

City of York Council

Committee Minutes

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MEETING	SOCIAL INCLUSION WORKING GROUP
DATE	11 MARCH 2009
PRESENT	COUNCILLORS VASSIE (CHAIR), ASPDEN, BROOKS, GUNNELL AND LOOKER (ITEMS 36 AND 38-42)
NON-VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS	PETER BLACKBURN – LGBT LARRY HOTCHKISS – YORK OLDER PEOPLE’S ASSEMBLY JAN JAUNCEY – YORK INTERFAITH SUE LISTER – YORK OLDER PEOPLE’S ASSEMBLY DARYOUSH MAZLOUM – YORK RACIAL EQUALITY NETWORK (YREN) PAUL WORDSWORTH – YORK INTERFAITH
EXPERT WITNESSES	NICOLA BEDFORD – HIGHER YORK JOHN BETTRIDGE – MENTAL HEALTH FORUM DAVID BROWN – YORK ACCESS GROUP MAUREEN RYAN – VALUING PEOPLE PARTNERSHIP
APOLOGIES	SARAH FENNELL, RITA SANDERSON, FIONA WALKER AND GEORGE WRIGHT

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### 36. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were invited to declare at this point in the meeting any personal or prejudicial interests they might have in the business on the agenda.

No interests were declared.

### 37. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was one registration to speak at the meeting under the Council’s Public Participation Scheme.

Verna Campbell, Chair of Campaign Against Barriers at York Station (CABYS), expressed concerns at the problems that could be created for infirm or disabled people by the introduction of barriers at the station (agenda item 8 – minute 43 refers).

Concerns were expressed about the proposed changes, including:

- Problems that would be caused because there would be no easy access to the station from the short-term car park. This car park was frequently used by people accompanying elderly or disabled people to the station.
- Ticket barriers would cause difficulties for frail, elderly or disabled passengers and those with luggage.
- The proposed arrangements were likely to result in congestion, for example around the barriers, which would cause problems for travellers.
- Some people found ticket machines difficult to use.

### **38. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**

RESOLVED: (i) That the minutes of the meeting of the Group, held on 14 January 2009, be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

It was noted that, in the proposed additions to the membership of SIWG, the Access Group were to be invited to nominate only one representative even though the group included people with physical and sensory disabilities.

RESOLVED: (ii) That, should they wish to do so, the Access Group be permitted to alternate their representative to ensure that the views of those with physical and sensory disabilities were heard.

### **39. CHAIR'S REPORT**

(i) SIWG Development Day 2009

Consideration was given to setting a date for the SIWG 2009 Development Day.

RESOLVED: That the SIWG Development Day be held on Wednesday 20 May 2009.

(ii) Membership of the Group

Tribute was paid to the work that former members of SIWG had carried out.

RESOLVED: That thanks be recorded to Jack Archer, who had formerly served as a representative of the York Older People's Assembly and Lynn Jeffries, who had previously represented disabled people, for the contribution that they had made to the Group.

**40. CITY OF YORK COUNCIL DEMOCRATIC SERVICES  
EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

Members of the Group received a report seeking their views on the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment of Democratic Services.

The Democratic Services Manager explained the work of the department and sought the views of the Group as to how improvements could be made. The following suggestions were put forward:

1. Written and Verbal Information

- Comic sans is the preferred font for many users.
- Font size 14 is preferred.
- Improvements need to be made to the Council website as information is not easily accessible.
- Sometimes organisations prepare written documents in different languages but this tends to get stockpiled and go out of date. It is better for the information to be available electronically and produced on demand.
- Although agenda papers give information about access arrangements this needs to be better promoted.
- It would be better for documents to be personalised on request in order to meet the specific needs of individuals e.g. large font size, easy-read version or in another language.

- When documents are emailed the format can be amended by the reader to meet their needs e.g. increasing font size. This is not possible for PDF documents.

## 2. Procedures

- Council procedures should be modernised and made easier to understand.

## 3. Members Support and Training

- It needs to be made clear to the public that all strands of the equalities are encouraged to stand for election and that if they have specific needs appropriate support will be in place.
- More action needs to be taken to raise the profile of the work that councillors carry out. Information should be available in places like the library. The role of the councillor should be more prominent on the Council website.
- Careful consideration should be given to the timings of meetings.
- The Group welcomes the proposal to offer equalities training to councillors but notes that not all councillors attend training sessions.

