



Shropshire Disability Network

Your Voice, Your Connections

www.shropshire-disability.net

General Meeting 10th March 2011 Minutes

1. Chairman's Welcome

Geoff Forgie welcomed 40 people to the Meeting, and to an Agenda which he hoped everyone would find interesting. He was delighted to welcome our Guest Speakers: 1) Ann Johnson, SDN Steering Group Member, and Head of our Employment Sub Group, to talk us through changes in the Equality Act, and 2) Keith Barrow, Leader of Shropshire Council, to talk to us about the impact of the Big Society on Shropshire.

Geoff passed on apologies once again from our Patron Emma Suddaby. Her relentless cycle of operations followed by infection continues. Geoff said, "I have visited her at the Orthopaedic Hospital several times and she would certainly have wished to be with us today. Every time I speak with her I am inspired. I hope you will all join me in sending our very best wishes. She truly is a hero and an inspiration in her fight to make the most from her challenging life". The Meeting asked Geoff to send Emma our best wishes.

On the subject of Patrons we are shortly sending an invitation to Joe Hart, Manchester City FC Goalkeeper, originally from Shrewsbury. We do not have any personal contact with him but thought it worth a try. Geoff asked anyone who may have personal influence with Joe to please support our request.

Finally Alison Smith our ex-Webmaster continues to make good progress with her projects to make the web accessible to all. She may well address our June meeting.

Geoff also welcomed Julie Davenport, Parents and Carers Council,

and Jim Struthers of EAGA, who had display stands, and would say a few words about their organisation later.

2. Guest Speaker – Ann Johnson
“Is treating someone with a disability equally fair?”

The short answer is **NO**. Persons with disability should be supported by legislation that makes special provision for them.

The **Equality Act 2010** replaces 9 separate Acts. It is being introduced in 3 parts – Oct 2010, April 2011, and April 2012. It brings common threads together, closes loopholes, covers additional discriminations, and aims to improve people’s lives.

There are changes to all protective characteristics

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Re-assignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) is still relevant, and the objectives of the Social Model remain, namely, protecting in the workplace, provision of services, and reasonable adjustments.

But much more emphasis is now being put on Disability Equality Duty, i.e. it’s more about what you are proactively doing as an employer or whatever. Changes include a change of the word “involvement” to “engage” with people with disabilities when reviewing policies and work practices. Ann mentioned a **free workshop** she is giving on **23rd March** about the implication of this wording change.

There is no change to the definition of disability as in the DDA 1995, namely

“A person has a disability if he / she has a mental or physical impairment which has a substantial and adverse long-term effect on that person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

Some other changes:-

- Now gives the right to modify the home in communal living

- areas, as well as in individual homes.
- Generic pre-recruitment health forms have been outlawed
- We can say, “You’ve discriminated against me”. They have now to prove they haven’t
- It is recognised that circumstances can arise “as a result of” disability, e.g. tiredness during the day
- You can now take action on 2 different grounds at the same time

How to enforce the Act? Ann believes always in education first. Only once has she had to take things beyond education to get things changed. However, the Equality of Human Rights Commission website www.equalityhumanrights.com fully describes the processes available, if you need to take action under the Act. You get free support, and a caseworker assigned to you.

In the end, we need to

- Be better informed
- Inform others
- Empower
- Share understanding
- Enable

3. Julie Davenport – Parents and Carers Council

PACC are all parents of children with disabilities. It is used as a consultation body by public and official organisations, like the Council. They hold events for families so that they can get together. A current promotion is the Shropshire Face to Face Befriending Scheme.

4. Jim Struthers – EAGA – BBC Switchover

Jim is a Regional Coordinator of the Switchover scheme, which is being run by the BBC, supported by Government. They report to the BBC Trust. Jim reminded us that Shropshire switches over to digital on 6th April, with a follow-up on 20th April. A number of people will be eligible for free assistance, and these will be mailed. Please respond to the letter, even if it’s to avoid further letters.

5. Minutes of General Meeting 9th December 2010

Minutes of the Meeting on 9th December 2010 were adopted as a true record.

6. Matters Arising

There were none that are not covered later in the Agenda.

7. Website & Newsletter

Website

Geoff said that our website continues to move forward, with our very able Gavin Martin dealing with the day to day issues, and with the help of Paul Nash, our very experienced and capable new Webmaster. The number of visits to the website has increased from approx 800 per month to 1000 per month. As a result of this and Sally's newsletter, our regular contact list is approaching 500.

We are forming a web editorial team to help make our information even more useful to individuals with disability. Val Lewis and Trevor Dickenson are currently on the Editorial Team, and Val appealed for volunteers to join the team. We could do with up to 6 on the team, including people with disability, who can provide the insight we need to ensure the website remains relevant.

