

SOUTH EAST WALES REGIONAL COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETING

Date: Friday 8 March

Time: 9.30am to 12.30pm

Venue: Rhondda Sports Centre, Ystrad

Attendance:

Members:

Jonathan Morgan (Chair)	South Wales Central
Lorraine Barrett	Cardiff South and Penarth
Christine Chapman	Cynon Valley
Geraint Davies	Rhondda
Janet Davies	South Wales West
Jocelyn Davies	South Wales East
Michael German	South Wales East
Janice Gregory	Ogmore
Jane Hutt	Vale of Glamorgan
Pauline Jarman	South Wales Central
Peter Law	Blaenau Gwent
David Melding	South Wales Central

In attendance:

William Bee	Director, Disability Rights Commission
Rhian Davies	Chief Executive, Disability Wales
Delys Jouvanet	Equalities Adviser, Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council
Maggie Hampton	Operations Manager, Arts Disability Wales and Treasurer, Rhondda Cynon Taff Coalition for Disabled People
Roger Galletely	Mencap Cymru
Kerri Smallman	Mencap Cymru
James Crowe	Director, SCOVO
Vanessa Webb	Director, Wales Council for the Blind

Secretariat

Roger Chaffey	Committee Clerk
Liz Wilkinson	Deputy Committee Clerk

Opening remarks

Geraint Davies formally welcomed the Committee, presenters and members of the public to Ystrad. He said that disability, which was a priority for Rhondda Cynon Taff County Council, was a diverse issue affecting the lives of many people.

The Chair said he was pleased to be meeting at the Rhondda Sports Centre, Ystrad. He extended his thanks to Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council for the use of their facilities and to the sports centre staff for their assistance.

Item 1: Apologies for absence

1. Apologies for absence were received from Peter Black, Rosemary Butler, Alun Cairns, Jane Davidson, David Davies, Ron Davies, Sue Essex, William Graham, John Griffiths, Brian Hancock, Carwyn Jones, Huw Lewis, Dai Lloyd, Rhodri Morgan, Lynne Neagle, Jenny Randerson, Owen John Thomas and Phil Williams.

Item 2: Minutes of the meeting held on 1 February SEWR-02-01 (min)

2. Geraint Davies said that he had offered apologies for absence. Following this, the minutes of the meeting held on 1 February were agreed.

Item 3: Open mike session

3.1 The following issues were raised by members of the public:

- The need to establish a Commission to promote the rights of people with learning disabilities and to ensure an inclusive approach to policy development;
- Provision of designated disabled car parking in residential areas;
- The need to improve access to public transport for disabled people, including the provision of appropriate seating and the publication of information in alternative formats;
- The need to provide appropriate signage in public buildings, particularly hospitals to ensure equal access for visually impaired people;
- Proposals for the new Rhondda special school, which would be located near the Nantygwyddon waste disposal site.

2.

3. In response to the above the following points were raised:

- The Welsh Assembly Government had recently consulted on proposals for a draft framework for services for people with learning disabilities, which were set out in the Learning Disability Advisory Group's report entitled 'Fulfilling the Promise'. The service framework would encompass all aspects of a person's life including education, leisure and work. It would address the needs and rights of people with learning disabilities.
- The designation of car parking for disabled people was a matter for local authorities. It was noted that where designated parking in residential areas existed, there was no legal

provision to allocate spaces to a named individual. The Welsh Assembly Government's Transport Directorate offered advice on public notices, which could be used as an alternative.

- It was suggested that further investment was required in public transport services and infrastructure in order to address the needs of disabled people. It was noted that seating provision was a matter for local authorities. Members felt that increasing accessibility to public transport for disabled people would be an ongoing process, which could be achieved as current stock was updated and replaced.
- It would be vital to ensure that public bodies were implementing equal opportunities policy in the provision of signage to enable hearing and visually impaired people equal access to public services. The Minister for Health and Social Services agreed to discuss with officials the provision of signage, particularly in hospitals. It would be important to address this as part of the improvement plan for hospitals in Wales.
- Members agreed it was imperative to engage effectively with disabled people to ensure that their needs were met when developing policies and planning services and provision. It was felt that the voluntary sector played a crucial role in representing the rights of disabled people.
- It was noted that planning provision approval for the special school was currently being sought from the Minister for Environment. It was felt that careful consideration had been given to the site and that environmental concerns had been taken into account before the proposals were agreed.

