



CIL MATTERS NEWSLETTER

Access & Inclusion
Spring Edition
April 2018

This newsletter reflects the diverse views
of Merton CIL members

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1. The Merton CIL Update

Message from the CEO



Dear members and supporters,

I am so proud to present this newsletter which has a record number of contributions from you, our members and supporters, thank you!

The theme for this edition is "Access and Inclusion" and as you can see the newsletter is just jam-packed with news and views, and we could have said so much more. We've covered access to elections, access to information, access to justice, health, benefits and decision-making. And of course access to travel and getting out and about and using local services.

There are still far too many barriers preventing Disabled people from participating fully in society and I would really encourage you to start raising these issues where you can. In fact, on page 23 one of our members has been very successful in raising concerns about poor access to physiotherapy services. Plus, you can check out Inclusion London's top tips for challenging discrimination on page 6.

I can't wrap up without telling you how excited I am to invite you all to our birthday celebrations – Merton CIL is 10 this year, and we think we all deserve a party! Find out more on the next page, I can't wait to welcome you all! And, final word to our members as always; we're filming people's stories as part of our celebrations. There is still time to get in touch and tell your story. Find out more on page 4.

Lyla, CEO of Merton CIL

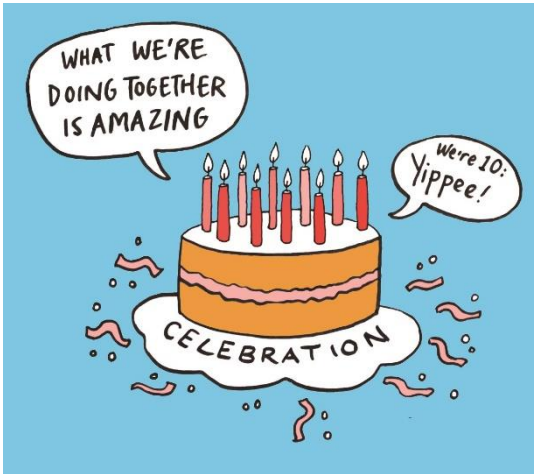
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Join us to celebrate 10 years of Merton CIL at My Voice Matters on 5th July 2018



Can you believe it? This year we celebrate a decade of Merton CIL, and what a ten years it has been!

We plan to celebrate all that Merton CIL has become and our journey so far on **Thursday 5th July 2018** from 11am until 1:30pm at **The Everyday Church, Queens Road, Wimbledon, SW19 8LR**

It will be an opportunity to say thank you to all our members, supporters and allies who have part of this journey with us. We plan to have lots of exciting things happening and a light lunch will be provided. If you have any dietary requirements please let us know as soon as possible.

You can RSVP here: <https://bit.ly/2IoRhIw>

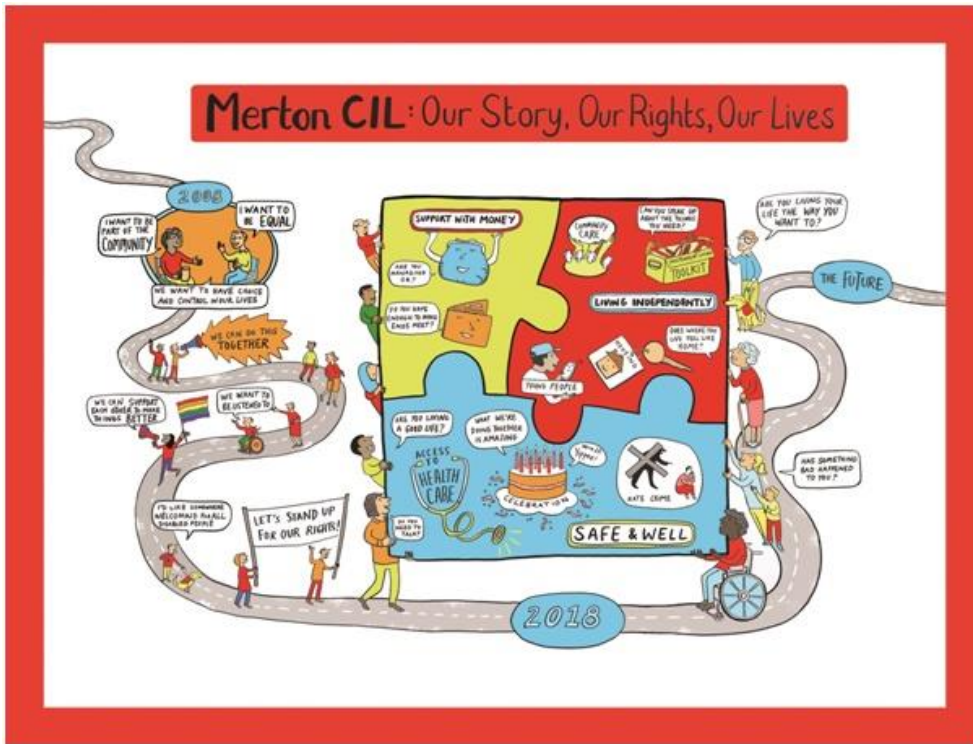
Or contact Charlet on 0203 397 3119 or email info@mertoncil.org.uk

Please keep an eye on our website, social media and newsletters for updates on what will take place on the day. Our volunteers will be calling members to give you all a gentle reminder a few weeks before the event.