## 4. Mayoralty

- The Group welcomes the proposal that the Lord Mayor's engagements diary will be more formally monitored to ensure that it supports engagements and visits to groups representative of the equality strands.
- Consideration should be given to The Lord Mayor hosting a reception for representatives of the equality strands on an annual basis.

## 5. Mansion House and Guildhall Facilities

- Praying/contemplation facilities should be available.
- The situation in respect of the bell at the Mansion House should be addressed as soon as possible as it is extremely demoralising for a member of the

public to seek assistance in this way and for this to go unheard.

- The refurbishment of the toilet for disabled people that is adjacent to Committee Room 2 should be treated as a priority to ensure that it is fully accessible.

## 6. Performance Management

- Whilst the Group welcomes the proposal to collect data to help understand how effective the measures outlined in the Equality Impact Assessment have been, there are concerns that some people may find the questionnaires to be intrusive. The Group would not wish such arrangements to deter members of the community from attending or participating in council meetings or from using facilities such as the Mansion House and Guildhall.

The Group was informed that the questionnaire would be brought to the Group for consideration in due course.

RESOLVED: That Democratic Services be requested to take into account the comments and suggestions put forward by SIWG.

## 41. **CITY OF YORK COUNCIL PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STRATEGY EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

Members of the Group received a report seeking their views on the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment of the Private Sector Housing Strategy 2008-13.

Copies of the Private Sector Housing Strategy 2008-13 were circulated and a presentation was given on the key issues. The strategy set out how the council and its partners would work to help improve the condition and management of owner occupied and privately rented homes in York.

Members of the Group put forward the following comments:

- There was insufficient reference to sexual orientation. (It was noted that customer satisfaction surveys included this

information but that it had not been included in the stock condition survey).

- More consideration should be given to issues in respect of racial tension – YREN would be able to provide information as to reported incidents of harassment.
- Some residents had perceived the questionnaires to be a form of prying by the Council even though completion of them was on a voluntary basis only. This was a communication issue that should be addressed when future surveys of this type were carried out.

Larry Hotchkiss informed officers that he had ideas about a new concept in respect of housing issues and it was agreed that he would forward his suggestions to officers after the meeting.

RESOLVED: That it be requested that the comments and suggestions put forward by SIWG be taken into account in the implementation of the Private Sector Housing Strategy 2008-13.

## 42. COMMUNITY ISSUES

### (i) Project Proposals for Funding in 2008/9

Sue Lister informed the Group that there was insufficient time in which to arrange the proposed SIWG Diversity Day for 2009. She was therefore seeking approval for the funding of £1,500 that had been allocated for the Diversity Day to be used to develop a community impetus for the event, which could then be held in May 2010. The funding allocated for 2008/9 could be used for purposes such as the creation of a working group to arrange the event and to prepare flyers and leaflets about the day, which could be handed out at other festivals.

RESOLVED: That further information on the proposal be forwarded to the Equalities Officer for consideration at the next meeting.

### (ii) Representation from York Interfaith

Jan Jauncey informed the Group that Corry Hewitt would be replacing her as representative of York Interfaith on SIWG. The Chair thanked Jan for the work that she had

carried out and the contribution that she had made to the Group.

#### 43. **CONSULTATION ABOUT IMPROVEMENTS TO YORK RAILWAY STATION**

Representatives from National Express gave a presentation on the proposed improvements to York Railway Station.

The presentation included:

- Improvements made over the last decade
- Recent improvements
- Proposals for 2009/2010
- The future vision

Diagrams of the proposed automatic ticket gates were also circulated.

The Group was informed that representatives from National Express had previously met with the Campaign Against Barriers at York Station (CABYS) and were keen to hear the views of SIWG.

The proposal to install automatic ticket gates was part of the franchise commitment and was very much supported by the Government. It was a key policy of the rail industry.

The Group was shown a map of the proposed developments and it was noted that the long-term aspiration was to work with the council to provide a new bridge, which would link to the city centre.

