



Disability Act Focus Group 2006

Full Report (November 2006)



Prepared By The Market Research Group (MRG), Bournemouth University,
on behalf of
North Dorset District Council.

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1: Key Messages

The following summary has been drawn from the research findings section of the report.

1.1: Attitudes

- People with physical disability find it hard to take their wheelie bins to the point of collection and they need to rely on other people to do that for them.
- Respondents commented that although they sort their recycling, when it is collected it is thrown into only one compartment.
- There was an agreement that individuals should cater for their needs and make sure that they take care of themselves and their requirements. This can only be done by informing in advance the authorities for these specific needs.
- The general feeling was that disabled people would like to be taken into consideration when decisions are being made.

1.2: Parking

- Some people commented that the signage for disabled parking is not understandable and sometimes it is not clear to them where they should be parking.
- A comment was made that different councils have different regulations regarding disabled parking making it even harder for disabled people to know where to park.
- Comments were also made about people who are not disabled parking in the few designated disabled parking spaces.

1.3: Transport

- Respondents commented on the transport to and from the hospital. Some of them find it hard to go to the hospital because of their disability and the lack of bus services close to their homes. Therefore they proposed that the council should re-introduce the hospital car service since that was their best option for transport to the hospital.
- Specifically for people with metal rods in their bodies, individuals with back problems and patients that are transferred to the hospital by ambulances, the jolts due to potholes make their situation worse and they experience further pain.
- Traffic in certain areas can be a problem for disabled people when they need to get in or out of cars and the drivers behind are impatient.

1.4: Access

- Closing the public disabled toilets proves to be a big problem for disabled people.
- Generally respondents had positive comments regarding the kerbs.
- Some respondents commented on the lack of ramps in banks and listed buildings.
- Respondents complained about the lack of pavements in busy roads in the area of Shaftesbury.

1.5: Communication of information

- Respondents (specifically people with hearing problems) commented on the problem they had communicating with other people.
- Another problem is communicating on the phone with a hearing aid or having to go through automated phone messages where they have to press certain keys.

1.6: Policy and Procedures

- Generally positive comments were made in terms of the way the District Council provides for the disabled.
- A respondent commented on the raised tables (raised formations on the road that help with the traffic) in the area of Blandford and how dangerous they can be for people with disabilities.
- A possible solution to planning problems would be to consult groups of disabled people before any decisions from the planning department are made.

1.7: Employment

- Some respondents commented on the problems they had to find or keep a job due to their disability.

2: Introduction

2.1: Disability Act

Consultation is the mechanism by which public agencies can monitor quality and cost of services they provide for the public, and investigate issues of importance to stakeholders.

Assessing the views of residents and service users is key to this process, so North Dorset District Council has embarked on a public consultation programme. This ensures that any decisions made are in line with public opinion, and that communities are more involved in the decision making process.

2.2: Disability Act Focus Groups 2006

North Dorset District Council is involved in providing services and support to North Dorset disabled residents. One of its tasks was to develop a Disability Equality Scheme which will outline how it intends to eliminate discrimination and harassment and how to actively promote equality of opportunity for people with disability and sensory needs.

Before introducing the Disability Equality Scheme it was considered important that the public and specifically people with disabilities are consulted. This report details the results of such a consultation.

2.3: The Market Research Group (MRG)

North Dorset District Council has commissioned MRG, based at Bournemouth University, to undertake this research. MRG aims to be a key independent resource for the provision and interpretation of market intelligence for its clients.

The group offers expertise, experience and advice in the field of market research, tailored to suit the needs of individual organisations. MRG has specialised in public consultation of this sort, and has numerous projects to its name.

2.4: Project Aims & Objectives

2.4.1: Project Aims

The project's broad research aim is to provide North Dorset District Council with the views, comments and suggestions of people with disability and sensory needs, carers or support groups. This input will be used to develop a Disability Equality Scheme.

2.4.2: Project Objectives

More specifically, the project sought to achieve the following objectives:

- To assess the initial views of respondents on issues that affect them within the North Dorset District.
- To gain an understanding of how disabled people are affected by these issues.
- To collect suggestions on how to tackle these issues.

3: Methodology

3.1: Research Design

Due to the complexity of the issues being assessed and the lack of current information available on this specific subject, a qualitative methodology was determined as the most appropriate research method.

3.1.1: Target Population

In this case the target population, those of interest to the research, were all disabled residents living in North Dorset. For ease of recruitment the Dorset Citizens' Panels, managed by MRG on behalf of the local Council, was used as a sample frame to contact a random selection of residents. The Panels are representative samples of local residents who have agreed to take part in research for the benefit of the local community.