We look forward to seeing you all there!

Take part in Merton CILs filmed Case Studies to Celebrate 10 years of supporting Local Disabled People

We will be creating a series of short films to celebrate our journey over the past 10 years. We would love to include your stories. If it was not for our members, supporters and service users, we would not be where we are today and we think it is important that you get to speak up. You can speak about support you have received from us, your engagement with the service, or an experience of someone close to you, we want to know what you think is important to say.



If you would like to appear in the film but need some support thinking about what you would like to say, we can help! Just contact us and we can arrange a time for you to come in and receive some support.

You will be given a Merton CIL tote bag with some goodies to thank

you for taking part. We can also cover travel expenses if this will be an issue for you.

Interested? Please contact Charlet on 0203 397 3119 or email info@mertoncil.org.uk

Launch of our Easy Read Constitution

At Merton CIL we have recognised that our constitution is written in very legally language which isn't very accessible to anyone. Our constitution is the document which tells us how to run Merton CIL properly. We are pleased to announce that we have now translated our constitution into Easyread.

Unfortunately, we still need to keep our original constitution in technical language as our official document, for now, because the Charity Commission have certain rules about what they want to see in a constitution. We are talking to them about this.

If you would like to take a look at it, you can find it on our website in the About Us section <https://www.mertoncil.org.uk/about-us/>

Top Tips on Challenging Discrimination: Discrimination Training with Inclusion London & Focus-4-1



Merton CIL, Inclusion London and Focus 4 1 ran a discrimination training workshop to inform local Deaf and Disabled people how to identify discrimination and use the law to challenge it. The workshop was led by Svetlana and Henrietta of Inclusion London.

The workshop began with a discussion around barriers faced by Deaf and Disabled people in everyday life. People mentioned things such as access to transport and dial-a-ride, having to disclose

your mental health issues to explain gaps on your CV and more. The overall feeling was that it was not clear how to challenge issues such as these. Therefore, we thought it would be great to create some top tips, in the hope that when Deaf and Disabled People face these issues in the future, they will know how to challenge them.

Top Tips for Challenging Discrimination

1. Make sure you are clear on what discrimination is so that you can correctly identify it.

There are three types of discrimination:

Direct discrimination – You are treated worse because of your impairment

Example: We do not want disabled people in here

Indirect discrimination – neutral policy or practice that puts disabled people in a worse situation compared to others

Example: No dogs in my shop

Discrimination arising from disability – you are treated worse not because of your impairment but because of something connected to it.

Example: council hold meetings in inaccessible rooms.

2. Familiarise yourself with the Equality Act

This is a piece of law that protects people from discrimination based on the following: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnerships, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation



<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

Easy Read Version:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/85039/easy-read.pdf

3. There is a duty to make reasonable adjustments – demand what you need

There is a duty for reasonable adjustments to be made. If you need aids, help and support or something to ensure that you get the same experience as everyone else, you are entitled to this. If it is not available, complain.

4. Take action and make a complaint

Anyone can make a complaint and you can complain about anything. There is no financial risk or cost to making a complaint. The outcome tends to be an apology, change in the way things are done, training/awareness for staff, compensation or wider change for other people.

You can also make a claim in the County Court within 6 months from when the discrimination took place. However, there may be financial risks and costs.

You can use Inclusion London's Guides and templates to write complaints:

<https://www.disabilityjustice.org.uk/learn-more-and-take-action/>

Merton CIL may be able to support you to write/make complaints too. However, the complaint must relate to one of our areas of work. Please contact us if you would like to make a complaint and see if we are able to help.

If we pull together and stand up, make complaints and say when we feel discriminated against, we can make change happen for all Deaf and Disabled People.

Merton Residents Being Unfairly Denied Benefits

Merton CIL research and casework has identified that thousands of Merton residents have already been denied their Personal Independence Payments (PIP) or had their benefit reduced, and thousands more are at risk. We wrote about our ongoing efforts to address some of the issues identified in September 2017 (you can read more here: <https://www.mertoncil.org.uk/news/thousands-of-disabled-people-i/>).

We identified that that key local issues include inaccessible assessment centres, that assessment centres are being deliberately overbooked, and that there is a worryingly high number of inaccurate assessments. In March 2018 we attended a Council Scrutiny meeting where people who have experienced the PIP process, including our members, spoke about their experiences. This included a Deaf person being told that they had to prove their deafness. They were made to face the wall during a PIP assessment and they think that the assessor might have shouted, said or done something behind them, but they don't know what was done.

DWP representatives attended the Scrutiny meeting and were asked by Councillors to explain why a benefit for Disabled people was being assessed in inaccessible centres? The DWP representative suggested that this was the fault of Independent Assessment Services (ATOS) but Councillors felt this was the responsibility of DWP who had commissioned the service.

