

DISABILITY REFERENCE GROUP

MINUTES

5.30 P.M. – Tuesday 9th June, 2009

Committee Room 2

Members Present

Sara Pivac Alexander (Co-Chair)
Rosie Macleod (Co-Chair)
Alan Royal
Philippa MacDonald
Jules Taniwha
Lisette Wesseling

Also Present

Marie Retimanu-Pule (WCC)

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed the group and noted the Councillor Pannett had had a baby boy. A round the table of introductions was held.

2. Apologies

Apologies were noted from Councillor Pannett, Thomas Bryan, James Tait, Sandie Waddell and Sinead Roe.

3. Fiona Johnson – Community Facilities Review

The Review started in 2005 and was around trying to assess the effectiveness of the Council's facilities. It was broad in scope and covered swimming pools, libraries, sports centres, community facilities and halls and was aligned with the Council's strategic review. The review concluded that for all services, except for community centres and halls, the services were effective and sufficient and aligned with the Council's direction. There was not sufficient information to actually assess the efficiency for halls. Council then looked more closely at the community centres and halls and developed further direction that included the condition of the assets, what the assets were, the values that people have, the importance of the asset to the community and the Council's role. It was also looked at what other assets there were in the community and how Council fitted in with their facilities. The review looked at what other services that were Council only provided in the community for halls and centres and where Council only had a part role.

The conclusion drawn through the review was that centres and halls were quite effective with Council owning 10% of the spaces available for hire and with about 20% of the community using them. These facilities were targeted at people with a low income and that faced some sort of barrier. Improvements that could be made were noted along the way.

This review also looked at gaps in the city and where other services needed to be provided. A brief overview of the city showed that facilities were reasonably well covered but there were gaps in certain places, eg, Churton Park. The review showed a discrepancy in the quality of buildings Council is providing. Many Council facilities are designed around providing a certain facility or service. Centres and halls are quite often buildings that were built for a different purpose, i.e. unused libraries and they are also aging assets.

This review was presented to Council at the end of last year and from this Council is trying to develop an integrated service model. The intention is to develop a policy framework around community support looking at what it is that people need to ensure that they can have a stronger community and develop a sense of community. This policy will be developed around the people in the community. This is the work that is ongoing at the moment.

The proposal now is to put a paper to Council in August that will look at getting the Councillors' agreement for this community support framework and new way of doing things. A survey is being developed around what the barriers and attitudes are around the community, what are the key issues, what stops people participating, what prohibits engagement in the community and what values people have for their community. The DRG may like to be involved in a statistical survey that will look at getting feedback from the community. This work will be carried out over the next three months.

Questions & Comments:

In the survey are you specifically including questions around disabilities?
The survey is still being developed but as yet there are no specific questions about whether people have a disability. This information would come out when the question is asked what stops you from using a facility, i.e. is there difficulty with access.

Council does not ask about disabilities and does not know how many respondents are disabled. This does not tell you enough about the people who are responding to surveys. So if you get 200 respondents to your survey and only 5 are disabled you need to ask why people are not responding to the survey and are Council getting accurate information.

We want to create a telephone survey rather than a self survey that will contain general information on gender, income, etc, but we can include a question on whether people have a disability.

If you are conducting a phone interview then Deaf people will be excluded. Does this mean that Deaf people will not be included in the survey?

When people are phoned they will be given the option to do the survey online instead of by telephone but I do not know if this meets your concerns.

Providing an online survey as well as phoning is a good way of conducting the survey but it was noted that phoning people is a barrier as well.

It is important that the survey questions the kind of people who are aware of recreational activities as this is a barrier for disabled people not being able to access facilities.

One of the key barriers is actually awareness that facilities are available.

The DRG have made a comment to the Council in relation to the LTCCP submission that none of the performance measures target groups. You need to take a clear record of this in the survey.

If you are going to be working around the community one of the key issues is that many groups cannot afford to use Council community facilities, ie, Illot Theatre.

There is a lot of ethnic diversity in Wellington and that not all people have access to a phone or are able to speak English to be able to respond to questions about how they can participate in activities in the community. How are you going to get around this?

This comes down to whether or not we just do a survey in terms of statistical information or have focus groups. Maybe we will have to consider face to face meetings in terms of the design of the survey.

If you go down the track of focus groups isn't this a minor way of doing a needs assessment?

We are not doing away with the needs assessment process. We will undertake a needs assessment over a three to five year period and by the end of this we would know where investments should be made. It is very clear that there is a level of concern around the idea that no investment occurs during the process of the facilities review. We will put up a proposal that may have financial obligations and when it comes time to spend the money then we will do a needs assessment and look at the best way to use the money.

How many people do you intend to send the survey to and will they be distributed across Wellington?

The survey will be representative of the 11 planning areas and the planning areas cover the whole of the city. At least 100 responses in each area will be needed but preferably more like 200 if the survey is to have any statistical importance at all. Overall, about 2,000 responses will be needed.

It may also be important to consider the weather as a factor when deciding on when the survey will be sent out.

The timeframes for the survey have been set for July/August.

Have you considered having survey people on site, e.g. at the pool, as some people would be more inclined to complete surveys in person?

This can be considered. One of the key issues is to find out why people do not use or do not want to use the facilities.

Will the survey come through on the Council's website web alerts?

Survey design has not been finalised but the intention is that it will be available on the website..

Though web alerts are very useful, they should contain more detailed information rather than links to PDFs or web pages.

If this survey is online it should be written in Plain English.

The DRG would like to be informed of the results of the survey and in particular any issues that arise for the disability community.

