

Item No. 29	Classification: Open	Date: 9 April 2003	MEETING NAME Community Support and Safety Scrutiny Sub-Committee
Report title:		Review of Disabilities	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:			

NOTE FOR MEMBERS

Subject: *Ongoing review of service provision and access rights for disabled users*

Project Brief: *To determine how well the Council is meeting its requirements in the provision of access and services for those with disabilities*

1. BACKGROUND

Members have embarked on a review of service provision and access arrangements for disabled users and residents.

At its meeting on Wednesday 5 February, Members met with Officers and Peter Bailey, from Disability Matters, to review the findings of a Mystery Shopper Exercise at the Peckham One Stop Shop. Findings from that meeting were recorded in a letter to Officers (attached), to which Officers have now replied (also attached). Some information is still outstanding from Officers in respect of communications issues and bringing pedestrian crossings up to standard for disabled users. This information will follow soonest.

At its meeting on Wednesday 9 April, Members will also have an opportunity to have input to a **draft** Corporate Equalities Action Plan [CEAP] (attached). Chief Officers will be considering the draft CEAP at a meeting on 2 April. Officers have also prepared a **draft** report to the Executive to accompany the CEAP (to follow).

Officers will be available to members at the meeting on Wednesday 9 April. They will be able to advise sub committee members, further, on the final form of recommendations going to the Executive.

20 March 03

Dear Jules

**Community Support and Safety Overview and Scrutiny Sub Committee:
Review of Disabilities provision**

I am sending this letter on behalf of the Chair and other Members of the Community Support and Safety Scrutiny Sub Committee in respect of the Sub Committee's ongoing review of how well the Council is meeting its duty in respect of the Disabilities Discrimination Act 1995. I thought it would be useful to reflect back to you some of the key issues and decisions arising out of the meeting on Tuesday 4 March so that you can take forward actions requested by the Sub Committee.

The Sub Committee were pleased to receive the results of the Mystery Shopper Exercise carried out by Disability Matters. The contribution to the meeting on 4 March provided by Peter Bailey, of Disability Matters, was most helpful.

Please find below a summary of the discussion:

Future Mystery Shopping Exercises

The Sub Committee recommends that these are ongoing in order to monitor and evaluate how well the Council is meeting its duty but that, in the future Southwark based disabled people are asked to carry them out, after training. Further, that future Mystery Shopping Exercises should be carried out across a range of Council buildings and not only the Peckham One Stop Shop used in the original exercise. The Sub Committee will want to see evidence that all reasonable adjustments have been made as a result of this and future Mystery Shopping exercises and that staff training issues arising have been addressed. The Sub Committee were pleased that eye-witness accounts supplied by the consultants in this first exercise were largely complementary of staff in the Peckham One Stop Shop and support the letter from Chief Officers to staff thanking them for their efforts.

The Sub Committee note that the Mystery Shopper Exercise has pointed to some 'quick wins' available through immediate remedial action and that Business Unit Managers have been sent a 10 point, round robin letter, asking them to address these. You have undertaken to provide members of the Sub Committee with a copy of that letter.

Developing staff awareness

Members noted that central disability awareness training has been ongoing since 2001/02 and that take up is high and that this includes sign language courses. Members also noted the availability of the Disability Access Guide for staff on best practice in providing accessible service delivery. Members wanted as many staff as possible to have sight of this but, particularly, front line staff in the first instance. Members mooted the idea of relevant training details being posted on the Southwark Intranet and you undertook to investigate this further and report back to the Sub Committee. Members noted that it will be particularly important that staff are trained to a standard which will enable them to communicate with clients with disabilities in the way which best suits the client.

Data

Members noted that the kind of model created for collecting data on Neighbourhood Renewal issues towards determining the distribution of Neighbourhood Renewal Funding could be applied in respect of disabilities.

Communications

Members noted the importance of good communication in respect of advising disabled clients on what access, service and provision they can expect from the Council. Members asked that a request be sent to Amanda Hirst, Head of Corporate Communications and Consultation, on behalf of Sub Committee, to determine:

- In what ways the needs of disabled users are taken into account through arrangements on customer access which is one of the Council's Corporate Priorities and how these will be monitored to ensure they are adequate;
- In what ways the Best Value Review of External Communications, now ongoing, and the action plan arising from the Review, will address the needs of disabled clients, particularly around such things as ensuring the consistency and adequacy of signage.

Members noted that Southwark Life should be a key resource for publicising disabilities issues and access to services.

Chief Officers Sub Group

Members noted the existence of a Chief Officer Sub Group set up pursue the equalities agenda across the Council. Members requested that they are kept informed about the work of the Chief Officer Sub Group as it progresses.

Equalities and Diversity Panel

Members noted that the Equalities and Diversity Panel are a key vehicle for progressing the equalities agenda, including disabilities, and that communication between the Sub Committee and the Panel will be ongoing as part of this review.

The Sub Committee have reviewed recommendations and questions put to the Sub Committee by the Panel via agenda documentation and would respond to the some of the points raised as follows:

Members note the Panel's concern that there should be a dedicated disabilities officer in the Equalities Division. However, Members are aware that the Equalities Team is a small one within the Council and that the Head of Equalities has no budget or recourse, currently, to assign one particular member of her staff solely to disabilities issues. Members did recommend that the Head of Equalities ensure there is one member of her staff who can be a key point of contact on disabilities issues;

Members considered the Panel's request for input to issues of better communication on disabilities issues. Their recommendations are outlined under the 'Communications' section, above;

Members noted the request for more robust action on the part of the Council as an employer of people with disabilities. Members noted that Equalities generally, including issues of disability, are a corporate priority and that there is a Corporate Health Best Value Performance Indicator, BV16, which requires the Council to improve performance against set targets for employing more people with disabilities. Members will monitor progress on this performance indicator through a review of quarterly reports on performance supplied to the Executive Body.