It was agreed in the meeting that DWP representatives would facilitate a meeting between IAS, Merton CIL, and Citizens Advice Merton and Lambeth, chaired by Councillor Peter McCabe. This was supposed to happen within 1 month, but is now not happening until the end of May because IAS only employs only two 'Claimant Champions' to cover the whole country! Merton CIL will be pressing for improved assessments and a commitment for the refusal rate on PIP to be reduced, as refusals are currently above the national average.

You can read more about the Scrutiny meeting here:

<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?Cid=151&MId=2801&Ver=4>

You can read some news coverage here:

http://www.wimbleonguardian.co.uk/news/16117405.Disabled_people_in_Merton_face_extreme_financial_hardship_over_benefit_appeals/

Council's Failure to Consult Prevents Access to Decision-Making

Many of our members will have seen our press release on the failure of the Council to involve Disabled people in decision-making on cuts to services for Disabled people. We argued that based on the Public Sector Equality Duty, Merton Council has a duty to consult with Disabled people. We also argued that the Council had created an additional duty to consult because they had previously promised they would. We argued that without consultation, Merton Council couldn't evidence that it had paid 'due regard' to equalities issues. Finally, we pointed out that the Council had committed to monitor the effect of cuts on Disabled people, and there was no evidence they were doing this. You can read the original article here: <https://www.mertoncil.org.uk/news/press-release-insult-to-democ/>

We wrote to the Monitoring Officer at the Council on 29th January 2018 with our concerns. Despite our calls and reminders, we did not get a response until after our press release. We finally got a response from the Monitoring Officer at 4.57pm on 27th February 2018. With the budget Council meeting scheduled the next day on 28th February, such a late response was clearly unsatisfactory, leaving us no time to ask questions. In addition, the letter we received from the Monitoring Officer was in an accessible format and we had to write back for an accessible version which only arrived on 28th.

According to Merton's constitution, it is the Monitoring Officer's job to report on contraventions or likely contraventions of any enactment or rule of law. In our letter to the Monitoring Officer, we made it clear that we felt Merton Council was not compliant with the law. The response which we received says that:

- Merton didn't commit to consult on the annual budget, it committed to consult on changes that affect service users
- They don't believe that the cuts proposed amount to changes that affect service users
- They "do not accept that there is valid criticism of the manner in which the Council discharges its obligations under the Act."

The response from the Monitoring Officer doesn't address the issues we raised of the Council failing to gather a proper evidence base and failing to monitor the impact of cuts to services. Therefore, here at Merton CIL we will continue to ask these questions on behalf of our members.

Farewell to Richard Downes – Our Engagement and Development Worker



As many of you may be aware, Richard has left Merton CIL and we are closing our Supported Volunteering programme. Richard has played a huge role in the development of Merton CIL and supported a number of volunteers over the years. We would like to say a huge thank you to Richard.

2. News

Breaking news! Some Parties Commit to Better Consultation following Hustings Event



Picture: Philippa Maslin, Greens; Paul Kohler, Lib Dem Group; Chair Rev Gerry Stanton; Councillor Oonagh Moulton, Leader of the Conservative group; Councillor Stephen Alambritis, Leader of the Labour group; Councillor Peter Southgate, Merton Park Independent Residents

On Thursday 5th April, Merton Voluntary Service Council (MVSC) hosted a hustings event. Representatives of the different political parties answered questions from local organisations. Merton CIL went along on behalf of our members to see what the politicians had to say.

Disabled people or social care was mentioned in 4 out of 5 of the opening speeches. This is a big improvement on previous years where Merton CIL were told that issues affecting Disabled people weren't a doorstep issue. It looks like the tide is turning.

Attendees asked questions about social value of the voluntary sector, the environmental sustainability of housing, support to connect the voluntary sector with businesses, support for Residents Associations and what the Council will do about the scandal of low spend on mental health and people being sent out of borough.

Merton CIL's question started with a quote from Martin Luther King "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere".

We asked: "in our 10 year history in Merton we have repeatedly raised concerns about poor delivery of services to Disabled people, asked the Council to properly assess the cumulative impact of cuts to services and asked you to engage with

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Disabled people as you should under the Equality Act. We are concerned that ongoing failure to do these things could amount to institutional discrimination. What will you do to address this in the next administration?"



Philippa Maslin, Green Party said she was concerned about funding cuts, and about the levelling down of care packages which was causing great turmoil. She said social care needed to recognise the different needs of Disabled people and older people. "I want to assure Merton CIL that policy changes would be discussed with Disabled people and we would involve them at every level of decision-making"



Paul Kohler, Lib Dem Group said that cuts to the Independent Living fund had caused great anguish. He said there was a need to listen to people and to have genuine consultation with the possibility of changing proposals in light of what people actually say. "We need to consult with Disabled people at the outset and actually listen to what they say"



Councillor Peter Southgate, Merton Park Independent Residents said that Scrutiny at the Council was a good forum to raise concerns and this had led to successes in the past like greater investment in social care. He said there was always a place for Merton CIL at Scrutiny.



