Seema Jassi	Aragon Housing
	Jo Bellamy	CBC, Policy and Performance CBC
	Elaine Quantic	CBC, Policy and Performance

1 Welcome and Introductions

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting and invited all present to introduce themselves.

2 Apologies Received

Peter Keates	CBC Building Control
Jon Balaam	Greensand Trust
Rex Skinner	CBAG
Clare Harding	CBC Corporate Policy Advisor (Equality & Diversity)
Alexe Rose	Greensand Trust

3. To agree the Minutes of the meeting held on 18th May 2010

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18th May 2010 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

a) Matters Arising

Change name: to read Seema Jassi

4. To receive an update on the Equality Act and work ongoing – Clare Harding CBC

Unfortunately Clare's son was currently in hospital and she was unable to attend the meeting. The group sent their best wishes to Clare and family.

5. To receive a report from Susan Childerhouse, CBC

Susan reported that since the last meeting two enforcements visits had been made to the taxi rank at Flitwick Station and only one small problem had been identified.

It had come to her attention that there had been a fight between the taxi drivers themselves in early July.

First Capital Connect were looking at their permit system for taxis and considering withdrawing this as it was perceived as not working. They were now considering having someone on duty at stations across the whole of the network to control the parking system. Susan would be writing to them to seek an update on this and ask how and when this would be implemented if introduced.

Susan had also written to all Town and Parish Councils in Central Bedfordshire, informing them of a new Health and Safety Advisory Group for any events and asking people to consider disability issues when planning such events. Martin Usher would be at these meetings and so able to report back to CBAG. Roy Storey had produced a paper which outlined the type of issue to be considered by event organisers and Martin agreed to pass this on to those concerned with the Safety Advisory Group. Susan Childerhouse intended to issue a document which would cover frequently asked questions on how to address disability issues within event planning.

Susan updated the group on the current situation with regards to the Licensing of premises. At the current time the Authority could not put its own conditions on the granting of a License if the matter concerned is already covered by other legislation. The issues regarding access were already covered by the DDA Service Providers Act and not under the Licensing Act. Roy Storey put forward the opinion that if the Licensing Authority ignored the access issue they were ignoring the legislation of the DDA. Martin Usher responded that it was for the provider of the law to oversee it and there was no overseeing body for the DDA.

Roy reminded the group that Jayne Moakes had suggested writing to the MP Nadine Dorries about this and confirmed he had done so on behalf of the group. Roy read out the response to the letter and it was noted that unfortunately the MP had passed this on to two other people who were not connected with the Licensing Issues raised. Roy would update the Group when a further response was received from Nadine Dorries.

Further letters to local MPs Burt and Selous had yet to be responded to, although Mr Selous had acknowledged receipt of the emailed letter.

Susan Childerhouse felt that the group should contact the Herts and Beds Licensing Group, who were a regulatory service covering local areas and able to look at issues such as these. Susan would pass the contact details to Roy Storey.

Ian Kelly felt that each venue should be contacted and asked to address the issues within their own premises. Roy Storey had received an email and had a phone conversation with Amy Parker of Leonard Cheshire Homes who were producing an Access Campaign Pack. They were very interested in the work of CBAG on this matter, as were many other accessibility groups.

Martin Usher and Susan Childerhouse felt that they had pursued the issues as far as they were able and met with the same result, that there was nothing that could be done within current Licensing laws.

(a) Questions

Simon Daize asked whether there had been a Police Report on the fight at the Flitwick Taxi Rank but apparently none had been filed.

Roy Storey thanked Susan Childerhouse for her report.

**6.To receive a report on the fairer charging policy, Jo Bellamy Policy and Performance CBC.**

Jo Bellamy introduced herself and her colleague Elaine Quantic. Copies of the Consultation Paper were circulated.

The issue was fairer charging for non-residential care. Elaine explained that guidance would be used to see if people would be required to pay for services in future. This would be means tested using the factors of capital income, household expenses and disability expenses. Should income fall below a set amount then services would be given free of charge. There would be a group of people in the middle who would be required to pay something towards costs and others who would pay all costs. 50% do not pay anything and 10% pay full costs.

The reason for the changes was new guidance from Central Government. There had been changes to the way non-residential care was financed with the introduction of Personal Budgets and Direct Payments etc.

Jo took the Group through Page 4 of the proposals – attached Appendix 1 and addressed as follows:

1. Fair
2. Funding would not be given until contribution assessed so no claw back necessary.
3. Will be charging for enablement service
4. Reducing or eliminating subsidy on Meals on Wheels service – not a popular change. Jo to investigate and report back on the value of budget savings.
5. Charges to be introduced to and from Day Care Centres – currently free. Dial a Ride and Link a Ride had been involved in this but had lost the subsidy from MBDC some time ago.
6. Charges to be made if more than one carer needed.
7. No changes to tele -care.
8. All charges will be backdated to the date of disability – no time restriction.
9. There would be annual recalculation on payments.
10. If a client was not willing to disclose financial information it would be assumed they could pay the full amount. Clients would be assisted with this process through annual visits

to go through the form and ensure full benefit entitlement being received and also that clients were paying the correct amount. Jo felt this would stop people delaying co-operating with the system and so getting free

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services. Any Social Worker involved would have an awareness of the person and would link in with them.

11. No claim can be made for disability related expenses for relatives if the need is not one identified within the care plan.