Although it is recognised that individuals residing outside this area, for example commuters and tourists, will be affected by these issues, it was felt that this group should be the focus for this initial consultation.

3.1.2: Sample Size & Technique

Although qualitative research of this sort is not statistically significant, it is nevertheless beneficial to include a good variety of respondents in the research. For this reason a spectrum of respondents from various Ward areas and of different ages, genders, ethnic, social and religious backgrounds were invited to take part. In the event 17 Panel members took part in the consultation.

3.1.3: Data Collection

Discussion groups, rather than individual depth interviews, were selected as these allow the simultaneous interviewing of multiple respondents, the flow of discussion between respondents, and are beneficial in idea generation. They involve a trained moderator eliciting responses on topics of interest from a group of respondents, which are commonly recorded on an audio or video device. The interview is unstructured, and it is the role of the moderator to guide the flow and depth of the discussion depending on the responses given.

Two focus groups, each lasting just over one and a half hours, were conducted at the following times and locations. Respondents were recruited by telephone, and to encourage attendance respondents were offered a small attendance fee in lieu of their time and refreshments upon arrival.

- Durweston Village Hall 26th October 2006.
- Fontmell Magna Village Hall 3rd November 2006.

3.2: Data Analysis

The recorded comments of respondents were transcribed into a dedicated computer database programme for ease of manipulation. Some of these verbatim comments have been used in the findings section of the report to highlight respondent views.

Please note that the results of this research are not representative of the behaviour and views of the target population. They are based on a relatively small qualitative sample size, and have been designed to investigate the types of views present in the local community, not to quantify them.

3.3: Respondent Profile

The focus group was made up of the following respondents (total 17):

3.3.1: Respondent Gender

- 5 male.
- 12 female.

3.3.2: Respondent Age Groups

- 3 aged 25-44.
- 4 aged 45-64.
- 6 aged 65-74.
- 4 aged 75+.

3.3.3: Respondent Disability

- 16 yes.
- 1 no (carer).

4: Research Findings

This section of the report discusses the findings of the consultation, and has been presented under headings relating to each of the main issues.

4.1: Attitudes

4.1.1: Refuse Collection

One of the points made regarding the refuse collection was about the wheelie bins. Specifically people with physical disability find it hard or impossible to take the wheelie bins to the point of collection. Usually a carer or a member of the family needs to do that.

"I think people who are in wheelchairs would definitely have problems pushing the wheelie bin in and out"

A proposed solution to this problem would be to arrange door collection for people with physical disabilities.

Another point made was regarding recycling; in certain areas people have to sort their different types of recycling. Respondents considered that this is a difficult job for old or disabled people and that they should not be made to sort their recycling since it is the Council's duty.

Some also commented on the fact that although they sort their recycling, when it is collected it is thrown into only one compartment.

"They come around and they chuck everything in the back of the truck in no separate compartments. They come one day to do that and another day to take the normal stuff, waste."

Lastly some people commented on the lack of dog wardens although that is not something that is related to their disability.

4.1.2 Attitudes towards disabled people

One lady commented on the fact that when she needs to give a presentation to a school or a seminar and she needs to get on stage most of the times there is not a handrail that she can hold from. Therefore she needs someone to help her and she does not like that because she wants to be perceived as normal.

Respondents debated on the above point of view by saying that disabled people need to recognise that as they become older they will need more and more help from other individuals and that they should not feel bad about asking for it since most of the time people are happy to assist.

Some respondents commented that disabled individuals should first cater for their needs and make sure that they take care of themselves and their requirements. This can only be done by informing in advance the authorities for their specific needs.

" If you show people that you have a problem and you need support, it is available in plenty and if you want to appear normal and don't wish to take it, then you suffer, can't expect people to know your needs."

"Last year I wanted to travel to Cardiff on my own as a matter of principle. I thought I would take the train from Salisbury as there was parking. I sorted and planned everything with the railway authorities, the car park, there was a lift to go down to the platform, and the authorities helped me very well. My disability factor was taken care of."

Some respondents commented on the attitudes of people when they see them making use of disabled facilities although their disability might not be obvious.

"I get the look when I walk out of the disabled loo, and there are people in wheelchairs. I look normal but I am disabled, and why should I tell people what my disability is?"

The general feeling was that disabled people would like to be taken into consideration when decisions are being made.