Councillor Oonagh Moulton, Leader of the Conservative group talked about the challenges of social care funding and that she was glad the Council had finally applied the Social Care Precept to Council Tax. She said the administration was weak on consultation generally, and Merton CIL were right to call it out. "We will protect vulnerable people and ensure people are consulted before decision-making."



Councillor Stephen Alambritis, Leader of the Labour group said he doesn't recognise the talk of lack of consultation. He said they would be challenged in a Judicial Review if they didn't consult. He talked about his background in Disability and Equalities and said he believes in the Social Model. He said he goes by what residents say and read

from a letter praising social care. "We will do all we can to support Disabled people in Merton by working with Merton CIL and others."

We're pleased to have heard some commitments for better consultation. At Merton CIL we also think that the Council should be fulfilling their previous commitment to assess the impact of cuts properly and they should be listening and acting when service users raise concerns about social care.

Candidates will be knocking on doors between now and Election Day on May 3rd. Make sure you quiz them about issues important to you!

Local Elections 2018 – Make sure you can have your say!

We have only just recovered from the last election and there is another one just round the corner, this time local elections! There will be Local Elections to select your local councillor on Thursday 3rd May 2018. Traditionally, disabled people have faced barriers to voting and democratic engagement. These barriers can include a lack of accessible information, inaccessible polling stations and society's failure to properly value the voices and choices of disabled people. Political decisions are having a direct impact on the day-to-day lives of Deaf and Disabled people. Disabled people need to make sure our voices are heard in the democratic process. Voting and getting involved in activity in the lead up to elections is one important way to do this.

If you want to have a say, you must register to vote by Tuesday 17 April, and the deadline to apply to vote by post is 5pm on Wednesday 18 April. The deadline to apply to vote by proxy is 5pm on Wednesday 25 April.

We asked Merton Council's Electoral Services on what they have been doing to make sure people are registered to vote, and will be able to vote on Election Day. Merton Council told us that they did a full canvass of the borough last autumn, sending electoral registration canvassers to call on all those new residents who they had identified as living at properties but who had not yet registered to vote. They also sent a household notification letter to all properties in February this year letting people know the status of their electoral registration. This letter also informed residents that there are elections coming up on 3 May and to register to vote if they have not already done so.

We know that changes to registration, implemented by central government, affected the registration of Disabled people and especially people living in residential, sheltered and supported accommodation. We asked Merton Council

about this and were told that they make contact with managers of homes and accommodation if they are concerned that not all the Disabled people living there are registered to vote.

Electoral Services also told us that all the polling stations being used in this election are accessible. This is great news!

Here are some other recommendations from the Electoral Commission's 'Elections for Everyone' report to help make elections more accessible for everyone:

- Care and support workers need to know how they can support the people they care for when they vote.
- People running elections need to understand the needs of people with disabilities so they can support them and make it easy for them to register to vote and to vote.
- Candidates and parties should make sure information is in easy to read formats and available in good time before the election so people have the time to read it.
- When political parties publish their manifestos, they should make sure accessible formats are available at the same time
- Government should make changes to election forms so they can be easily understood; look at different ways that people with disabilities can vote so they have greater flexibility and choice; and change the law so that people with disabilities have more choice about who they can take to the polling station with them

You can read more from the Elections for Everyone report here:

<http://ow.ly/loki30j9NeZ>

You can find out more about registering to vote here: <http://ow.ly/DqB930j9PXR>

Your vote matters, please register to vote!

Poor Website Design Limits Access to Information

In Merton and across the country, more and more information is being moved online. Digital self-service, if you like. For lots of people, getting their information online can be fine. But what about the 22% of Disabled adults who have never used the internet¹? What about the Disabled people and their families who have been disproportionately impacted by tax and welfare reforms and have seen their income reduce by £2000 - £5500 per year²? We see in our casework that not everyone can afford to get online, and not everyone can afford to get out to their local library, even if they can overcome the other access barriers to getting there.

Even for those of us who are able to get online, many websites are still not meeting accessibility standards. Look at Merton Council website which is still in the 'beta' phase. In December 2015 at the Learning Disability Partnership Board, Council officers announced that they would be seeking input from people testing the accessibility of the website. In the years since the announcement, Merton CIL members group has tried to find out more, but no dice. During the same period, our members group has commented on other websites like the Health Help Now app, and our own website.

Taking a look at Merton Council's website, it isn't clear that it meets the standards it says it aims to meet³. The website must be accessible to everyone who needs it. If it isn't, Merton may be in breach of the Equality Act. Quite apart from the fact that only a small part of the website is in the new design, making it really confusing, key information is missing, such as a copy of the Fairer Contributions Policy (only the annexes are available at the time of writing). In another example, the webpage on needs assessments still refers to the old FACS criteria which haven't been valid since the Care Act 2014. Come on Merton, Let's improve your website accessibility!

