**Minute of Virtual Meeting of the Tweeddale Access Panel, held on Zoom, on Wednesday, 23 September 2020 at 7.00pm.**

**PRESENT:** *Paul Nichol (Chairman), Callum Macdonald, Spencer Cobley, Frank Drummond, and Stuart Hill.*

**IN ATTENDANCE:** *Mags Greig (BSL interpreter)( until 7.15), Councillor Robin Tatler, and Clare Wildsmith (Wildsmith Training).*

**APOLOGIES:** (intimated after the meeting): *Michael Davis and Elaine Thomson.*

1. **Quorum**

The Chairman noted that there was an insufficient number of members present to form a quorum. This was not the first time that the Panel had not been quorate, and it was suggested that the quorum was set at too high a level, but a change in the quorum could only be made by amending the Constitution.

**DECISION**

**AGREED** that (a) any conclusions reached in the course of the meeting would not be final decisions but recommendations for approval at the next quorate Panel meeting; and (b) that Frank bring forward a report to the next meeting on how the Panel might go about amending the Constitution so as to reduce the quorum and to carry out any other adjustments they might think necessary,

1. **Minute of Meeting held on 29 January 2020**

The Minute of the Meeting held on 29 January 2020 had been circulated.

**DECISION**

**RECOMMENDED that it be approved** as a correct record.

1. **Matters Arising**
2. **Wheelchair – accessible Housing**

Paul advised that, as agreed, he had been in contact with Lindsey Renwick regarding the Wheelchair Housing Strategy and the Strategic Housing Investment Planning 5 year programme documents. He felt that no further action on the part of the Panel was necessary at the present time

**DECISION**

**NOTED.**

**(b) Mental Health Counselling Services – Withdrawal**

Frank advised that Kenny Harrow (Locality Co-ordinator, Scottish Borders Council) had responded to the concerns expressed by the Panel on the withdrawal of mental health counselling services at Hay Lodge Health Centre, by saying that he was “not overly sure” about counselling services, and he provided a link to an NHS Borders webpage on wellbeing.

Robin intimated that such services had been expanded in recent months in response to problems caused by the lockdown. He undertook to ascertain what mental health services were currently available locally.

**DECISION**

**AGREED TO RECOMMEND** that Robin advise Frank of the outcome of his inquiries, and Frank circulate details to Panel members.

**(c) Salt Bin Location – Eddleston**

Callum advised that he had not yet progressed his request for a salt bin to be located in Old Edinburgh Road, Eddleston.

**DECISION**

**AGREED TO RECOMMEND** that Callum contact Councillor Chapman to progress this.

**(d) Hearing Aid Battery Distribution**

Frank advised that both he and Clare had made representations to local Audiology Services regarding the reduction in the number of batteries being distributed to hearing aid users, and Audiology had now reverted to their previous distribution policy. Batteries were now being posted out to users to avoid the risk of infection involved in the usual arrangements for collection from health centres.

**DECISION**

**NOTED.**

1. **Minute of Annual General Meeting held on 29 July 2020**

The Minute of the Annual General Meeting held on 29 July 2020 had been circulated.

**DECISION**

**RECOMMENDED that it be approved** as a correct record.

1. **Street Access Surveys**

Paul confirmed that, as agreed at the Panel meeting on 29 January, he had approached Scottish Borders Council for funding of a review of footways dropped kerbs and obstructions. The Council had agreed to provide £2,500 to engage the services of a consultant, David Hunter, to assist the Panel in carrying out a review of major routes.

As a sample of the type of work that might be done, there had been circulated a report by David Hunter, on a walk on which he was accompanied by Paul and Frank, from the Gytes Leisure Centre to Hay Lodge Health Centre. In the report, David had highlighted various issues based on his experience, and on input from his companions.

Paul felt that the points raised were interesting and would merit further discussion, but pointed out that the walk had been undertaken by 3 able-bodied people. The report was being placed before the Panel to see if the Panel were happy with the approach, and if so, Paul would like to involve other members in walking all or part of the same route, and other routes, involving, for example schools, major bus stops, and care housing, to obtain a broader perspective on issues causing problems, according to their different levels of ability. Callum, Spencer and Stuart offered to take part in the surveys. Current Covid restrictions would prevent Panel members from walking the routes in a group of more than two people, but Paul would discuss with David Hunter how best to involve the membership. The findings of the surveys would be passed on to Scottish Borders Council with recommendations on priorities for improvements.

Robin advised that this was good timing for such a project, as the Council had been allocated £1.2 million for the Spaces For People initiative, to make streets safer for walkers, wheelers and cyclists. He suggested that the finalised report be passed to Philippa Gilhooley, as the roads officer responsible. Robin indicated that the Community Council and Peebles Community Trust were also taking an interest in Spaces For People.

Consideration was being given to linking the Tweed Walk from Walkerburn to Peebles with an Eddleston Water Walk from Peebles to Eddleston. Callum suggested that contact be made with Jeremy Cunningham of Sustrans, who was taking the lead on that project.

Paul thanked members for their support in volunteering to take part in the street surveys.

**DECISION**

**AGREED TO RECOMMEND** that Paul continue to progress the surveys along with the Panel members who volunteered to take part (whether at the meeting or subsequently), following discussion with David Hunter, liaising with the Community Council, Community Trust and Jeremy Cunningham of Sustrans as and when appropriate.

