

Submission Nine (Additional)

9.1 Dear Sally

I have just received the enclosed response from Rasdaq Ali-Balogun, at the Southwark Disablement Association, who put in a formal complaint on my behalf [attached], on 8 July 2008.

9.2 When I received my new FP, I wrote to inform and thank him - asking if he had received a response from Heather Rodney:

9.3 Dear Mr [REDACTED]

9.4 I am pleased that your Freedom Pass has now been re-issued. Unfortunately I did not receive any response from Ms Rodney as they do not usually take it kindly when you make a complaint against them.

Regards,

Rasdaq Alli-Balogun

Advocacy Worker
Southwark Disablement Association
2 Bradenham Close SE17 2QB

Email: Rasdaq@sda4.dircon.co.uk
Tel. 020 7701 1391
Fax: 020 7277 0481

9.5 When I met him on 3 July, I did not know that he would put in a formal complaint; I had thought he would simply write to Ms Rodney, in order to elicit a response of some kind, regarding my Appeal.

9.6 Rasdaq is a *very* experienced Advocacy Worker. If this experience is the rule, then there is something **very** wrong within the department.

9.7 I thought I would bring it to your attention, given next week's meeting.

9.8 Regarding my email [16 July] to Ms Rodney about reimbursement of the £64.05p in fares, I have not yet had a response. As soon as I do, I'll let you know.

Continued overleaf...

9.9 Ms Heather Rodney
Disabilities Services
Southwark Council
PO Box 51504
London
SE1 9ZU

08 July 2008

Dear Heather

[REDACTED]

- 9.10 I am writing on behalf of the above named regarding his Freedom Pass appeal. [REDACTED] wishes to make a formal complaint following a series of correspondences to your office that he did not receive a proper response. [REDACTED] has sent me several of the correspondences and also informed me that on several occasions he was to be contacted but failed to receive any call or correspondence.
- 9.11 [REDACTED] said that he has had the Freedom Pass for eleven years and could not comprehend why it should be suddenly withdraw without proper explanation. [REDACTED] also attempted to exercise his right to appeal but felt that he has been circumvented and frustrated.
- 9.12 Attached is a copy of [REDACTED] appeal that supposed to support his need for a Freedom Pass according to the stipulated criteria. [REDACTED] believed that you have failed to respond to his correspondences within the prescribed time and matters' concerning his appeal is yet to be addressed.
- 9.13 Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require further information and I look forward to your reply.

Regards,

Rasaq Alli-Balogun
Advocacy Worker

Submission sixteen (Submissions resumed)

- 16.1 I plan to attend the Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting. I have the following concerns and points needing clarification. I do hope these will be covered, either as agenda items or within general discussion.
- 16.2 1) Are there different levels of Freedom Passes; if so are they dictated by different criteria? Is there a procedure manual guiding Council Officers decisions?
- 16.3 2) Why were insufficient passes issued to such a large number of Post Offices Only was this revealed to applicants at the end of the processing action.

- 16.4 In fairness, I found Council Officers action in carrying out their duties, fair, helpful and generally efficient so as to expedite each stage in the true spirit of the One Stop Shop philosophy.

Submission Seventeen

- 17.1 I am Emailing you regarding the processing of my freedom pass. I would like to know whether or not you would be able to help me regarding this matter.
- 17.2 The processing of my application took ever so long and then the outcome was that of decline. I would like to know about the appeal process as I feel that I do meet the criteria for the freedom pass and I feel that I have just been disregarded as a lot of people have!!