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/itandinternetindustry/bulletins/internetusers/2017#adults-who-have-never-used-or-no-longer-use-the-internet>

² https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/impact-of-tax-and-welfare-reforms-2010-2017-interim-report_0.pdf

³ <https://www.merton.gov.uk/accessibility>

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Limited Access to Justice Creates Further Marginalisation

Two reports have come out recently identifying how Disabled people risk seeing their access to justice reduced. 'Priced out of Justice?' by Loughborough University, Law Society and Joseph Rowntree Foundation⁴ found that people with lower incomes were being priced out of Legal Aid support. This is because the means test threshold for disposable income has not increased in line with the cost of living, whereas costs have increased. The research found that people faced being asked to pay or contribute to legal costs even when that would take them below the poverty level, and that this disproportionately affected people already in poverty, including Disabled people.

When Merton CIL looked at Legal Aid means testing, we found that although the guidelines do allow people to identify their Disability Related Expenses (which are on average £570 per month⁵) there are some concerns about whether these are being properly calculated. This could lead to Disabled people being told their disposable income is too high to receive Legal Aid support, but finding themselves unable to fund legal fees themselves.

We are concerned that access to justice is being eroded for Deaf and Disabled people, further compounding marginalisation and discrimination experienced in other areas of life. This has also recently been highlighted by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights⁶ who points out that access to justice is a fundamental right in itself and an essential prerequisite for the protection and promotion of all other rights.

Inaccessible buildings, inaccessible documents, and inaccessible procedures all play a part in preventing access to justice for Disabled people. As austerity measures prevent Disabled people from accessing essential services and benefits, exposing them to social exclusion and rights violations, the need for legal support to claim those rights is greater than ever. Cuts to Legal Aid subject Disabled people to further marginalisation and must be resisted.

⁴ <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/news/press-releases/struggling-families-disqualified-from-justice/>

⁵ <https://www.scope.org.uk/campaigns/extra-costs>

⁶ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Disability/Pages/RighttoAccestoJusticeArticle13.aspx>

News Shorts

Reminder: Merton CIL is not responsible for the content of external sites

Problems Getting Into Shops around Merton

There is a real issue with shops and their accessibility. There are a number of shops in and around Merton where it is near impossible for someone in a wheelchair or scooter to get around. Merchandise is piled up obstructing walkways, or you cannot get near enough to the stock to decide what you would like to buy. Why would you not want to make your shopping experience as comfortable for as many customers as possible?

Our vice-chair Gina says "I struggle to get around WH Smith in Tandem Way due to the layout and piles of merchandise everywhere. Marks and Spencer's in Merton regularly blocks the exit for the lift too."

Get in touch with Merton CIL via email or telephone and let us know places in Merton that you struggle to get into or around.

MENCAP's Treat Me Well campaign looks at unequal healthcare for people with a learning disability

New research suggests a lack of training for health professionals could be contributing to 1,200 avoidable deaths of people with a learning disability happening every year. 38% of people with a learning disability die from avoidable causes, compared with 9% of the general population.

The Treat Me Well campaign launched with a report calling for Government and NHS to ensure no healthcare professional can set foot in a hospital without proper training on learning disability.

Avoidable deaths include cases like Nicholas Jones who was just 27 years old when he was admitted to hospital for a kidney operation and died less than one month later. A Coroner's Court ruled recently the death was contributed to by 'gross failures' in care. Hospital staff ignored the parents' concerns.

Find out more about the campaign here:

<https://www.mencap.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-mencap/current-campaigns/treat-me-well>

We need a Changing Places toilet in Merton

There aren't enough public, accessible, toilets in Merton. In addition, to use the toilet in safety and comfort, many people need to be able to access a Changing Places, which have more space and the right equipment, including a height adjustable changing bench and a hoist. Did you know there is no Changing Places facility in Merton borough at all? The nearest ones are in Sutton, Kingston, Croydon and Wandsworth. Merton CIL have written to the team building the new Morden leisure centre to ask if it will have a Changing Places facility, and are waiting to hear back.

You can find out about Changing Places here: <http://www.changing-places.org/>

Morden Regeneration Must be Accessible



There's a lot of excitement in the air about the regeneration of Morden. Some of the artists impressions (see picture) of the regeneration looked like shared space schemes. We have raised concerns in the past about the access barriers created by shared space schemes. Merton Council has reassured us that there are currently no shared space plans, and there will be full consultation on the regeneration. Consultation is likely to be from autumn this year, so watch this space!

You can find out more about regeneration plans here:

<https://www.merton.gov.uk/planning-and-buildings/regeneration-urban-design/make-more-of-morden>

3. Your Views

Reduced to Tears at the Airport

Written by Gina and Grace

There has been a lot of coverage in the press recently about problems with access at the airport. For example, there have been articles in the Guardian and the BBC.

You can read a Guardian story here:

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/mar/26/heathrow-apologises-for-losing-frank-gardners-wheelchair>

You can read a BBC story here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-43526222>

We asked two of our members about their experiences.

What is it like getting to the airport?