"The majority of the disabled people want to get on with their lives and not stick out like a sore thumb. We do not want to be patronised but just be remembered in discussing planning. I am sure planning for disabled people is hard, there are many different types; what is ideal for the blind people is not also suitable for wheelchair users or people with sticks".

4.2: Parking

Some people commented that the signage for disabled parking is not easy to understand and sometimes it is not clear where they should be park.

"In the car parks the notice always says that the disabled parkers can park free in a designated bay and I have never been clear whether that is a designated disabled bay or just a clearly marked bay. I don't always use a disabled space. If there is a reasonable space to access I prefer to take that and leave the wider ones to those who need them. But if I am going to do that I do not want to come back and find that I have got a ticket because I am not in a designated parking bay, the disabled parking bay. You know obviously I don't want to take that risk. I am a blue badge holder, which I need, but I do not necessarily need a wider space, I just need to be near my point of attention."

A comment was also made about the fact that different councils have different regulations regarding disabled parking, making it even harder for disabled people to know where to park.

Another concern was the fact that carers or relatives of disabled people can not park in a disabled space when they are driving a disabled person to a destination.

A solution to the problem would be to provide disabled people with a badge that could be used in any car park.

Comments were also made about people that are not disabled parking in the few designated disabled parking spaces. The problem is worse in areas where there are not many parking spaces anyway.

"All our disabled car parks are being used by non badge users and construction workers and their vans."

4.3: Transport

4.3.1: Crossings

Some respondents commented on the lack of pedestrian crossing on specific areas.

" I live in Nobleton Andrew which is between North Dorset and West Dorset, the A354 passes through a downhill and then there is a sudden bend to the right, which is quite accident prone. There has been a request for a pedestrian crossing in 1984 which has still not come through."

They also commented that the raised bumps put in place in certain areas are not a solution to the problem since a lot of drivers do not really slow down. Therefore people with a disability need to look for the closest zebra crossing in order to cross the road safely.

4.3.2 Transportation

Respondents commented on the transport to and from the hospital. Some of them find it hard to go to the hospital because of their disability and the lack of bus services close to their homes. Therefore they proposed that the council should re-introduce the hospital car service since that was their best option for transport to the hospital.

"I don't have a car, and I need to go to Shaftesbury hospital. Until now my hospital vehicle picked me up, but I am not on wheelchair, and now they have said that I will not be permitted to use the hospital pick up and I cannot afford a £100 round trip by a taxi to the hospital and I can't walk till to the Gilligham station to get a bus to Shaftesbury. I can walk only a few yards at a time. I would be glad if you could help me in my situation. I can't go to hospital on my wheelchair, because if I go faster than 1 mile an hour, I could tip off and fall on any stone or bump."

Some people commented on the buses and the fact that although most of them now have ramps sometimes these ramps are not low enough for a person in a wheelchair. Others commented on the bus services schedule, saying that although these services might be convenient for a person that just wants to go out for the day, they are not really helpful for people that work.

Alternatives methods of transport was also mentioned, e.g. Norcats (good, but not reliable) and Age Concern (hard to find volunteers under the age of 60 to drive the bus).

4.3.3 State of the roads

Respondents had some complaints regarding the state of the roads. Specifically for people with metal rods in their bodies, individuals with back problems and patients that are transferred to the hospital by ambulances, the jolts due to potholes make their situation worse and painful.

A comment was also made about the "narrows" in Shaftesbury;

"Shaftesbury is a working town and not a tourist attraction. I agree that maybe something should be done about the narrows. But please think first"

4.3.4 Traffic

Traffic in certain areas can be a problem for disabled people. One reason is the crossing for pedestrians in very busy roads especially when they are no controlled traffic lights and the kerbs are not flattened enough. Another reason is getting in and out of cars on busy roads when other drivers are not patient.

"The majority of the disabled badge holders are elderly and they need more room than most to open the doors wide enough to let themselves swing their legs out the car and to stand up straight. Then once they have then got their balance they can either use their stick/frame wheelchair etc. to move around. In Bell Street this causes problems with drivers who have no sympathy for disabled drivers and some time toot to make them hurry up. Parking in Bell Street is a good idea but the traffic people's manners are not controllable! Some extra long parking spaces are essential for the wheelchair users, who need extra access to their cars. Space is needed also for the helper pushing the wheelchair".

4.4: Access

4.4.1 Toilets

Closing the public disabled toilets proves to be a big problem for disabled people. Although not all toilets are closed or locked the fact that they are not able to have access even to some of them can create a difficulty.