4. Robert Tierney – Building Consents & Licensing Services

The Building Act is the way the Council enforces requirements for all new buildings to provide a level of accessible facilities. New Zealand Standard NZS 4121:2001 provides a good guide on accessible facilities for buildings. The Council encourages people to follow this standard for compliance purposes. It covers access for ramps, doorways, hearing loops, visual awareness and is quite comprehensive. The Building Act requires that all new buildings must provide a reasonable level of accessibility. There is an adequateness of provisions aspect stating that a person with a disability should be able to carry out normal everyday activities in a building. It does not relate to private dwellings.

When altering existing publicly accessible buildings, the Building Act requires an assessment of compliance for fire, which is not the same as making the building fully accessible. Building owners often do not want to spend the amount of money required to make a building accessible if they deem this to be not reasonable or practical. However the benefits of upgrading a building to be more accessible can often outweigh the drawbacks in terms of cost. The Council must record every decision made on whether a building is compliant or not.

Questions & Comments:

Does the Council recognise the difference between universal and accessible design?

There is a means of complying with the building code called prescribed building solutions and Council try to promote these. Council are trying to get developers to move towards a better understanding of accessibility.

Are all new buildings required to have Braille in the buildings?

Yes.

Do older buildings that are being upgraded have an obligation to comply with this standard?

There is a requirement to assess the present level of compliance when doing alterations but this depends on the extent of the alterations and what is reasonable and adequate. Section 118 talks about this. The difficulty is that it comes down to decisions based on information provided at the time of the review and Council cannot go back on decisions made to enforce compliance.

It was noted that there are a couple of apartment blocks that have not got disabled access.

These apartment blocks are for individual owner occupation and unfortunately they do not have to comply. This should come under the need to future proof buildings.

5. Confirmation of Minutes

The Minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed as a true and correct record by Alan Royal and then by the whole group.

6. Report from the Chairs

Sara and James were thanked for preparing the group's submission on the draft LTCCP. It was noted that an oral submission had also been given.

Main points from the oral submission:

- Council encouraged to adopt the Disability Strategy into their long term planning
- Need for Plain English and New Zealand Sign Language to be more widely used
- Current subsidies for audio DVDs should remain unchanged
- Emphasised the importance of including words like accessibility and inclusive in the LTCCP

Questions from the Councillors:

Disability Strategy: is the DRG familiar with the Disability Action Plan?

Lisette reported her impression from the Councillors was that the Council is satisfied with the current situation with regard to policy and disability. More work from the DRG is needed on this issue. The submission went well and was positively received.

Main points from the DRG report to SPC:

- Information on issues that the DRG have advised on in the past year
- Ongoing issues include housing, transport and urban development, ICT and the arts.
- Contained positive and negative examples of how consultation has taken place.

Issues raised: Wellington Airport; Civil Defence; Access Tourism. Would be good to include these as agenda items in the coming months.

Councillors Cook and Gill sent their thanks to the DRG for all the work that they are doing.

Lisette and Rosie were thanked for presenting the oral submission on the draft LTCCP and Rosie was thanked for presenting the DRG report to the Strategy & Policy Committee.

7. Subgroup Reports

ICT Subgroup - Lisette

Lisette and Anthony Horvath of the RNZFB met with staff from the Web Centre on 29 May to demonstrate how the Council's website responds to use by a screen reader. Web Centre staff were surprised at the results and discussed with Lisette and Anthony how the website can be improved for use with screen reading software. The need for documents to be formatted correctly and the use of PDFs on the website was also discussed. This was a positive meeting but it highlighted the need for cultural changes at the Council in terms of making information and documents more accessible.

Housing Subgroup

- The subgroup has received copies of the Pre-Upgrade Evaluation reports done at City Housing complexes which will serve as useful references in future.
- Subgroup has met with Policy Advisors who are conducting a review of the Council's Housing Policy. They have received information sheets and noted certain points of particular interest. Eligibility for City Housing is assessed by income level and other criteria including a priority group list. The Policy team have invited the DRG to comment on the current situation and these comments will inform the Policy review. The review process involves a report to the Strategy & Policy Committee (SPC) in October and public consultation on a draft policy, expected to go back to SPC in March 2010. The group will be interested in looking at the document during the public consultation stage.
- The group discussed Tenancy Managers awareness of disability related issues and knowledge of community and other support mechanisms available to tenants with disabilities. Other issues discussed included how the rent on accessible units was set and the fact that physical disability is lowest on the list of priority groups. This list was designed by Councillors based on their own perception of need and will be reviewed.

Art Subgroup

Group will be meeting with Sinead to discuss audio description and whether a workshop can be run.

8. Council Officer's Report

There was no Council Officer's report this meeting due to Sinead being away.

9. Other Business

Wellington Community Net

Wellington Community Net (WCN) is a free web hosting platform with approximately 570 different websites. The Council has recently proposed withdrawing their funding for this service and that there is an e-petition on the WCN website to get the funding reinstated. Alan asked the DRG to look at this petition and consider supporting it and noted it would be good to let Jenny Rains know that the WCN funding not being continued.

Mobility Parks

Recently *Fair Go* featured a story on the clamping of cars parked in mobility parks where the car was clamped with an able bodied person in the car waiting for the disabled person to return.

Action: Fabian Todd to be invited to a DRG meeting to clarify the issue.

Disability Strategy

The group would welcome the opportunity to discuss the need for a Council Disability Strategy or Policy with Cllr. Pannett when she returns. It was suggested that both Jenny Rains and a representative from Strategy be invited to the next DRG meeting to speak about this as well.

Action: Add this item to the agenda for July DRG meeting

The meeting closed at 6:45 pm.

Next meeting is scheduled for: Tuesday, July 14th, 2009 at 5:30 pm.