

Disability Equality - making expectations reality

42 people attended the first in a series of events to be held by PAVS for people who use Social Care & Housing Services in Pembrokeshire. The purpose of the events is to raise awareness of services and information available in Pembrokeshire and to gather people's views on how a range of services work ... what's useful or helpful, what could be done differently or better, what other services could be developed?

This time the event focused on disability equality with Mrs Beryl Thomas-Cleaver of PIPPA giving an outline of the day and introducing the first speaker, Mr Alan Hunt, Pembrokeshire County Council's Access Officer.

Alan explained the function of the **Access Group** in Pembrokeshire and its role in promoting excellence and best practice in accessibility and equality for disabled people in the County. The Group takes a broad approach to access to include, not only physical access to public services provided by Pembrokeshire County Council but also access to services and information provided by other statutory bodies, voluntary organisations and the private sector.

Membership of the Group is mixed with County Councillors, including a cabinet member being represented as well as a voluntary sector representative and 2 PCC Officers, but most importantly the experience of people living with a range of impairments is represented via Group members who are wheelchair users or who have a visual, hearing or learning impairment.

The Group is active in carrying out access audits. Audits have been carried out for various organisations including PCC, private organisations, Dyfed Powys Police and a number of schools. The Group charges expenses only for carrying out these audits which means that there is minimal financial commitment for building owners or service providers in getting an audit undertaken. On behalf of the Group, Alan produces a report following the audit and works with the service provider to implement the audit's recommendations.

The Group has a website and produces reports and guides on accessible premises and leisure rides for scooter users. At the moment the Group is working on a project lead by one of its members to map flush curbs in the County. The Group were involved in the original Disability Equality Scheme, which is now being reviewed. The Group are often asked to brief PCC Directors on disability issues and are thus able to bring to the fore the real experience of disabled people to the policy makers.

Future work of the Group includes the development of an "access wallet". The wallet has been used successfully in Torbay, Devon - it's a credit card sized wallet with 5 or so compartments which can be used to store "flashcard" type information to be used on public transport to inform transport workers of the individual's needs. The advantage is two-fold: it helps people to get about more confidently and get the help they need and it also raises the awareness of transport staff generally as they become familiar with the wallet and the type of considerations people who use the wallet may require.

For instance, although people can tailor what information they want to put in their own wallet, if a lot of people use the wallet to get the same message across, then transport workers may soon start to adopt practice which is generally helpful e.g. flashcards which say:

- Please let me know when I get to my stop? or
- Please would you let me sit down before you pull away?

The Access Group welcomes new members and, if required, can provide training on access audits and Disability Discrimination Act requirements.

If you would like to find out more about the work of the Access Group you could: contact Alan Hunt on 01437 775148, or email him at alan.hunt@pembrokeshire.gov.uk, or visit the website at <http://www.pembrokeshire-access.org.uk/>

Rachel Powell, Pembrokeshire County Council's Disability Equality Officer then gave a presentation on her work; the review of the **Disability Equality Scheme** for Pembrokeshire.

Rachel reminded the meeting that before 1996, when the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995 came into force, it was perfectly legal to discriminate against someone on the basis of their impairment. The Disability Discrimination (Amendment) Act of 2005 (the DDA) builds on the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of impairment in a number of ways and in particular by introducing general duties for public bodies to:

- Promote equality of opportunity between disabled people and other people,
- Eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Disability Discrimination Act,
- Eliminate harassment of disabled people that is related to their disability,
- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people,
- Encourage participation by disabled people in public life,
- Take steps to meet disabled people's needs even if this requires more favourable treatment.

In particular authorities are required to produce and publish a Disability Equality Scheme (DES) which demonstrates how they plan to fulfill their duties under the DDA and the DES must include an action plan.

In Pembrokeshire the 1st DES was published and covered the period 2006 to 2009. A document produced by the Pembrokeshire Coalition of Disabled People and PAVS identified 10 broad issues of importance to disabled people and these issues have been used to inform the development of the new DES which will be published later this year. As well as using the issues identified by the Coalition, numerous groups and individuals are being contacted for their views on what the new DES should contain. This consultation, so far, has included meetings with over 30 local authority staff and 12 voluntary organisations, workshops, a customer survey and a PCC staff survey.

Rachel then asked the meeting some key questions about the DES to find out how aware people are of the DES and what more needs to be done with it to make it fit people's views and aspirations. We found that:

- 62% of people present had a long term condition or disability that affects their day-to-day lives,
- 41% of people present had already heard about the DES before Rachel's presentation,
- 24% of people present had seen Pembrokeshire County Council's current (2006-9) Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan,
- 32% of people present thought that involving disabled people was the most important issue to be addressed in the new DES,

- 27% of people present thought that customer care/staff disability awareness training was the second most important issue to be addressed in the new DES,
- 29% of people thought that access to services was the third most important issue to be addressed in the new DES,

Among the other things that people present wanted to see was disabled people being included in the staff recruitment process and mandatory disability awareness training delivered by disabled people for *all* staff - heads of service and managers as well as front line staff.

Rhyan Berrigan, Disability Wales' Access and Transport Policy Officer talked to the meeting about **Disability Wales' Streets Ahead campaign** which focuses on promoting inclusive access to high street shops and services. The aim of the campaign is to encourage service providers to change for the better and to emphasize to service providers that disabled and deaf people have the right to access their services. Although the campaign is Wales wide it took as its focus Haverfordwest as an example of a typical market town.

