

The Highland Council

Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities Committee – 5 December 2013

Agenda Item	16
Report No	CPE 57/13

Report on actions from meeting Sensory groups and members of the CPE Committee on 12 September 2013

Report by Depute Chief Executive

Summary

Following each CPE committee, Members have agreed to sessions to hear the testimonies of local equality groups. This report summarises the issues that arose from a meeting with some of the groups with an interest in sensory impairment issues in Highland which took place after the CPE on 12 September 2013.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Equality Act 2010 places a positive duty on the Council to consider equality of opportunity in all its activities. The Act provides protection from discrimination for people on the grounds of the “protected Characteristics” of disability, race, gender reassignment, age, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
- 1.2 Members have agreed to private consultation sessions be held with local equality groups to follow after each committee and that feedback on outcomes from previous private consultation sessions is provided. Groups attending these sessions are asked to highlight experiences of discrimination, prejudice and harassment, as well as examples of good practice in removing barriers, for example to accessing services or employment.
- 1.3 It has been noted that the stories behind the statistics, which are often very personal in nature, have helped Members to understand the complexities involved in delivering supportive solutions. These sessions have proved beneficial towards the Council developing equality outcomes based on evidence and involvement, and supporting the need to give due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality and foster good relations.
- 1.4 Following the CPE committee on 12 September, Members met with representatives of some of the groups working with people with sensory impairments in Highland. Groups represented included: Sight Action, Inverness Access Panel, British Deaf Association, Highland Deaf Forum, Lochaber Deaf Care, and two BSL interpreters were in attendance.

2 Sensory Impairment in Highland

- 2.1 The Scottish Government estimate that 1 in 6 of the population has some degree of hearing loss and possibly 1 in 30 of the population could be registered as blind

or partially sighted giving a total estimated population of about 40,000 people in the Highlands with some degree of vision or hearing loss.

- 2.2 Current estimates are that 3,000 people have a hearing loss so significant that they would qualify for support from Social Work's Deaf Services, now part of NHS Highland since integration, and between 6,000 and 9,000 people with a sight loss could be legally registered as Blind or partially sighted (it is a legal requirement for social work services to keep an up to date register of blind and partially sighted people - currently Highland has approximately 1250 people on the register).
- 2.3 Under the Equality Act, the Council has duties to ensure that everyone has the right to be treated fairly at work or when using services. Sensory impairments such as sight or hearing loss, may meet the definition of disability under the Act. The Act states that service providers may not discriminate against a disabled person by refusing to provide a service or offering a service of a lower standard or on less favourable terms, on the grounds of a disability. Service providers must also make adjustments to the way in which they provide goods or services to enable disabled people to access to them. It is worth noting that work is underway on re-provisioning communication support services provided by the Council and NHSH for people who are deaf, deaf/blind, deafened and hard of hearing.
- 2.4 Reasonable adjustments can include providing additional equipment or other forms of support, for example loop or infrared broadcast systems, or access to British Sign language interpreters (BSL), SMS text, note takers, textphones and portable loop systems, or welcoming assistance dogs. The reasonable adjustment duty is 'anticipatory', which means the service provider should be considering the needs of disabled people before a particular disabled person presents themselves.

3 Issues arising from the meeting

- 3.1 Guests were invited to tell Members about their experience of access to Council services, voting and elections, and employment, as well as any concerns about harassment and prejudice. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service was also in attendance. Discussions took place on the following topics:
 - Voting and elections
 - Engagement information
 - Access to services, accessible building and meetings
 - Specific fire Service issue
- 3.2 In this instance, there were few specific examples of harassment or discrimination raised but a number of instances of where people found barriers to access to services and a number of practical suggestions for improvements. The discussion resulted in a number of actions to be followed up. The issues raised and the proposed service responses are noted in Appendix 1. It is also proposed to co-ordinate a meeting with officers representing services to update on disabled access issues related to Council premises and to include adaptations such as loop systems.

4 Conclusion

- 4.1 These meetings provide useful feedback on some of the barriers faced by people to accessing services as well as experiences of community involvement and as well as exclusion. Often, actions can be addressed with minimal or no cost although some issues require more strategic or cultural change.
- 4.2 At this meeting, Members were also informed of the development of the national See Hear strategy – this is a draft strategic framework for meeting the needs of people with a sensory impairment in Scotland which has recently been out for consultation. In future there should be better partnership approaches to sensory issues. Dingwall Academy was cited as an example of good practice where all 1st Year pupils are doing a module on deafness. Members from Sight Action also welcomed a Council review of Children’s Visual Impairment Services.

5. Implications

- 5.1 Financial implications: There are no financial implications arising from this paper.

Risk implications: There are no risks to the Council arising from this paper.

Equalities implications: Continued engagement with equality in Highland will positively contribute to the equality duties placed on the Council to eliminate unlawful discrimination and advance equality of opportunity. The Equality Act states that meeting different needs involves taking steps to take account of disabled people's disabilities. It states that compliance with the duty may involve treating some people more favourably than others.

Climate change implications: There are no climate change implications arising from this report.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note the issues raised in the meeting with four Disability Access Panels and to consider the actions proposed by Services in response, as set out in the Appendix.