Gina: We are a very long way off being able to go wherever we want, whenever we want, without having to do a days worth of planning beforehand. I recently visited Qatar and although a lot of reasonable adjustments have been made in airports and on aeroplanes, I still faced a number of access barriers on my journey. I travelled from my home in Colliers Wood to Heathrow via tube. It is relatively easy as I can use step-free access to all platforms at Wimbledon to get to Earls Court and change to a tube that takes me directly to Heathrow. However, Earls Court is a busy station and I require the lift to get to different platforms. I struggle to get in to the lifts and regularly have to miss the first one due to people pushing in front of me and squeezing in. This is always a problem that I face.

Grace: I was diagnosed with chronic arthritis in 2004, and I have been very fortunate in retaining a high degree of mobility, but there are limits to my ability to walk long distances. I usually get a car to the airport and the only way I can cope with airline travel and large airports is by making use of the wheelchair service available at airports.

What is it like when you have pre-booked assistance at the airport?

Gina: When I travelled recently, I pre-planned my arrival with my travel agent. They had contacted the airline to inform them that I would be checking in a

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mobility scooter so that my check-in was fuss free. But, of course that did not happen. When I got to Heathrow, I was told that my scooter was not on the system, even though my tickets stated that I was going to need wheelchair access. I couldn't understand how I had a wheelchair access ticket but they had no idea I would be arriving. This does make the process even more stressful after over an hour commuting and arriving 3 hours before my flight. This issue was eventually sorted and my scooter was ticketed and taken away.

I was told that my scooter would be brought to me when I needed to change to my connecting flight in Istanbul. This was not the case. I was collected in a wheelchair and taken to my gate. When collecting my scooter, I realised that it had all been taken apart and my bag that was connected to it had gone missing. I waited over 1 hour to try and locate my missing bag. It was gone and so was my scooter charger that was inside the bag. This caused me to panic. I did not know where I would get another charger in Qatar. I was worried my whole holiday would be ruined. Luckily, my nephew who lives in Qatar had a work colleague coming over a few days after me. We managed to order a charger off the internet to deliver to his house for him to bring along with him.

Grace: My last trip through Heathrow in June 2017 provided a typical example of why I dislike using Heathrow. For a passenger requiring wheelchair assistance the service is pre-booked when the ticket is purchased. In other words, the receiving airport can quite easily calculate, well in advance, precise numbers of mobility restricted passengers arriving by flight, terminal etc. Does this then mean that suitable provision will be made? At Heathrow, apparently not... On my flight there were 5 passengers requiring assistance. We were coming off a long flight, approx. 5 hours, tired, all of us in some degree of pain, looking forward to getting to where we could finally relax. It took at least 30 minutes before assistance appeared: One wheelchair with assistant. We were trundled up one by one to the electric vehicle parked at the closest access point and waited while the sole assistant went back to get the others. Incidentally, passengers 4 and 5 had to wait until we were delivered to a collection point before they came off the plane. At the collection point the service then deteriorated from bad to appalling. If I remember correctly, there were certainly less than 10 passengers waiting at this point for collection by wheelchair to be taken through immigration and customs. Waiting times were quoted to us as between 1 hour and 90 minutes. All passengers had people waiting for them outside or needed to make connections for onward travel; in my case a car and driver had been booked with a quoted waiting period of maximum one hour and there was little of that remaining.

The seats in the waiting zone were consistent with normal airport seating, rigid plastic guaranteed to induce agony within 15 minutes. At the end of 30 minutes I was in tears. My husband asked for a wheelchair as he is perfectly capable of taking me through himself. Well, guess what, there were no wheelchairs available. The staff were distressed, phoning all over the airport; most of them work for Special Services because they like the job, and want to be helpful. Many of them have told me that, when staff provision and equipment are adequate to the demand, it's a real 'feel good' job. For some years now Management at Heathrow have chosen, quite obviously, not to meet the demand. A member of staff asked if anyone could walk about 100 meters in which case she could accompany us through the exit reserved for special services which would at least enable us to avoid standing and being jostled in long queues at immigration. Those of us who could, set off on foot. By the time we reached our destination the pain in my joints was unbearable. It was my turn to have my passport examined and the immigration officer asked 'are you upset about something', 'no, I answered, it's just the pain', to which she responded 'why on earth didn't you ask for a wheelchair'. Why indeed.

What has been your best or worst experience?

Gina: I travelled with Turkish airways on a smaller plane for the second part of my journey recently. The staff were very lovely and extremely accommodating. I was sat in a row at the beginning of my class and the toilets were situated at the back. It was a little awkward for me to get to and from the toilets. I managed a few times but the staff said that I could go to the toilet in first class as it was closer for me to get to. I would advise any Disabled person flying to request an aisle seat near to the toilets.

Grace: At Charles de Gaulle airport in France they provided prompt collection, but nonetheless left me feeling very unhappy as a fiend in human form insisted on checking my entitlement to his services before allowing me to sit down. I tried to point out that he could ask me to get up again if he wasn't satisfied, that I appeared to be the only passenger requiring assistance on that flight, and that standing was painful, but he insisted that those were the regulations and refused to unfold the wheelchair before examining my passport and boarding card. This is definitely a regulation which requires revision.

