

**Cafe Conversations**  
**Making Debate and Discussions Accessible for Disabled People**  
**4 September 2010**  
**Facilitator: Lisa-Marie Bowles**

**Participants agreed to look at 3 stages:**

1. Understanding process of democratic structures e.g. Council Assembly and Community Councils
2. How to make this information accessible
3. How to make participation accessible

**Summary points of discussion and post its:**

- **Ensure suitable accessible venues for consultation** - Participants especially those with hearing impairments found it difficult to contribute and hear due to open plan area and noise levels and could not hear facilitator or each other clearly. For one participant it exacerbated his condition (Further correspondence will be sent separately giving the participants the opportunity to add to their suggestions.) People need to know what facilities are available in advance of the meetings e.g. public transport, blue badge parking facilities, disabled toilets – ensure keys are not required to toilets, lift accessibility. Participant cited example of recently attending Council environment consultation on recycling last week where there were no disabled parking facilities and had to walk a considerable distance in rain on crutches and then wait outside the main entrance because officer said door had been locked “to keep the heat in.” Need disabled parking facilities close to venue.
- **Explain rules of the game** – it is difficult to make suggestions without knowing the rules and procedures of the democratic structures. Some participants requested to know what the role of the Scrutiny Committee was and how it linked to other structures. They felt they could not contribute meaningfully without full information.
- **Use Plain English** – all reports and explanations need to use plain English
- **Need timely documents in advance in accessible format – documents and consultation on-line** - can use IT for disabled people e.g. audio text for blind/partially sighted/hearing impairments.
- **Access to IT and printed documents** – not all people have access to the website or computers especially older people. The internet can be accessed in libraries and at pensioners centres or voluntary and community sector organisations. However, in libraries the PCs are only available for restricted time periods. Hours could be extended to book PCs for disabled people e.g. 2 hr slots, and staff could be provided to assist disabled people navigate and use IT in libraries. Some people require printed documents or documents in braille. 70% of blind people are unemployed and cannot afford access to IT or printer paper.

Request for more opportunities to acquire or buy refurbished second hand IT for disabled people.

- **Equalities Training for Council Officers** – officers often request disabled people to put requirements in writing but this isn't always possible or easy to do for people with disabilities and can take time and delay the process. A CD or audiotext would be useful on the first day of launch of consultation.