12. A new limit of £15 per week for expenses without a receipt.

13. Vague – considered to mean that where a customer can afford to make a contribution to a service then this will be charged. Direct payments as a method of payment would exist but the carers would be assessed.

Jo did not yet know whether the result of the introduction of all 13 proposals would result in a net saving or loss, however she believed this to be driven by fairness not savings.

(a) Questions

Roy Storey had attended a meeting on 11th June and was concerned that Julie Ogley had not mentioned any of these proposed changes during her lengthy presentation, although this change of policy was already underway. Roy also asked whether it was intended that Councillors be put under the same scrutiny as everyone else, as they currently received an allowance of over £17.00 per hour to attend meetings etc, whereas carers were paid £9.50. Roy passed the figures relating to Councillors allowances to Jo Bellamy for her scrutiny.

Ian Kelly raised the question as to whether there would be sufficient staff to cope with annual assessments and was informed that it was intended to space these out across the year. This would not preclude people requesting a reassessment if they required one following a change in their circumstances.

Sally Aspinall felt it was sad that it was intended to charge carers for Short breaks as many would not take breaks if they had to pay for them. She raised the concern that it was a hard job and one which took over peoples' lives and now they would be charged for breaks. Others felt that it was just another problem to be faced by those who already had a lot to bear when living with a disability or looking after those people in need of care.

The issue was raised that this was a National Policy so the Council would have no choice – it was a cost saving exercise and it was difficult to see any local authority going through this process if it was not intended to save money. The current climate meant that none of the proposals would be put into practice if it cost the authority money and this would apply to each and every one of them. It was hard to perceive this as either about fairer charging or a fairer charging consultation. The example was given of item 12, where it was possible to clearly see that this would not be being done unless making a saving and BCC having already scoped for this. It was not possible that this was anything other than a cost saving exercise. As BCC would already know who was receiving benefits, the question was asked as to whether these people would be consulted as to how this change would impact on them. Those present at the meeting could give an idea but were not in receipt of all of the benefits referred to in the consultation document.

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Jo Bellamy informed the group that they had chosen not to consult in this way but had asked Social Workers to ask people if they wished to take part in consultation. Those who currently received invoices would receive a leaflet – around 500 people.

The question was raised as to why the Council would wish to further backdate disability related benefits and the effect this may have on an individual in a time of crisis, who may find themselves facing a huge bill for money they had already spent having believed themselves entitled to it.

The group agreed that it should be a blanket consultation or not at all, as past experience had shown that answers could be cherry picked, and were also concerned that even then take up rarely exceeded 2%.

Roy Storey thanked Jo and Elaine for the consultation and advised that this would be sent out to everyone involved with the group. Jo agreed to attend an event including Aragon housing tenants and would be available up until September 10th. Jo was also going to attend a carers' forum and would capture the view of carers.

Members of the group felt the system was bureaucratic and were concerned that no straight answer would be given to people making initial enquiries as to what they might be entitled to, as nothing could be said until an assessment had been carried out. It was also considered sad to be taking away from carers something they had only recently been given by way of a higher profile.

Roy Storey summed up the response of the group and agreed with every comment made, and asked that the vulnerable should not be hit and that 98% of people in receipt of benefits both need and deserve them.

Jo Bellamy said that although she had been taking notes of the group's views she would appreciate the forms being filled in and returned.

## **7. To receive an update on the work of Bedfordshire LINK – Charlotte Bonser**

Charlotte reported that as the white paper on NHS changes had been published the day before, she had received many emails. The overall result so far appeared to be that Health Watch England was to be consumer champion with LINKs to be incorporated and called local health. This again was seen as a cost cutting exercise and the voluntary sector would be pulled in more and more. PCTs would be going by early 2011 and SHAs from 2012. GPs to be given a lot of power for managing the budget and the Local Authority would be charged with pulling all of this together and would also be in control of the Local Health Watch – so funding, complaints and complaints advocacy. LINKs cannot get enough volunteers so it would be difficult for them to take on complaints etc. All sources of feedback should be used to assess the provision of care etc. Local Authority will be getting the greatest proportion of the money and control as also overseeing the Local Health Watch.

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It was felt that in such situations price always took precedence over quality and it was the quality that went when costs were driving the system, forcing GPs to look after budgets at the expense of patients.

Charlotte thanked Roy for his input into the recent Mental Health consultation as it had been well received and her report widely publicised.

Roy Storey thanked Charlotte Bonser for her update.

8. To receive an update on the access path installation at Manor Park, Flitwick.

Martin Usher advised that this was now on its way and that he had chased a minor problem regarding a turning circle, which Flitwick Town Council had now dealt with. The top surface was the only work outstanding, as these required two dry days before it could be laid. There had been nothing done about the installation of benches as yet and the original suggestion of using fallen trees had been rejected because of height and the need to provide a suitable surface for seating.

9. Correspondence received since the Agenda was set.

The letter From the MP had been dealt with.

10. Questions

Ian Kelly reported that Access Audit for the Mount in Flitwick was almost complete. He was now talking to Martin Oake about a few issues and felt that access was going to be very limited.

11. Date and venue of next meeting

The next meeting of the Central Bedfordshire Access Group would be held on Tuesday, 14th September 2010 at Priory House in Chicksands, Shefford.

Roy thanked everyone for attending.