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DEAF COMMUNITY FORUM - 5.12.2018

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE DEAF COMMUNITY FORUM HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 5 DECEMBER 2018

COUNCILLORS

PRESENT Sinan Boztas, Mustafa Cetinkaya, Susan Erbil, Alessandro Georgiou and Ahmet Hasan

ABSENT Hass Yusuf

OFFICERS: Andy Ellis, Corporate Scrutiny Officer, Stacey Gilmour, Governance Secretary

Also Attending: Tola Kolawole, Head of Wellbeing, CommUNITY Barnet, Angela Greaves, Enfield Connections, Louisa Boon, BSL Interpreter, Karen Houlihan, BSL Interpreter, Naomi Cherubin, Hands on Signer, Bibi DaLacey-Mould, Hands on Signer
Approximately 20 members of the public

1 ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

Councillor Hass Yusuf was appointed as Chair for the municipal year 2018-19. Councillor Alessandro Georgiou was appointed Vice-Chair for the municipal year 2018-19.

In the absence of Councillor Yusuf, Councillor Georgiou chaired the meeting.

2 WELCOME & APOLOGIES

Councillor Georgiou welcomed all Councillors, attendees and speakers to the meeting. The BSL Interpreters and Hands on Signers were introduced.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Hass Yusuf.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

4 UPDATE FROM COMMUNITY BARNET

RECEIVED an update from Tola Kolawole, Head of Wellbeing, CommUNITY Barnet on how they and their partners will support Enfield residents with sensory impairments.

NOTED:

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- The new wellbeing and information service called Enfield Connections, facilitated by Community Barnet launched in April 2018.
- In partnership with the Enfield Voluntary Sector, Enfield Connections will cater for residents who need improved information and advice to enable them to make informed decisions to remain independent and active.
- Working in collaboration with a wide range of expert charities, Enfield Connections will provide accessible services to all residents including those with hearing impairments, learning disabilities and the elderly community.
- Enfield Connections aim to reach residents through telephone, internet, type talk and face to face.
- Vulnerable community members will be supported in form filling, later life planning, some appeals work and supported volunteering.
- Enfield Connections will be overseen by CommUNITY Barnet and delivered through Enfield Disability Action, Age UK Enfield, Mind in Enfield, Citizens Advice Enfield and the Homeless Resource Centre.
- The Deaf Community can visit the Mind in Enfield Office, Fore Street, Edmonton, N9 for help and support. Appointments would need to be made in advance however to enable a BSL Interpreter to be booked.
- CommUNITY Barnet as an organisation do not provide any other services themselves but use local delivery partners to provide connection services.
- Arrangements are in place for all delivery partners to provide BSL Interpreters when they are needed.
- Enfield Connections has a fast track booking service for people with disabilities to see the specialist disability provider.
- CommUNITY Barnet had attended the BSL Users Forum in May and July 2018 as well as the ENDIG meeting to advise and update the Deaf Community on the various services that Enfield Connections would be providing.
- The new service is still in its infancy and it is recognised and appreciated that the Deaf Community have been used to a very different way of receiving and accessing services. However, CommUNITY Barnet and Enfield Connections are very keen to engage with the Deaf Community to look at and discuss what is needed and ways of improving the services on offer. Any suggestions and feedback from the audience tonight would be greatly received.

The following questions/comments were raised by Councillors:

- Q. How are you assessing the needs of the Deaf Community?
A. We are working closely with Action for Hearing Loss, ENDIG and the BSL Users Forum to obtain feedback and suggestions on what the Deaf Community require and how these services can best be delivered. Staff are also undergoing Deaf Awareness Training.
- Q. How do the Deaf Community deal with council issues, such as housing, council tax enquiries etc.?
A. These sorts of issues are dealt with by Mind in Enfield, Edmonton N9.