Submission Eighteen

- 18.1 SDA do not see the need to add to the litany of submissions received by the scrutiny committee so far, suffice to say that the whole episode was disastrous to the public image of Southwark Council. This may not be the public enquiry we were seeking, but we still need answers.
- 18.2 SDA has received many individual complaints, and the submissions received so far to the scrutiny committee mirror them. As far back as March 24th (Easter Saturday) I became aware of a potential problem with the initial renewal date of 31st March as I personally had heard nothing from Southwark Council regarding a renewal with my current pass due to expire in 7 days. I contacted Peter Hendy the TfL commissioner and Dave Wetzel the then vice-chair of TfL requesting an extension for Southwark. They both replied on Easter Saturday evening that an extension had been granted for all Boroughs until 31st May. That 2 month extension took the immediate pressure off everyone concerned. During April & May I voiced my concern to Councillor David Noakes, Dominic Gain and a new player [REDACTED] (more about her later) who appeared to be running the renewals office. I eventually got my renewal letter by recorded delivery after much screaming and harassment of the officers concerned. 10 days before the extension renewal date of 31st May, I was assured by [REDACTED] and Councillor David Noakes that everything was under control and that all passes would be issued in time and that Southwark Council was phoning the outstanding pass holders to remind them of the renewal extension date. I was very sceptical of this last statement. I even put his incorrect information into my Disability Corner column in the Southwark News.
- 18.3 Councillor Noakes expected a few procrastinations but nothing on the scale of horror we witnessed with people lying on the floor in agony after queuing up in excess of 3 hours only to be told they had ticked the wrong box's or given forms that the Post Office would not accept. The whole scenario of medical evidence required is flawed. If someone has a letter from the DLA saying that they had been awarded the high rate of mobility allowance indefinitely, that should have been enough to exempt them from having their G.P. supply a letter. The submission

- from the LMC highlighted poorly designed forms and a problem over G.P's fee's. The fact that Southwark Council were blaming GP's was just one of the many lies emanating from [REDACTED] at that time.
- 18.4 This problem arose after the disability office was transferred to the Cotton Centre without any consultation with anyone. SDA are the Premier Disability organisation in the Borough and should have been involved in the renewal process. We are first and foremost a disability organisation and most important we have highly qualified staff in Disability related matters.
- 18.5 I think more attention should have been paid to the continuous concerns of a legitimate organisation like SDA and our concerns should have raised a red flag, instead of the standard reply of everything is ok, given to everyone by Councillor Noakes and [REDACTED] whose name keeps coming up in all the submissions and due to her incompetence should never work with Disabled people again. To get an amendment passed praising the work of these officers some who were uncaring and downright rude after such a faux-pas just beggar's belief. This scrutiny committee investigation cannot be seen as a whitewash and by its actions needs to restore the faith that disabled people used to have in Southwark Council. We need to know, why it happened, whose fault was it and what remedy has been put in place to ensure it does not happen again.

Submission Nineteen

- 19.1 I am writing regarding evidence for the Freedom Pass, I am a paraplegic, and wheelchair bound, I applied for my Freedom Pass to be renewed, in February. I took all my documents to the Walworth Road One Stop Shop in February, I gave them a Higher Rate DLA Certificate, and as a paraplegic I fit the automatic Criteria They told me at the One Stop Shop they would have to contact my GP to prove my disability which I found a bit confusing, as I gave in my DLA certificate which proves my disability and they could see clearly my condition, They told me the rules had changed now and they had to contact GPs for everyone,
- 19.2 I hear nothing after that for weeks I then went to the One Stop shop after two weeks and every two weeks after and I was always told that they were waiting for my GP, they did not check if the GP had responded or anything they just said it. I still had no pass at the end of May 31st and I went to the One Stop Shop on the Monday 2nd June I had to queue outside in the rain and wait many hours before I was seen, I did get my pass on that day,
- 19.3 I don't know why I had to wait so long like this I am as I say a paraplegic and have higher rate DLA, I also never got any information I had to keep going to the One Stop Shop every two or three weeks and when I did go they could not tell me anything,
- 19.4 I hope this does not happen again when I have to renew my freedom pass and I think the staff need to be more professional, helpful and give much more consideration to people like myself who are paraplegics and have other disabilities,

Submission Twenty

19.5.2008

Grant Smith
Disability Services
London Borough of Southwark

Dear Mr Smith,

Re: Freedom pass application

You may remember talking to me some time ago on the telephone about the problems I was having in contacting your staff about difficulties with the renewal process for the freedom pass. You asked me to send my completed application for your personal attention: here it is. Please note that I have sent the documents and one photo exactly as requested by Mr (*name removed*), not as on the form/letter. I hope you will be able to issue me with a pass very soon.