Members of the Group put forward their views and questions about the proposals and representatives from National Express responded to the points put forward:

- Easy access from the short-term car park to the station is essential, particularly as this car park is often used by carers who are accompanying elderly or disabled travellers.  
*There would be a dedicated walkway from the car park to the station. Phase B of the plans would include the improvements in respect of the Scarborough Road bridge.*

- Will it be possible for a carer to accompany a passenger onto the station platform?  
*Yes. They would obtain a pass from a member of staff. An assisted travel scheme is also in place whereby passengers can arrange in advance for support to be provided on their journey.*
- Would the same apply if you wanted to meet a friend, relative or colleague on the platform?  
*Yes. You would ask a member of staff for a pass.*
- How would parents with several children be able to cope with a ticket barrier?  
*Staff would be available to assist. Wide aisle gates would also be in place for those with buggies or for wheelchairs.*
- Could luggage become trapped in the barriers?  
*Sensors would be in place to prevent the paddles on the machine from closing. Wider gate access would also be available.*
- What would happen if there was a power cut?  
*The gates would open automatically.*
- Why is funding being invested in this way when it could be used to employ more ticket inspectors?  
*There will still be guards on trains. National Express is contractually committed to installing automatic ticket gates. They bring benefits.*
- Do you have figures as to the amount of money that is lost through ticket evasion?  
*Although we are not prepared to state the amount involved, the issue of fraud and fare evasion is a big concern for National Express. The fact that the franchise is prepared to invest around £1million in gating alone is an indication of how seriously the matter is taken. The money saved will be reinvested back into the railways.*
- Can arrangements be put in place to allocate a place for prayer and reflection? York has many tourists who use station and the city is also visited by religious travellers.  
*We will take back the request and give further consideration to this matter.*



- The proposed changes do not acknowledge the historical status of York Station.  
*National Express takes its obligations as custodian of York Station very seriously. It is committed to maintaining and enhancing the buildings. The improvements that it has made at stations such as Durham have won awards. Representatives from National Express have met with the “Cultural Quarter” – Ad Hoc Scrutiny Committee and that meeting had focussed more on the cultural implications. The ultimate aim is for the station to link in with the development of the “Cultural Quarter”. National Express is committed to support the master plan for the listed building.*
- The station is an iconic building. The proposed arrangements will make it exclusive and only available to travellers.  
*The building will not be exclusive. Visits can be arranged for those who are interested in its history and design.*
- How will the proposed changes improve security?  
*There have been incidents of vandalism to the male toilets at York Station and of people using the waiting rooms overnight and leaving them in an undesirable condition. Where other franchises have introduced ticket barriers such incidents have reduced, as have incidents of violence and threatened violence to staff.*
- Could improvements be made to the way in which passengers are notified when trains are delayed or platform changes are necessary? The use of an audio system is not helpful to passengers who have hearing difficulties or for whom English is not their first language. They are reliant on asking a member of staff to notify them if a change is announced. It would be beneficial for such announcements to be made in a visual form as well as by an audio system.  
*National Express will look into this possibility.*
- People with learning disabilities or for whom English is not their first language may find it difficult to cope with the machines.  
*The barriers will be manned at peak times. Video support will be available and the gates can be opened randomly. There will be ticket machines for people entering from Leeman Road and the long-stay car park.*

- Has an Equality Impact Assessment been carried out in respect of the proposals to consider how different equality groups will be affected?

*That is one of the reasons why National Express is meeting with SIWG.*

Members of the Group reiterated their concerns regarding the proposed changes. A key issue remained the access from the short-term car park. There were also concerns that the barriers and ticket machines would pose difficulties for disabled passengers or those for whom English was not their first language.

The representatives from National Express stated that they understood the importance of the railway station to York and recognised that they were custodians of the station. They were keen to engage with community groups and work in partnership with them. Further comments from members of the group were welcome and should be forwarded to them.

- RESOLVED:
- (i) That a copy of the Equality Impact Assessment template used by the Council be forwarded to National Express<sup>1</sup>.
  - (ii) That the Executive be requested to give full consideration to the issues raised by SIWG in respect of the proposed changes to the station and to the Equality Impact Assessment when this was submitted by National Express.

Action Required

Copy of EIA template to be sent to National Express

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**44. FIRST YORK**

Concerns were expressed at the impact that the proposed cuts to the bus services provided by First York would have on members of the community, particularly young people and the elderly.

- RESOLVED:
- (i) That a letter be sent to First York expressing the concerns of SIWG regarding the proposed cuts and the implications for members of the community.
  - (ii) That a representative from First York be invited to attend a meeting of SIWG to discuss issues in respect of bus service provision.

Councillor C Vassie, Chair

[The meeting started at 6.30 pm and finished at 9.15 pm].