Pedestrian Crossings

Members noted the ongoing issue of ensuring that pedestrian crossings are fully accessible to disabled users. Members noted that this issue had been reviewed by the Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Sub Committee as part of their review of the Best Value Review of Highways infrastructure. Members noted that at present, new pedestrian crossings are made fully accessible for disabled users but that existing pedestrian crossing are adapted for disabled users only when they require attention. Members asked that officers revisit the issues arising and report back to the Sub Committee on whether current practice in respect of pedestrian crossings puts

the Council 'out with' compliance issues arising from the Disabilities Discrimination Act.

Member Involvement

The Sub Committee noted the need to ensure more members of the Council are drawn from the disabled community in order to make Council membership fully inclusive. Further, that there should be training on disabilities and equalities awareness offered to all Councillors.

Additional Issues

The Sub Committee will continue this review through liaison with the Equalities and Diversity Panel and having had sight of the Disabilities Action Plan (as part of the Corporate Equalities Action Plan) in due course. Members request that you make the Action Plan available to them as soon as possible. The Sub Committee will revisit issues arising at its meeting on Wednesday 9 April.

The Chair of the Sub Committee, Councillor Barrie Hargrove, will be pleased to receive your response to the issues discussed in this letter as soon as possible. If you require any more context to this letter, please contact Maggie Sullivan, policy support officer to the Sub Committee, on 0207 525 7160 or via email.

Yours sincerely.

Councillor Gavin O'Brien
Vice-Chair Community Support and Safety Scrutiny Sub Committee

cc: All members of the Community Support and Safety Scrutiny Sub Committee
Councillor Richard Porter, Executive Member for Community Support and Safety
All members of Overview and Scrutiny Sub Committee
Nathalie Hadjifotiou, Head of Social Inclusion
Ian Hughes, Head of Corporate Strategy
Eleanor Rees, Constitutional Support Officer

Councillor Barrie Hargrove,
Chair,
Community Support and Safety Sub-
Committee.

Direct telephone: 0207 525 7491

direct fax:

e-mail: jules.omahoney@southwark.gov.uk


our ref:

your ref:

Date: 24 March 2003

Dear Councillor Hargrove,

Community Support and Safety (CSS) Sub-Committee: Review of Disabilities.

I am writing in response to Councillor Gavin O'Brien's letter to me of 20th March, which fed back the CSS Sub-Committee's comments following the meeting of 4th March. 

I will address the points Councillor O'Brien raised in the order he raised them.

I'm pleased that the mystery shopping was so well received, and hopefully it has had the added benefit of giving us the opportunity to make some early quick positive changes to front line services, and how our customers feel about how they are dealt with by the Council. I distributed the 10 point letter I wrote to all front line managers following up on some key points from the shopping exercise, at the Sub-Committee meeting.

As I stated at the Sub-Committee, we are committed to a programme of mystery shopping over the coming year, and this has already been explicitly highlighted in the draft Corporate Equalities Action Plan (CEAP). I did stress however, that I don't think that we can realistically deliver Southwark shoppers over the next couple of rounds of shopping: it takes fairly intensive resourcing and training to do this well, and for those working with us to feel adequately confident both of themselves and of the support we can offer. I've discussed this with Southwark Disablement Association and Speaking Up, both of whom are represented on our Equality and Diversity Panel, and both of whom seem committed to working with us on this, and I think it's fair to say they share this view. We will therefore be developing this programme with them and other appropriate local agencies over the coming months.

I need to clarify a point about the "Disability Access Guide" for staff on best practice in providing accessible service delivery. The document referred to is published by a Disability Association, and whilst it is a very useful document, especially for front line staff, (all members of the Sub-Committee have been issued with a copy for information), it is not as such "available". The document costs £1 per copy and I am in discussion with the Corporate Learning and Development Team about how to best incorporate the very simple, but very valuable messages in that document, with what is happening with disability training on a wider basis throughout the Council. My team is also committed over the coming year to producing a Disability Access Guide: again I need to give more thought as to how to incorporate this message.

I will report back, as discussed, to the Sub-Committee on the issue of posting relevant training information on the Intranet.

I note that the Sub-Committee has written to Amanda Hirst requesting the information discussed at the meeting. I understand that we are aiming to have that information available for the meeting on 9 April.

The Sub-Committee wanted to be informed about the work of the Chief Officers Sub-Group on Equalities. At present that Sub-Group is very much focused on finalising a first draft of the CEAP, which will be available for your Sub-Committee to consider when it meets on April 9th.

The Sub-Committee's comments about the Equality and Diversity Panel are noted. I have already fed back initial comments from the Sub-Committee to the Panel and had advised them that they would receive fuller feedback once I'd had sight of your letter.

I have contacted the Highways team to ask for further clarification in relation to pedestrian crossings. I have requested that they feed back to me so that I'm in a position to advise you on the 9th April.

I have forwarded the Sub-Committee's comments about Members training to Shelley Burke, who is leading on the [Forward@Southwark](#) Member Development Programme.

I hope this adequately addresses the points raised by the Sub-Committee. Please don't hesitate to get back to me if you need any further information.

Yours faithfully,

Jules O'Mahoney,
Social Policy Manager,
Social Inclusion Division.