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- Q. In terms of accessing the specialist advisers what is the current waiting time?
- A. Two weeks at present but we are working towards improving this.
- Q. Do you have numbers for how many people have used the service since it was launched?
- A. In terms of hearing impaired Citizens Advice Enfield have seen 15 people from the Deaf Community and 3 from the hard of hearing community.
- Q. This seems low. Have you done everything you can to get your contact details/information about your service out there?
- A. Yes, we have attended various Forums, left flyers and engaged with the Deaf Community as much as possible. Further information and flyers will be left on the table at the back of the meeting hall tonight and the audience were encouraged to take copies of these as they left.

The following comments and questions were then raised by the audience:

- Your organisation and your staff are not deaf aware, and you do not understand how the deaf Community live. The service is so slow. We often have to wait weeks for an appointment at Mind or Citizens Advice Enfield and then when we do eventually attend there is no interpreter there, so we cannot discuss our issues.
- As a community we are becoming more and more frustrated after every meeting of this deaf Community Forum. It is reassuring to hear the new Councillors on the panel asking the right questions and already this feels more positive. However, many of the new services on offer rely on the use of texts/emails and having English as a first language, when BSL is our first language. We have been asking for over two years for things to be accessible in BSL but this is still not happening and is causing us great stress. You also need to think about the deaf /blind community as none of the services provided are accessible to them. You do not seem to be engaging with the right people to find out exactly what the Deaf Community need, there also needs to be better use of Interpreters.
- Tola said that they are considering the deaf/blind community and as such are working closely with the Sensory Impairment team to better improve the services on offer.
- The Jewish Deaf Association (JDA) are a much-valued organisation and are always there to support the Deaf Community. They have great provision and resources; all their staff are deaf aware trained and able to use BSL. It was therefore suggested that Enfield Connections liaise with the JDA to gain some guidance and advice from them as to how services in Enfield can be improved.
- We were promised that the service provided by CommUNITY Barnet would be a like-for-like service as was originally provided by the EDA. Six months later and the service on offer is nowhere near as good as was originally provided. How can we trust Councillors when you are clearly making the wrong decisions for the deaf community?

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- As hearing members, you do not know what communication difficulties are. We have a rich language that we are very proud of and all we ask is that services are accessible in our own language; BSL.
- Please can Councillors help to reinstate the budget so that Mary White, Deaf Project Manager at EDA can continue to provide us with the excellent, efficient service that was always in place. We do not want a Remote Interpreting Service, we do not want to have to wait ages to attend Mind in Enfield or Citizens Advice Enfield to discuss personal and confidential issues when we can just pop along to Mary at the Deaf Project who knows us well and fully understands our needs.
- The Chair, Councillor Georgiou advised the audience that the decision had now been made to award the Deaf Project Service Contract to CommUNITY Barnet. Once the contract expires all the points/concerns raised tonight can be argued again, but at the moment there is nothing legally that can be done to change the situation. For now, however, we all need to fight to ensure that the services provided are the best they can be.
- Discussions took place regarding Ushers Disease and it was agreed that this was a significant issue that required adequate funding and the appropriate staff to deal with the needs of those individuals affected by this disease.
- Better communication was required between Enfield Connections and the EDA. It was agreed that Mary and Tola would meet to discuss this issue in more detail.

Action: Tola Kolawole/Mary White

The Chair thanked Tola for her informative update and hoped that the feedback and suggestions she had heard at tonight's meeting had proved useful.

Tola thanked Members and the audience for the opportunity to attend the meeting of the Deaf Community Forum and agreed that she had found the discussions most helpful. She would take away all the feedback and suggestions raised and discuss these with her colleagues with a view to implementing changes and improvements where possible. She looked forward to attending the next meeting of the Forum to provide a further update.

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MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 6 MARCH 2018

AGREED the minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2018.

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FEEDBACK AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

The Chair allocated fifteen minutes to hear from the audience to discuss how they felt about the services provided by the Council for the Deaf Community.