Item 4: Disability Rights Commission – eliminating discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity

4.1 The Chair welcomed representatives to the meeting and invited them to make their presentations.

4.2 Will Bee said that the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) was established in 2000 to support the effective implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995. He outlined the role of the DRC and the services the Commission provided.

4.3 He said that statistical evidence highlighted the lack of awareness of the DDA and the DRC in Wales. This manifested itself in disproportionately low levels of calls to the Commission's helpline and a lower number of cases referred for casework support. In addition, evidence suggested lower appreciation by disabled people in Wales of the rights to which the new

legislation entitled them.

4.4 The DRC felt that it had not achieved high media profile and the local press was reluctant to cover stories addressing disability issues.

4.5 Will Bee said that in some parts of Wales disability is seen as a community problem, which involves offering individuals support, rather than a rights issue where disadvantage arises from an unwillingness to remove barriers to choice for disabled people.

4.6 Rhian Davies said that Disability Wales was a national, umbrella organisation for voluntary groups dealing with disability issues.

4.7 She said that despite the specialist support available to disabled people, many remained isolated from society and continued to suffer disadvantage. In order to overcome this, it was vital to move away from the 'medical model' of disability and to promote a 'social model', which acknowledged the lack of understanding of disability issues and the way society currently discriminates against disabled people.

4.8 Rhian Davies emphasised the need to develop an infrastructure to provide information and advice services and to raise awareness about disability issues. She highlighted the lack of disability equality trainers and the reliance on the voluntary sector to carry out access audits. It would be crucial to increase investment and make available adequate resources to the voluntary sector to succeed in promoting the rights of disabled people and providing equality of opportunity.

4.9 Delys Jouvanet outlined the actions being taken by Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council to deliver effectively disability services. This included the 'Thinking Aloud' conference to seek the views of disabled people and the appointment of an equality adviser. She said that disability access audits had recently been completed in all local authority buildings. These were carried out by frontline staff who had attended briefings and awareness sessions.

Following these access audits the local authority would be implementing changes and continuing to improve disability awareness. In addition, a follow up conference would be held to measure progress and evaluate the actions taken to date.

4.10 The following points were raised in discussion:

- It was important for the National Assembly to adopt a strategic approach, which included the 'social model' of disability to meet effectively the needs of disabled people. Rhian Davies felt that this would involve a radical change in policy delivery and resource allocation. It would be necessary for the National Assembly to lead by example and to encourage other bodies and organisations to change the way in which they dealt with

disability issues.

- There had been some improvement in disability access to polling stations in recent years and it was found that attitudes of staff were increasingly supportive of disability issues. However, the Committee agreed that further work was required to ensure that disabled people were given equal opportunity to participate in the electoral process. Members emphasised the need for local authorities to provide suitable alternative polling stations as well as offering the option of postal votes. It would be important to identify imaginative solutions, including the use of supermarkets. It was noted that implementation of the requirements on accessibility contained in the DDA should increase the number of public buildings available for use as polling stations.
- The DRC felt that employers and service providers had demonstrated a willingness to change their attitudes towards disabled people and had made some significant steps in the implementation of the DDA. However, there was still considerable work to be done to increase awareness of disability rights in Wales. It was suggested that further benefit would be derived from the involvement of the Chambers of Trade and Commerce. Members agreed that the voluntary sector had played a crucial role in raising awareness and providing advice to date. It would be necessary to provide adequate funding to allow voluntary organisations to continue this work.
- There was concern about the high levels of unemployment among disabled people. Members agreed it was vital to offer suitable training and employment opportunities for disabled people, including appropriate supported employment. In addition, it would be necessary to continue to challenge employer prejudice and stereotyping. Rhian Davies suggested that the lack of flexibility within the welfare benefit system was a contributing factor to high levels of unemployment among disabled people. It was felt that further financial support was required for disabled people who were able to undertake part time work.
- There was some discussion on the need to engage with architects to ensure that accessibility issues were given priority in the design of new buildings. In particular, it would be important to consider disability access when taking forward the proposed Millennium Art Centre. Members welcomed the work being undertaken by Disability Wales with students at the School of Architecture, University of Wales College, Cardiff.

4.11 The Chair thanked the presenters for making their presentations and for answering Members' questions.

Item 5: Disability issues – voluntary perspective

5.1 The Chair welcomed representatives to the meeting and invited them to make their

presentations.