Gatwick, on the other hand, provides a great service, comfortable seating, prompt collection on arrival, departure collection point situated in the middle of the terminal which feels really inclusive, good levels of staffing. The staff I have talked to will tell you that salaries are not particularly high but they appear to enjoy their work, staff turnover must be fairly low, always a good sign, as I

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recognise faces on return trips, one in particular, the angel of Gatwick Special Services, leaves most of her passengers with broad smiles on their faces. Well done Gatwick.

Any final thoughts?

Gina: My journey home was much easier and enjoyable. Check-in went smoothly and this time I labelled all parts of my scooter as I was aware that they would be taking it apart and I did not want another part of my scooter to go walkabouts. If you can afford it or have the time to search around, always try and get a direct flight – they are worth it!

We shouldn't have to plan more than someone else when we want to go somewhere. Travelling around should not be so stressful. The trains and tubes need to display and promote step free access properly. Incorrect information causes so much disruption for Disabled people. We have a long way to go and we need to work together to change things.

Grace: From London to Beirut I've been asked why people like me don't just stay at home. Sometimes the questioner is genuinely curious to know why I bother when travelling is obviously not easy, on other, less memorable occasions the tone betrays impatience or resentment at the extra work I am causing.

My Scandinavian experiences have been uniformly good and Middle Eastern experiences also. The degree of organization at different airports in the Middle East varies hugely but entitlement has never been questioned and staff have often come up with highly inventive solutions to problems, such as hoisting mobility restricted passengers onto aircraft via the inflight food delivery hoist.

For me, recognition of entitlement to access for mobility restricted passengers has improved greatly in recent years, delivery varies wildly and the worst offenders are too often airports that can and should be doing much better.

Parents shocked at lack of physiotherapy treatment

Written by a member

From 1st April 2016, Connect Health has provided musculo-skeletal services in Merton. On their website Jon Lowe, Managing Director of Connect Health, is quoted as saying: 'we are delighted to have been chosen to provide the new community musculoskeletal service in Merton. We have wide-ranging experience in delivering and developing quality, patient-centred services across the country, and we look forward to working with the CCG and the staff within the service to build on what has been achieved to date, with the aim of providing first-class care for the residents of Merton.'

My daughter has severe learning difficulties and is a wheelchair user. Let's call her June. At her annual medical review she was offered a physio appointment at the Nelson Health Centre. Full of hope we met the Clinician/Physiotherapist and explained June's situation. After some conversation, we were told June could have no treatment there. At no time was June examined or even looked at closely. She was not asked to move her arms in any way or even asked to try to and sit up straighter. He made three main points.

1. The physio said, because June's posture had been bad for some time, it was unlikely to be improved by a short course of treatment.

I think that when someone is going to spend the rest of their life in a wheelchair at least an attempt to help their posture would have been welcome. The physiotherapist had consulted his manager before he saw my daughter and went out and consulted him again

2. We should try the wheelchair clinic at Roehampton. I expressed surprise that they did not do physio there. He said he meant they could provide additional support pads for the wheelchair.

3. It was then, unbelievably, pointed out that this was a musculoskeletal service and not for treating posture.

Posture is dependent on the skeletal and muscular systems and therefore surely falls within the remit of the musculoskeletal service. I have sent details of this lack of treatment to the Patient Engagement Group (PEG) and to Jill Anderson, the Senior Commissioning Manager at the Merton and Wandsworth CCG.

Two meetings should have taken place by the time this is in print. The PEG will have met a representative of Connect. Sally Burns, of Adults First and I will have met Jill to see what can be done for my daughter. The CCG seems to be keen to find a solution.

Adults First and Merton CIL would like to hear of your experiences of physiotherapy, or your difficulties in getting any. Please email us and let us know.

Merton Council should bring back webcasting

Written by a member

What is significant about 11 February 2016?

It is the day Merton Council webcast its last meeting. It used to be possible to watch live Council Meetings and Planning Applications Committees from anywhere you could get on the internet, and, if you weren't able to be free on the day, you could look back at recordings.

Webcasting started in 2013, and between March and December twelve meetings were webcast. Here are some statistics from Merton Council's own evaluation of the first year:

- 8358 viewings – 465 live viewings and 7913 archived viewings
- Average viewings per month 928
- Average viewings per meeting 696

By March 2015 the tide had turned, and Merton Council decided to stop webcasting. The plan to pull the plug was presented within a package of cuts in the 2015 - 2019 Business Plan, which was voted on wholesale at a full Council meeting. It was an all or nothing vote.

The projected saving was £15,000 a year.

The Equality Analysis said of webcasting that it contributed to "engaging members of the public in the council's decision making processes," and that "Removal of this service would impact on members of the public who are interested in the business of council or planning applications committee but are unable to attend those meetings."

So, it seems crystal clear that webcasting was seen to support democracy, while removing webcasting would reduce people's ability to access council meetings.

But there's more. The Equality Analysis also said there were around 1500 viewings of the webcast site each month.