1. **Website Improvements**

Paul advised that he proposed inviting those who had expressed interest in improving the Panel website to attend a Zoom meeting with Fiona Budd, our website developer, to discuss .and progress ideas for improvement. The website could say more about who the Panel members were, give more prominence to the Access Guide. The website could show links to the dropped kerb maps, as well as links to other relevant organisations in Tweeddale, such as the Citizens’ Panel, perhaps even supporting a page for them if they didn’t have a website of their own.

**DECISION**

**AGREED TO RECOMMEND** that Paul, Callum, Spencer and Clare, along with any other member expressing an interest, meet virtually with Fiona Budd to discuss website improvements.

1. **Chairman’s Report**

Paul advised that all of the activities covered in his Chairman’s report had already been discussed under other items on the agenda.

**DECISION**

**NOTED.**

1. **Secretary’s Report**
2. **DES Webinar on Thistle Assistance Scheme**

Frank advised that he had attended aDES Webinar on the Thistle Assistance Scheme, held on 11 May 2020, about the help available to disabled people who exhibited a Thistle Card when using public transport. A Thistle Card could be obtained online by going to the website, www.thistleassistance.com and clicking on the Menu and then on “Get the card”. The card came with various stickers appropriate to different disabilities.

Clare showed her card to members and advised that other stickers were available from Hearing Link.

**DECISION**

**NOTED.**

**(b) DES Spaces For People Webinar**

Frank advised that he had attended aDES Webinar on the Spaces For People Scheme, held on 26 July 2020. This national scheme was intended to make streets safer for walkers, wheelers and cyclists; to protect public health; and to improve access to exercise, shops, hospitals, etc. It was through this scheme that the Council were intending to reduce town speed limits to 20mph.

**DECISION**

**NOTED.**

**(c) DES Webinar on Face Masks**

Frank advised that he had attended aDES Webinar on Face Masks, held on 26 July 2020. There were speakers from FirstBus, Northlink Ferries, and Police Scotland. Much of the discussion related to face mask exemptions and the desire of many disabled people to be able to show evidence of their entitlement to an exemption.

Spencer advised that Lloyds the Chemists had metal exemption badges available.

**DECISION**

**NOTED.**

**(d) DES Virtual Meeting on Town Centre Action Plans**

Frank advised that he had attended aDES virtual meeting on Town Centre Action Plans, held on 12 August 2020, with representatives from Midlothian, Edinburgh and Dundee Access Panels, where he had reported on the need for wheelchair -accessible housing close to the town centre.

**DECISION**

**NOTED.**

1. **Treasurer’s Report**

Paul advised that, due to the closure of the local branch of the TSB, the change in Treasurer was taking longer than anticipated for the Bank to process. As a result, the Bank were still sending statements to Michael rather than Stuart. In Michael’s absence Paul reported that the Panel’s current bank balance was £2,244, after receipt of the DES grant of £1,400 and payments for BSL services, Zoom training assistance and website work.

**DECISION**

**NOTED.**

1. **Deaf Awareness**

Clare advised that she had written articles for that week’s issue of The Peeblesshire News and the October issue of Peebles Life on Deaf Awareness. The articles would highlight the difficulties caused by reflective screens and face masks for people with hearing impairments who needed to see lip movements and facial expressions to understand what was being said to them. Peebles Life would also publish a fingerspelling alphabet, the use of which would also be helpful

The Equality and Human Rights Commission Guidance on the legal responsibilities of retailers to help disabled customers included advice that a retailer should ensure that their staff knew to remove their mask or face-covering if assisting a customer who relied on lip-reading to communicate.

Paul suggested that the Panel might be able to assist in raising awareness by including an item on the website and perhaps by emailing those retailers whose email addresses were held, subject to compliance with GDPR, or alternatively by making contact through local organisations representing retailers.

**DECISION**

**AGREED TO RECOMMEND** that:

1. those involved in the website improvements follow up on Clare’s good work by including relevant information and links on the website; and
2. Paul’s suggestions for awareness-raising be followed up.
3. **Victoria Park, Peebles – Proposed Play Area**

Robin advised that plans for a proposed “destination play area” in Victoria Park, Peebles were now available for inspection on the Planning portal on the Council website. He encouraged Panel members to view the plans, which included some play equipment for disabled children, and to submit their comments to the Council.

**DECISION**

**NOTED AND AGREEDTO RECOMMEND** that members be encouraged to submit comments.

1. **Three Bridges Walk, Peebles**

Robin referred to the accessibility problems caused by the stepped section on the Three Bridges Walk alongside the Hay Lodge Health Centre complex. He advised that some funding had been found to allow an engineering expert to identify a possible solution.

**DECISION**

**NOTED.**

1. **Tweeddale Area Partnership Meetings**

Robin advised that Tweeddale Area Partnership meetings would resume virtually on 3 November 2020.

**DECISION**

**NOTED.**

1. **Go Tweed Valley**

Robin advised that a “Go Tweed Valley” Tourism Business Improvement District had been formed as a result of an effort by local businesses to market the Tweed Valley to attract both tourists and locals. He suggested that the Panel consider inviting Emma Guy, the Project Co-ordinator, to a Panel meeting to discuss matters of mutual interest.

**DECISION**

**NOTED.**

1. **Date of Next Meeting**

**Wednesday 25 November 2020, at 7.00pm**

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