Rhyan talked about the way that people in Pembrokeshire had taken part in the campaign by conducting mystery shopper exercises and giving interviews. Whilst some bad practice was identified during mystery shopping exercises there was also some good news about pleasant experiences of good practice locally including a report about a supermarket in Haverfordwest:

“The store has ample disabled parking bays. The aisles are wide and there are wider wheelchair accessible checkouts. Staff attitude towards and treatment of disabled customers was positive.”

The campaign has found that the most common barriers to good access are:

- Physical - not be able to get into or around the inside of building, e.g. lack of level access or ramps into shop premises, narrow doorways, the wrong type of door entry or shop-floor clutter,
- Attitude - poor staff attitude or lack of staff awareness including being unhelpful, insensitive or acting inappropriately,
- Poor communication and information such as signs in the wrong font size or colour of print or background.

The information gained during the campaign has lead Disability Wales to make a number of important recommendations on how things could be improved including:

- The Equality and Human Rights Commission should make training & information available to disability organisations, groups and individuals on their rights under the DDA and how to pursue a case,
- WAG should identify funding opportunities for the development of Access Groups,
- Local Authorities should support the development of a forum to bring together the various interest groups concerned with the accessibility of the high street,
- Businesses should ensure all their staff and managers undertake disability equality training.

The campaign has been useful in showing that disabled and deaf people are not being well served by the local high street and they therefore often leave it behind in favour of more accessible out of town retail outlets. By accepting the recommendations of the report it is

hoped that the high street can be more accessible which will, in turn, mean that it benefits from the custom of disabled and deaf people.

A copy of Disability Wales' Streets Ahead Campaign report can be downloaded from Disability Wales' website at <http://www.disabilitywales.org/1086>.

Maxine Ford of Pembrokeshire Mind talked to the meeting about her work to promote **better mental health** and how difficult it can be to tell people if you have a mental health problem ... but why should this be so? We happily talk to people about having the flu, breaking a leg or going into hospital for an operation but the stigma which can surround mental health problems means that, until fairly recently, mental health issues were not discussed openly. Worse still, until recently people were still locked up in institutions if they were alleged to have mental health problems. However the evidence is that mental health problems are very common; mental health illness is one of the top three causes of certified sickness absence representing the loss of 91.5 million working days in 1991 alone and for every 10 employees, two or three each year will suffer from some form of mental health problem.

There is clearly a need for support for people with mental health problems; one in eight people go to their family doctor to talk about emotional problems each year. But what other help is there?

Pembrokeshire Mind was set up to work for a better life for everyone with experience of mental distress, to promote a positive attitude to mental health and to reduce the stigma associated with mental health difficulties.

In order to achieve its aims, Pembrokeshire Mind provides a wide range of support including:

Befriending - this service recruits and trains volunteers who regularly visit people to relieve isolation, encourage and motivate people to achieve goals and realize ambitions. They also provide emotional, social and crisis support.

Supported housing - this service provides a range of supported housing which will enable people with long term mental health problems to move towards more independent living.

Resource Centre - this is a 365 day user focused centre based in Quay Street, Haverfordwest offering support, activities and opportunities for people to meet and gain information in a welcoming, safe environment. Emotional crisis support is offered here too.

Training - including a free Depression Beating course for people who experiencing depression and the Mental Health First Aid Training course which is free to any carers who attend (*any* carers, not just carers of people with mental health problems). The Mental Health First Aid course can also be run in-house for organisations wishing to provide this course for their workers, volunteers or service users.

Whichever of these services people use, they can be assured that all Pembrokeshire Mind's services are built around 6 core values:

- Choice,
- Dignity,

- Equality,
- Independence,
- Privacy, and
- Rights

If you would like to find out more about Pembrokeshire Mind you could:
you could:

contact Maxine Ford 01437 769982, or
email her at maxinepembsmind@aol.com, or
visit the website at <http://www.pembrokeshiremind.org.uk/>, or
call into the resource centre in Quay Street, Haverfordwest.

Just before the meeting broke for lunch we talked about people's views on **disability services provided in the County** - whether those services are delivered by Pembrokeshire County Council directly or via voluntary organisations. Some of the things that made services really good were:

- Assessment processes which make sure that social services really understand your situation,
- Really good support people can arrange by using direct payments, and
- Respite care.

And some of the things which could make services even better were:

- Understanding that people using services are the experts in their own conditions and needs,
- Making the process more speedy,
- Being more responsive to unexpected urgent needs,
- bus and taxi drivers having good quality disability awareness training,
- more community transport for disabled people and carers,
- keeping the same social worker so that a good relationship and understanding can develop between the customer and the social worker,
- Making sure that social workers are very knowledgeable about Direct Payment.

People also talked about gaining access to buildings and agreed that although gaining access to buildings can be a problem, transport links in such a rural area sometimes means that actually getting to the building can be just as much of a problem.

Some of the other things that we found from people at the meeting were that:

- 43% use social care services for themselves or a family member,
- 67% have had contact with the disability teams in Pembrokeshire County Council,
- 77% thought that services were average or better,
- 63% who had used disability aids or equipment found it had made their lives easier,
- 94%* found that home adaptations had made their lives easier,
- 26%* thought the adaptations process was straight-forward but 56% thought it wasn't,
- 38%* found it easy to get information in a format suitable to their needs with a further 33%* sometimes find this easy,
- 41%* had no problem using buildings where they get a disability service or information but 47%* had some difficulty or needed assistance to gain access.

The meeting closed with lunch giving people time to network and talk about some of the disability issues which matter to them most.

If you would like to find out more about service user events - perhaps to make sure that you're informed of future events or you'd like PAVS to organize an event for your service users, contact Anne Isaac, PAVS' Social Care & Housing Planning Facilitator on 01437 769422 or by emailing anne.isaac@pavs.org.uk.

* of those who expressed an opinion.