5.2 Maggie Hampton said that Arts Disability Wales aimed to promote equal opportunities and improve accessibility in the Arts for disabled people. She said the organisation provided training, information and advice on disability issues, including the DDA.

5.3 Arts Disability Wales had achieved successful Partnership working, however it was more difficult to engage with individuals. It was important to ensure that disabled people had access to appropriate training and career opportunities in the Arts. It would be necessary for the National Assembly to assist in removing the barriers faced by disabled people in gaining access to the arts and careers within the field.

5.4 Maggie Hampton said that Rhondda Cynon Taff Coalition for Disabled People was established following the identification of a need to represent disabled people locally. She outlined the process involved in the formation of the Coalition and its funding arrangements.

5.5 The aim of the Coalition was to provide an opportunity for disabled people to identify and address the barriers which existed for disabled people at a local level. This involved raising awareness; empowering individuals; challenging discrimination and ensuring equality of opportunity.

5.6 Roger Galletely said that the aim of Mencap Cymru was to assist people with learning disabilities, their families and carers to take control of their lives. This was achieved through conducting campaigns, providing information and services and participating in consultations to assist in policy development.

5.7 He highlighted the support required by people with learning disabilities and the need to ensure individuals have access to equal opportunities and are able to exercise choice in all aspects of their lives.

5.8 Mencap Cymru felt that further work was required to provide appropriate employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities. In addition, it would be necessary to improve day service and short term care facilities, integrated leisure opportunities and develop advocacy services.

5.9 Kerri Smallman emphasised the need to adopt an inclusive approach to policy development and to encourage people with learning disabilities to communicate their needs to those responsible for decision making. She highlighted the need for an adequately funded, independent advocacy service throughout Wales.

5.10 James Crowe said that SCOVO (Standing Conference of Voluntary Organisations for People with Learning Disabilities in Wales) was an umbrella body representing 117

organisations concerned with learning disabilities in Wales. He said that the movement was concerned with changing attitudes towards disability. In order to achieve this it was vital to provide equal opportunities for pre-school services, which would require adequate funding. In addition, it would be necessary to ensure that young people with learning disabilities were able to make informed decisions about their futures. Finally, it was felt that disabled people needed sufficient financial independence to allow them to identify and buy services which met their individual needs.

5.11 Vanessa Webb from Wales Council for the Blind felt that the voluntary sector provided a source of information and ideas about disability issues. In addition, voluntary organisations provided a mechanism through which the National Assembly could engage with disabled people.

5.12 She said it was the aim of the Council to raise awareness about visual impairment, which involved providing training led by visually impaired people. This would ensure that individuals felt comfortable engaging with visually impaired people without fear of causing offence.

5.13 Vanessa Webb felt it was important to challenge the concept that loss of sight was a normal part of the ageing process. It was vital to encourage individuals to assert their right to medical help and access to services.

5.14 The following points were raised in discussion:

- The Committee felt it would be important to raise awareness of disability issues among children and young people. It was suggested that best practice in anti-racism measures, including the use of positive role models, could be used to help challenge prejudice and discrimination.
- It was vital to provide appropriate mechanisms to ensure that the rights of children with disabilities were established from an early age. This included the right to meet their individual educational and social needs. It would be important to provide appropriate support to successfully integrate disabled children into mainstream education, where this was the preferred option. Members emphasised the need to improve accessibility to independent advocacy services, particularly for parents with disabled children.
- Some Members felt the media could be used as a vehicle to raise public awareness about disability issues and to assist in promoting disability rights. It would be important for the media to adopt a positive approach to assist in taking forward this agenda. In particular, there was a role for the local press in the publication of 'good news' stories. Likewise, community based journals could be used if adequate resources were

available. In addition, it was suggested that disabled people needed representation within the media and should be encouraged to consider career opportunities within the field.

- The need to produce public information, including consultation documents and public notices in alternative formats was reiterated.

5.15 The Chair thanked the presenters for making their presentations and for answering Members' questions.

Item 6: Date of next meeting

6.1 The Chair said that the next meeting would be held on Friday 17 May. The meeting would focus on Cardiff International Airport and transport issues.

6.2 Members agreed that an additional meeting should be held in the summer term, which would allow the Committee to discuss the Economic Development Committee's policy review of energy.