That's a massive growth on the average 696 views a month during 2013, and surely evidence that webcasting was becoming more popular.

As if that's not troubling enough, in the part of the Equality Analysis that assesses impact, two groups were identified as being potentially impacted negatively – older people and disabled people, both because of a potential inability to attend meetings.

But it's OK. The mitigating action was "continuing provision of published agendas and minutes on the website. The meetings are held in public so those who are able to attend will be able to do so."

To summarise.

A saving of £15k has been made by cutting a service that was increasingly popular, and which was helping engage people in the council's decision making process. Its loss was seen as likely to particularly impact older people and disabled people.

Meanwhile, Merton Council manages to find the money to livestream a peregrine falcon nest on the Civic Centre in Morden every year. Yes, this is less expensive to do this than to webcast council meetings. But what about democracy?

Sources

Evaluation of the council's webcasting pilot, paper to Merton Council Cabinet 20 January 2014

<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=146&MIId=204>

Equality Analysis, Merton Council 2015/16 Budget Plan

<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=142&MIId=1919>

4. Dates for the diary

My Voice Matters 2018: 10 Years of Merton CIL

Date: 5 July 2018

Time: 11am to 1:30pm

Venue: Everyday Church, Queens Road, Wimbledon, SW19

Please see more information on Page 4. It would be great to see you all there

Merton CILs Annual General Meeting 2018

Date: 25 October 2018

Time: 11am to 1pm

Venue: Vestry Hall, London Road, Mitcham, Surrey, CR4 3UD

Come along and here about all that we have achieved throughout 2017/18

External Events

Wimbledon Guild - Activities and Exercise Classes

Worple Road, Wimbledon SW19 4EF and its adjacent community hall Drake House, on St Georges Road SW19 4ED.

Each week there are exercise classes in: Tai chi; yoga; Pilates; active, senior and mixed ability; plus two classes specifically for people who have had a stroke. Many of the sessions provide seated and standing exercise. Wimbledon Guild also supports two weekly "Get up and go" classes at South Mitcham Community Centre, CR4 3PR.

There is a full range of activities too, from talks, walks and trips to art groups, clubs and IT courses. If you have a problem with your mobile or tablet bring your

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device along to one of our workshops each week where someone will help resolve it for you. On Friday's, Men's Matters, the new social club for men, provides somewhere to chat, share jokes and enjoy a board game, cards or chess.

To see the full list of what's on go to

<https://www.wimbledonguild.co.uk/activities.html>

or email activities@wimbledonguild.co.uk

Free healthy walks in Merton

Walking in the fresh air is good for your health and fun to do, with the opportunity to make new friends! Merton Council offer FREE walks in parks and open spaces. Their led walks last approx.50 mins and have a 15-30 minute option for beginners. Details of all Merton's walk venues, dates and times can be found here - <https://bit.ly/2F233C8>



Remark Sign Club

Date: Tuesdays from

Time: 5pm-7pm

Location: 18 Leather Lane, London

Go along to Remarks sign club and practise your BSL skills in a relaxed environment. Tea and Coffee will be provided

<https://remark.uk.com/sign-club/>



Candy Girls Performance at New Horizons

Date: Friday 6th April 2018

Time: 7pm to 10pm

Location: New Horizons Centre, South Lodge Avenue, Mitcham, Surrey, CR4 1LT

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5. A final word

Poem on Access, by a Member

It's a small word!
Easily misunderstood
And often unheard.
How do I get out?
How do I get in?
How do I keep safe?
Where do I begin?
Entering a new space
What do I need?
Living at my pace
Moving freely.
Thinking of my friends,
Thinking of myself
Needs are unique
As is our health.
I may use a service dog
Whilst my friends
May use a ramp
So it really can depend.



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Our Services include:

Personalised Transport Service (PTS)

A personal service using accessible MPV's which can carry passengers, escorts and others as required.

Group Transport

MCT owns a fleet of minibuses available for use by groups. The fleet includes accessible 16 seater minibuses, most of which are equipped with a passenger lift and a side step. These can be used to transport passengers who are in wheelchairs, either manual or electric.

Excursion Club

Operating between April and December, with trips to either a place of interest (Eastbourne, Hastings, etc.) or shopping centre (Chiswick House, Christmas lights) at a set cost for club members.

Minibus Driver Awareness Scheme (MiDAS)

We are members of MiDAS, providing a safe service to passengers by ensuring that all our drivers are suitably trained with the appropriate licence, covered by our insurance and with MCT authorisation. As well as drivers, all MCT Passenger Assistants are PATS trained. PATS' training is available to all staff and volunteers of affiliated organisations and individuals.

Happy Shoppers

Merton Community Transport runs a 'Happy Shoppers' shopping shuttle on Wednesdays to Sainsbury's/Marks & Spencer in Colliers Wood. This is a door to door service targeted at, but not restricted to, older people and those with mobility requirements.

Please note that all services requires annual affiliation of £12 for individuals, group membership differs. Charges apply for groups/individual services.

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