Designation: Depute Chief Executive

Date: 22 November 2013

Author: Rosemary Mackinnon, Equal Opportunities Officer Tel (01463) 702094

Appendix 1

3. Actions arising from the meeting

1 Voting and Elections	
Elections team to consider how to get information to different groups, eg direct contacts, alternative formats, using intermediaries. This can be informed by focus group work planned by the team.	<i>Elections team to follow up</i>
Elections team to speak to Electoral management Board about disability awareness in respect of canvassing.	<i>Elections team to follow up</i>
Use of postal voting to be promoted.	<i>Elections team to follow up</i>
CM to follow up with CMcl (and Electoral Registrations Office) about BSL information on elections and voting to be developed and added to Council website.	<i>Policy team has followed up with the Elections team and the Electoral Registrations Office. Information has been prepared for transcription into BSL on video – content just awaiting final proof - to be added to Council “BSL Used Here” resources.</i>
2 Engagement	
The Protocol between Access Panels and Planning Service has generally been well received.	<i>Access Panels are reviewing experiences of how the protocol is working in different areas and will feed back to Planning in March 2014.</i>
Raise awareness that BSL interpreters can be booked for public meetings and ensure that members of the public are routinely asked if they have any specific access requirements to attend meetings.	<i>Equal Opportunities Officer has discussed with Ward Manager representative on Equality Group. Ward Managers already aware of need to make public meetings accessible but will consider how to</i>
Need to look at ways to reach all sections of the community when carrying out public engagement. All Council services to be asked how they currently engage with Equality Groups.	<i>All service representatives on the equalities working group have been asked to provide information for the next meeting on 28th November.</i>
Sensory groups to be invited to return in 2014 for a further post-CPE meeting.	<i>Head of Policy and Performance to action in 2014</i>

Appendix 1

3 Access to services, accessible building and meetings	
Investigate use of signage indicating support required at Service Points/receptions etc	<i>Equal Opportunities Officer followed up with Customer Services who will adapt and use the communication aid flyer suggested by Lochaber Disability Access Panel</i>
Deaf awareness training for frontline staff. Consider how to better promote to frontline staff and incorporate suggestions such as pen and pad to be available at counters to aid communication.	<i>Recent training for staff on sensory awareness was promoted on "What's New" section of intranet. Guidance on communication skills is included in the Council's online disability awareness course. Equal Opportunities team investigating further opportunities with Customer Services and Employee Development</i>
Circulate Geoff Heathcote's information on good practice on sensory issues.	<i>Information circulated following CPE meeting.</i>
Update on use of Plain English and font sizes.	<i>Public Relations team The Programme for The Highland Council 2012 - 2017 states that: "The Council will provide information in clear language, to the 'Crystal Mark' Plain English standard." The Highland Council became a corporate member of the Plain English Campaign on 14 June 2013. This means that the Council is committed to clearer communication. A report to the Council's Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities Committee on 13 June 2013 was endorsed by members. See news release: Council commits to clearer communications. (14/06/13)</i>

Appendix 1

	<p><i>The Council's Public Relations team strives to ensure that accessible criteria are applied to all graphic design and printed materials produced by The Highland Council. Guidance on accessible information is provided in Disability Awareness training for staff.</i></p>
<p>H&P to inform how loop systems are maintained and services to inform on training etc.</p>	<p>H&P to provide details to cross-service meeting on disabled access</p>
<p>TEC/Planning to provide an update on approaches to kerbs, street furniture, etc.</p>	<p>TEC/Planning <i>Current design standards require the kerb to be flush with the adjacent road, with no upstand. This does unfortunately make the footway crossfall slightly steeper than with the old design which had a 25mm kerb upstand.</i> <i>There is often a conflict between the pedestrian "desire line" which is usually the shortest possible route, and the safest location which may mean a deviation around a slightly longer route. We try to go for the safest crossing point but if the deviation is too great pedestrians will ignore it and step off the full kerb to take the shorter route. If there are specific examples of crossing points which are considered dangerous they should be reported to local TECS staff.</i> <i>Head of Service was to issue a reminder to technical staff to check that developers include appropriate crossing points in their designs and that they are constructed in accordance with the design.</i></p>
<p>TEC to respond to query about subsidised taxi scheme</p>	<p>TEC <i>There is no current budget to cover this as discount</i></p>

Appendix 1

	<p><i>schemes are usually subsidised by local authorities. A scheme may increase use of taxis so difficult to determine likely financial requirement. Some local authorities are reducing subsidy or removing schemes altogether, for example Aberdeen City and Dundee. The Council does operate subsidised taxis in certain areas, for example in Thurso and Kinlochbervie, to replace buses and in these circumstance National Entitlement Card holders and senior citizens can travel free.</i></p>
<p>Customer Services to be asked how they ensure telephony equipment is most efficient and appropriate for sensory impaired customers.</p>	<p><i>Equal Opportunities Officer has asked for response from customer services</i></p>
<p>Job Centre to be informed of issues raise at meeting.</p>	<p><i>Comments have been passed to Disability Adviser at JobCentre Plus</i></p>
<p>4 Police, Fire and Rescue</p>	
<p>John from SFRS to follow up concerns about office fire alarm for Deaf individual (not HC employee).</p>	<p><i>SFRS followed up directly after the meeting.</i></p>