Newsletter

Geoff gave an update as follows:-

Further to Sally's pending retirement, I am pleased to welcome to our meeting Peter Staples a highly qualified and newly retired volunteer who is here to discuss production of the Newsletter with Sally. "Cometh the hour, cometh the man". Sally has kindly agreed to stay on to the end of May. In the meantime if anyone would like to be involved in helping with the Newsletter, please let me know by leaving your details or ring me on 01691 830662 or contact Sally at newsletter@shropshire-disability.net

I would once again like to publicly thank Sally for the tremendous job she has done in getting Your Voice up and running and for the very valuable contributions she has made to our Steering Group.

Continued thanks also to volunteer Susanna for her continued help with Graphics, and to volunteer Marina for her brilliant work in producing the vocal version of the newsletter. Marina would love some more volunteers to help her.

8. Volunteering Opportunities with SDN

We are constantly on the lookout for volunteers. Listed below are posts we are currently looking to fill.

- **Fundraising Co-ordinator**
- **Newsletter Assistants**

- **Event Co-ordinator – SDN Disability Challenge 4th Sept**
- **Event Co-ordinators – Shropshire Disability Awareness Day 16th Oct**
- **Marketing Officer**
- **Social Events Co-ordinator**

For further information please contact Geoff on 01691 830662 , email geofforgie@talktalk.net or Sally at newsletter@shropshire-disability.net

9. **Treasurer's Report**

Tom Memery made a brief statement.

Current Bank Balance is £2,938, of which £688 is currently uncommitted.

Tom also paid tribute to the huge effort put in by SDN volunteers. We know that not all volunteer hours are reported, but what has been reported amounts to 2,500 volunteer hours per year.

Dave Hewetson mentioned 2 imminent Street Collections being held to replenish our core funding:-

Saturday 19th March Darwin Centre Shrewsbury

Saturday 30th April Telford centre

and asked for volunteers. **We are currently about 4 volunteers short for the 19th March.**

Dave's contact details are Tel: 01743-247019, email davidhewetson@talktalk.net

10. **SDN Walk and Roll 2100 – 10th April, The Quarry, Shrewsbury**

Geoff urged all Meeting attendees to take away leaflets and application forms for this event and all SDN supporters. We'd like to see as many people as possible there on the day to enjoy a fun event.

11. **Shropshire Disability Awareness Day – 16th October, Shrewsbury Sports Village**

Geoff had attended a successful Parents and Carers Council event there recently, and was able to envisage a successful event for SDN in

October.

12. Shropshire Disability Challenge

This has been provisionally booked for Sunday 4th September at Cardingmill Valley. Teams of 6 to 8 will transport wheelchair users over a route of 4 – 6 km.

13. A.O.B.

- 1) Phil George of CINCH (shortly to be re-named HealthWatch) invited SDN to attend their Care & Health Issues Group meeting on 7th April. His colleague David Beechey said they have monthly meetings, addressing the community's concerns about issues with care and health services, and report to the Care & Equality Commission. They would like important groups like SDN to be involved. Currently the group is looking at the Ambulance Service Patients' Charter. Val Lewis asked if they were involved in querying the changes to Hospital services. David replied that they were involved in the group looking at those issues, and also with clinical groups. Carol George mentioned there are a number of public meetings (Road shows) where people can bring their stories and voice concerns. She will send a publicity poster to Dave Hewetson for SDN to publish to SDN contacts.
- 2) Val Lewis mentioned the Transition Town Shrewsbury Group were meeting on 19th March at 2pm in The Gateway, Shrewsbury. Prof. Lumsden from the Dept. of Tourism will be there, and they'll be talking about affected bus routes.
- 3) Val also mentioned the Survey on our SDN Website. It includes a question that says – if this service stops, how would you get there? She asked that people don't just answer, "I wouldn't!" We want to know the real difficulties people would experience if they had to continue to make the journey, by alternative means of transport.
- 4) Ann Smallcombe stated that people with hearing disability would benefit if all taxi services in Shropshire were equipped with an SMS (text) service. She or Kathy Jones will send details about the requirement to Dave Hewetson.
- 5) Peter Ruberry mentioned that Shropshire ME Group have a Conference on Sat 7th May at Bayston Hill Memorial Hall. More details will be published soon.

**14. Guest Speaker – Keith Barrow, Leader of Shropshire Council
“The Impact of the Big Society on Shropshire”**

Keith thanked SDN for inviting him, and said he was very happy to speak to the Meeting. He began by promising to take away the request about taxi SMS services for people with hearing disability (made in A.O.B.) and see what could be done about it, as it seems such an obviously sensible suggestion.

Keith’s own background is he has run a carpet and flooring business for 34 years, and was a swimming coach for 20 years, during which period he coached swimmers with disabilities to Olympic standard. He recalls that blind swimmers were tapped on the head with a tennis ball to tell them it was time to go into a tumble turn!