North Dorset has closed the disabled toilets by the post office in Blandford. Its bolted, pad locked I cannot get in anytime day or night, due to funding or something it says on the door. There is one more at the other end of the town where the Safeway used to be, down by the river and the other one is by Somerfield. I used the one by Somerfield last night when I was running the dog, very urgently and there were no lights, the door was open wide for no fault of anyone, no loo roll. Bins were not emptied, the lights not mended, the cleaning of disabled toilets is absolutely diabolical and why is one being shut? I need all of them, I am not the only one using it, there must be others who need it too."

Another problem relating to toilets is that some of them have heavy metal installed so the door will not fully open so a person in a wheelchair is unable to get in.

4.4.2 Kerbs

Generally respondents made positive comments regarding the kerbs.

"They were very kind in doing the dropped curb; if you are in a wheelchair you should be given way".

"I think they have done very well! I don't have any problem with the kerbs."

A problem reported with kerbs was the difference between the curb and the road. This can be a problem specifically for people with sticks or frames since they do not know how big a step they should take. People with wheelchairs also experience problems since the leaning of curb towards the road makes the control of the wheelchair difficult.

An individual commented on the plans to now make kerbs 45 degrees to the road. They suggested that the new kerbs might be good for blind people or people with wheelchairs but it would cause problems to people with sticks and frames since there is an increased danger of them falling down.

4.4.3 Ramps

Some respondents commented on the lack of ramps in banks and listed buildings.

"In every bank in Blandford there are 2-3 steps to get in and no ramps, unless sometimes they might bring you one. 2 banks in Dorchester have ramps at the side but none in Blandford."

Another respondent mentioned that the slopes on the ramps are not marked and there is always a danger of not expecting a slope and ending up on the road.

4.4.4 Pavements

Respondents commented on the lack of pavements on busy roads in the area of Shaftesbury.

I am talking on behalf of my deceased disabled father, I wish to raise the issue about the Shaftesbury main road (Salisbury Road). As an able bodied person I find that road very difficult to negotiate, it has no pavement".

"Trying to get a wheelchair down the high street in Shaftesbury is incredibly hard. It is not wide enough for people to go down without worrying about blocking the way. And in some places you need to get off the pavement so as not to fall over, e.g. between Body Shop and Humphries".

Another problem stated was that the unevenness of the pavement creates pain to people with certain conditions (e.g. back problems) and it can be dangerous for people with sticks or frames.

4.5: Communication of information

Respondents (specifically people with hearing problems) commented on the problem they have communicating with other people.

"When I go to my hairdresser, I can't keep my hearing aid on because it will get spoilt and if I don't I am lost on what the hairdresser is saying."

Another problem is communicating on the phone with a hearing aid or having to go through automated phone messages where they have to press certain keys (e.g. press 1 if you want this, press 2 if you want that etc). A solution to the problem would be to have access to information from other sources or have a specified phone line for people with hearing disabilities. Publicising such services in e.g. local newspapers would help disabled people be aware of these options.

4.6: Policy and Procedures

Related to the above topic was the comment of an individual about the difficulty she has filling the forms in order to claim benefits.

"I am disabled I have problems in writing and I am deaf, I tried contacting the council for benefits, I had difficulty in filling the forms that had so many instructions. I would prefer human interaction rather than websites and instructions"

Another respondent commented on the raised tables in the area of Blandford. Apparently a few accidents have taken place in the area due to the raised tables and a demonstration occurred in order to pressure the Council to remove them. However, none of these efforts have succeeded. A possible solution to such problems would be to consult groups of disabled people before any decisions from the planning department are made.

Generally though positive comments were made in terms of the way the District Council provides for the disabled.

"I must say that the council takes a lot of care of us and I am grateful."

"Electoral service was excellent where I could use proxy and postal vote system. I am thankful for the council tax concession I got for not permanently living in my home, as I was a carer for my father"

"I found Dorset very good with grants because a few years ago I just could not get into the bath. We asked for help and they fit in a shower for us and didn't charge us a penny, although we had to sign saying we will be here for 5 years."

4.7: Employment

Very few comments were made regarding employment. The few that were made were focused on the difficulty that disabled people have to either find or to keep a job.

A respondent commented on the fact that he lost four jobs in three months because of his disability.

"I lost 4 jobs in 3 months because I was always in the loo or in the hospital".

Another person said that he lost his job in a well established organisation when he was diagnosed as disabled and instead of the organisation trying to find him a job that would cater for his disability they preferred to let him go.

A third respondent got a part time job however he had to also take full time courses in order to keep that job which was not possible due to his disability.

"I got some temporary jobs about 12 hours a week for which I had to do full time courses, which was not possible".