As you requested, I have also enclosed the guidance notes, which as you can see do not match what it says on the form (Mr *-name removed*) thought I may have been sent the wrong guidance notes). You asked me to detail the problems I have had. As I said, I am afraid I do not have the time or energy to do this in the detail I would like, but in summary:

1. It is not evident how to fill in many parts of the form, and the guidance notes do not answer this.
2. The documents and evidence asked for on the form (ie. where it is marked 'P') do not match what it says on the guidance notes, and the covering letter implies something different again.
3. On finally speaking to Mr (*name removed*), it seems that several parts of the form do not apply to many people, yet there is nothing to say that these details do not have to be supplied. Most of my problems would have disappeared if this had been made clear.
4. The second and 3rd pages contain almost identical questions with large boxes for the applicant to explain their disability. Why have 2 almost identical questions? Nowhere does it say just fill in one.
5. It is suggested that applicants contact their doctors etc to get evidence, but it seems that you do this yourselves, so please do not ask us to do it if not necessary. Again, I might not have needed to contact you if this had been clear in the materials you sent.

6. Worst of all, I spent 2 months phoning and leaving messages hundreds of times, on the two numbers you gave and others, to find out how I should deal with these inconsistencies. As of now, NONE of my messages have been responded to and none of my calls have been returned – going back to February. I am not exaggerating when I say I rang HUNDREDS of times. I was not able to speak to anyone who could help me with this until I phoned someone outside the council, in the Health Authority, who was so appalled that she arranged for me to speak to you! This is shocking and your department should be ashamed of itself. I know that others who were also applying said they had had a similar experience to me, but had given up totally trying to get through.

I had similar problems, but not as bad, two years ago when applying. I made some constructive suggestions then about the inappropriate form, but obviously nobody thought it was worth bothering about. PLEASE sort something out for next time. Please employ more people earlier, people who can actually deal with questions and not just take a message which is never responded to. I would particularly say that the form, notes and covering letter need a complete redesign. I would suggest Mr (*name removed*) would be a good person to do this, as he seemed to have a good understanding of the process and what was wrong. I would be happy to 'test' it for you if you choose to do this, which I believe you should. A clear and consistent form, notes and letter would save a lot of time, money, and stress for the hundreds or thousands of people who have to use this form.

I am copying this letter to Councillor David Noakes, as he has taken an interest in this.

Yours sincerely

Submission Twenty One

Earlier this year, I discovered that people with partial sight could apply for a Freedom Pass so I downloaded the application form and sent it off with two passport photos and my original registration card for visual impairment/partial sight. This was at the beginning of May when I did not know anything about the problems which were later highlighted in the press. I have tried emailing and two weeks ago I went down to the One Stop Shop in Walworth Road. Incidentally, the person who was supposed to be dealing with the passes did not turn up until 9.30 a.m. when the queue was quite long. I have had no joy in finding out whether my application was ever received and, more importantly, locating my certificate of disability which I need and it is nearly three months now.

A little bit more communication would solve a lot of problems. I do not mind waiting but I must be assured that my original documents are safe.

Submission Twenty Two

Dear Sally Masson

Most of the information regarding my personal experience on this matter, has gone through my local Councillor - Susan Jones.

Basically, I applied in January. I rang the office and enquired as to who I had to address the form to. Mr (*name removed*) told me just to the office. On asking how long I was expected to wait for the pass, he said 6 - 8 weeks. Two days before the 8 week deadline, I rang and spoke to him. He told lie after lie regarding my claim. First he said that they were still waiting for the reply from my G.P. regarding their letter. He didn't even look at my records! I rang my G.P. and they said they had sent it out the very next day after receiving his letter. That was back in March!!! When I informed Mr (*name removed*) of this, he said Doctors lie all the time! He also added that 6 - 8 weeks is not necessarily true, and kept on saying that the 8 weeks wasn't up until three days time. He clearly didn't want to help me or tell me the truth. He wouldn't look at my records.

He gave me one of the manager's email addresses, and then I contacted him straightaway. He ignored my email. I then contacted Councillor Susan Jones for help. Despite a couple or more emails being sent to and fro through Susan Jones, **I didn't receive a pass until the end of June!** Upon picking it up at the post office, it materialised that it was the London Only one. **I had received a phone call from Mr (*name removed*) a week before receiving the letter, saying that he was sending it out that day!** I got onto Susan Jones and told her of the London Only feature of the pass. She was annoyed and contacted the office. Eventually, in **July**, I had to receive the GREEN LETTER, I should have received in the first place, in person '**BY HAND**'.

I have received severe mental stress and my ongoing depression has worsened greatly through all of this.

I hope this sorts out your enquiry regarding the passes.

Yours faithfully