There is much debate about what The Big Society means. Keith sees it as turning back the clock to when people in communities were more caring, and would look out for one another. There is a lot of confusion because The Big Society has been linked with budget cuts, when they’re really different things. He heard something on the Politics Show recently talking about people doing ironing and washing, to give respite to carer families.

The Council is trying to look at things differently now. For example, they’re planning to spend £12 million working in partnership with voluntary organisations to offer services and help to people. One example was a large sports centre in Market Drayton, which was sold to volunteers for £1. The centre’s roof needed repairing, and the Council had been quoted £650,000, prior to the sale, for the work. Post sale, the volunteers got the same firm to do the same work for £160,000. Another was in Cleobury Mortimer, where the Council was quoted £180,000 to build a block of toilets. The council is looking at providing access instead to existing community halls which have disabled toilets. Another way we can do things better is through Personal Budgets. Keith’s cousin’s daughter Jane, who has Downs Syndrome, is now able to spend some money on going dancing, which she loves.

In summary, we’re recognising that often we haven’t done things right, and are trying to change the way we do things. In a recent radio interview, the implication was taken from what he said that the Council was going to dump stuff onto voluntary organisations. That’s not true. What he meant to get across was that the Council has to work in partnership with these other organisations.

Keith then took Questions:-

1) **Q.** Has moving to a Unitary Authority made any difference?

A. Keith said yes. They saved £18m just by doing it. 168 posts were saved. We face bigger and bigger challenges. Next year they have to save £30 million, and this will be achieved by savings in mainly back office positions, largely through vacancy management. Then they have to save £20 million, £20 million, and £9 million, in the following 3 years.

2) **Q.** What services are going to be cut?

A. It's not so much about cuts. It's largely about doing things differently. For example, changing the stops of mobile libraries to match the demand, allowing volunteers to man local libraries. When Keith came to office, he found there were 12 solicitors employed by the Council, and is now reviewing this. Moving leisure centres into management by Trust is expected to save hundreds of thousands of pounds. The Council is asking business if they would run leisure centres.

3) **Q.** Can we have parking bays outside houses to help people with disability?

A. This is a legacy of houses designed in days when the car population was low, and streets were allowed to be narrow. There isn't the money to address this at the moment, I'm afraid.

4) **Q.** There are a lot of changes, and things are being done differently. Can you please make sure that the way you promote the changes, and the locations for the promotion, are relevant? And can you make the language you use Equality-proof?

A. Yes. We must do better. Recently, a meeting of a Local Enterprise Partnership (where Council meets business people) was arranged for 2.30pm (in the middle of the business day), which was madness. When it was re-arranged for 6.30pm at Ludlow Racecourse, more than 200 people attended. We are listening. For instance, we have casualties with young people falling in the river after a night drinking. There are more mobile smart phones than mobiles now, and an App. Is being developed to message young people a reminder to book their taxi after a night out.

5) **Q.** It was recently reported that 4 jobs with the Council would cost a total of £380,000 in salaries. How can you justify that in a time of cuts?

A. Keith was angry about this story in the Shropshire Star, which was untrue. It is even more frustrating, since the Council place £400,000 worth of advertising per annum with the paper. The truth is that a Senior Management Review has taken place, which has resulted in a saving of £4 million. All Senior Managers were given notice, and had to re-apply for their posts, which were not all retained. However, 4 Senior posts require appointments from external sources. 1 is a Finance Officer, and the remaining 3 may be shared with other Councils.

6) **Q.** Personalisation is great, but there are gaps in provision, e.g. specialised childcare, and there is a cost of training for carers.

A. That is a hard question, which in turn asks questions about our economic development. We must create jobs in the wider economy. We're pressing ahead with Personalisation, but recognised that it poses problems, which we need to address. For example, in community transport, we have to look at our overall strategy. Can we retain bus routes, but run buses less frequently? Recently, when a bus company cut a route at Shawbury, which was used by 1 person, over 100 people met to protest. Is that reasonable?

7) **Q.** It's great that the Council is trying to be smarter and more proactive. But why does Mr. Cameron insist the cuts are front-loaded, and not distributed over a longer period, which would ease the load on both the Council and the taxpayer?

A. We really have no choice but to make a major start now. Council spending from 2001 – 2005 increased massively. Between Children's Services, Education, Social Services, and Care Services, the increase was around £80 million.

8) **Q.** Can I expect to see my Council Tax come down as a result of the savings?

A. There will be no increase in Council Tax for the next 3 years, and a slight reduction thereafter.

15. Next Meeting

The next General Meeting will be held on **Thursday 9th June 2011** at the Mereside Community Centre, Sutton Farm, Shrewsbury.



Managed by the Community Development Foundation