The following comments/questions were raised:

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- Why was the contract awarded to CommUNITY Barnet despite extensive protests from the Deaf Community? The service previously provided by the Deaf Project worked extremely well, and offered the exact services that the Deaf Community require?
- How long has the contract been awarded to CommUNITY Barnet for?
- There are currently two consultations (Waste Services and the Budget) out for public consultation which the Deaf Community are unable to access. There are no hard copies available in BSL and the 'Listen' link on the Council website which is used to access the consultation document is not working either. Mary White, Deaf Project Manager said she would now have to use the Thursday Deaf Community Drop In session helping complete the consultation survey.
- A recent Council Job Fayre, held in September did not provide any BSL interpreters so again this was not accessible to the Deaf Community.
- The remote Interpreting Service provided each Monday at the Civic Centre is just not efficient and does not provide the Deaf Community with the service they require. The computer systems and internet regularly fail, the wait time is far too long as council staff must wait for the remote interpreting staff to become available, and as many of the Deaf Community are not computer literate they cannot understand or follow the process. The audience agreed that they need a one to one interpreting service as this is the best way of communicating for them. They do not want to rely on a 'hearing service'. However, despite raising these concerns time and again, the requests and needs of the Deaf Community are continuously ignored.
- The Dial-A-Ride Service is very inflexible, unreliable and often cannot be booked to coincide with other appointments already made; for example, an appointment at the Citizen Advice Bureau. This then has to be cancelled which is most frustrating as it has usually taken ages to even get this appointment due to waiting for a BSL Interpreter to be booked. The audience felt that they were being let down by both services.
- Concerns were raised again regarding the cycle lanes, especially when exiting buses directly into these lanes as the Deaf Community cannot hear bicycles approaching, therefore it is extremely dangerous for them. This matter had been raised at the March meeting with David B Taylor, Head of Traffic and Transportation, but no improvements appear to have been made. This matter would again be taken up with David and feedback provided at the next meeting.
Action: Stacey Gilmour
- Have front line council staff now received better Deaf Awareness Training as the view of the audience was that no improvements had been made.
Action: Stacey Gilmour/Mark Morgan, Operations Manager
- The audience addressed the new Councillors on the Forum and said they hoped it was now apparent to them that every way the Deaf Community turn they are faced with continuous barriers. It is so frustrating for a deaf person to have 'hearing' people all around them telling them what they 'need' when they really have no idea.

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Councillors thanked the audience for speaking to them about their concerns and agreed that there were ongoing issues that needed to be addressed. They gave assurances that they were here to help and support the Deaf Community and would therefore speak to their colleagues and Council Officers about the various issues raised with a view to resolving and improving matters wherever possible.

It was requested that the Leader of the Council, Councillor Caliskan and the Cabinet Member for Health & Social Care, Councillor Cazimoglu be invited to the next meeting of the Forum on 20 March 2019 to discuss awarding the Deaf Project Services contract to CommUNITY Barnet in more detail.

Action: Councillors/Stacey Gilmour

Councillor Alessandro Georgiou, who was chairing tonight's meeting and had also been a member of the Deaf Community Forum for several years, thanked his colleagues who had now joined the panel and said how refreshing it was to have colleagues on board who were enthusiastic and keen to support the Deaf Community in improving services for them.

The following items were suggested for future meetings:

- Update on Enfield Council's in-house BSL Interpreting Services
- Update and feedback from CommUNITY Barnet on the new service to date.
- Update on Dial-A-Ride Services

The audience were also asked how they would like to receive information about the Deaf Community Forum, for example the agendas and minutes for future meetings. Any ideas and suggestions would be greatly received by the Deaf Community Forum Clerk, Stacey Gilmour.

In conclusion the Chair thanked everyone for attending and welcomed the audience to stay behind at the end of the meeting to discuss any personal issues with Councillors.

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DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

NOTED the date of the next meeting as follows:

20 March 2019