Chairman’s Remarks

Thank you to all the volunteer auditors, for undertaking a number of interviews with the people who volunteered from Westmead Centre. A draft report of findings has been produced and a final version will be available in due course.

Our efforts have been congratulated by the CSCI inspection team, particularly in respect of the approach taken. Well done to everyone!

Also, thank you to all members who supported our information events this summer, particular thanks to everyone who came to the Deaf Centre during Deaf Awareness Week in May. We hope that you enjoyed taking part in the taster sessions for the Get Healthy, Get Active, Get Out events.

Many thanks to Karen Morton from Capability Company and Reading Voluntary Action for running training courses that have benefited “would be” management committee members. The training program will conclude by the end of October. Thereafter decisions will be made about a new independent working structure for Wokingham Ability Partnership.

Don’t forget that Wokingham Ability partnership works to respond to you and your needs, so do get in touch, and raise issues, so that we can work with you most effectively. There are various ways to contact us listed on the back page.

On a practical note we would like to see more people become involved with WAP, so if you would like to volunteer some time, for things like admin, taking notes at meetings, helping out at events, co-ordinating events etc then please get in touch with us - we’re a great bunch, very friendly, and will give help and support in whatever role you become involved in. Give it a try!

Steve

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Over the past few months WAAG have been talking to Gareth Wiseman, Senior Highway Inspector, Environmental Services and Councillor Brown, about the bollards situation in Wokingham. Gareth Wiseman has arranged a meeting for us with BBSI, Brigid Batt-Rawden (WBC Access Officer) and Richard Thompson, who is in charge of the trials to inspect certain colours on trial in the town.

Councillor Brown informed us that he has acquired £2000 to carry out this work, and its now 7 months since that money was put aside. At our last meeting on Thursday 18, it was reported to us that in previous trials carried out in the town, fluorescent yellow had come out best. WAAG will pursue this colour at any meeting we attend if that is confirmed by the trials.

Pavements and Obstacles
WAAG have been in talks with Councillor Brown and others over obstacles on the pavements including Mr Hermann of Woodley, Mr Hermann reported cars parking on the curbs etc in his area plus other objects stopping him from using the footpaths.
We have been pursing his complaint via many of the avenues open to us, and we have now received confirmation of the law from Chief Inspector Ismay of Thames Valley Police; a copy of that document can now be found on our web site www.waag.co.uk

A Boards
WAAG are still getting complaints about A Boards in Denmark Street. WAAG have brought this up with Highways Manager and Councillor Baker. They have told us that any trader that is not complying with the agreement is now given a copy of the agreement and warned; but this is not what we understood would happen - we understood each trader would been given a copy of the new rules and that they would be enforced by the Town Manager and other council employees.
This is something we will have to take up with the council after the 6 month trial finishes. Photo evidence of this abuse would be helpful in any further attempts to get A Boards removed from the streets.

Tesco Crossing
GOOD news here! Talks with Julia Tredwell of Strategic Policy and Neighbourhood Services and Councillor Baker (e-mail 27 Aug) confirm they have now done a survey of the area and identified a place north of the roundabout for the crossing.
Julia informed us that Tesco are in the process of obtaining planning consent for more car parking and expansion of their building and that part of any community grants gained from that planning will be spent on the crossing.
However, we understand that this has been put back for a while, but the council have assured us there is a need, and that if Tesco do not get planning the crossing will still remain a priority, but could only be installed inline with other projects and when the council can find the money.

Dates for the Diary
Awards Ceremony
October 21st at Shute End, Wokingham, 10.45am. Anybody wanting to put forward a company for an award please send them in now. Anybody able to help with inspecting please contact us.

Notification of AGM 2008, November 20th at Shute End, Wokingham, 7.30 pm. Anybody wishing to put themselves forward for any post, plus the incumbencies of the following posts, please could they confirm they wish to stand again by sending their names to David Anderson via email or in writing by 30th OCT.

The positions up for re-election are Chairman, Deputy Chairperson, Secretary, plus committee members. Email contacts are: chairman@waag.co.uk, secretary@waag.co.uk or info@waag.co.uk.

David Gaskin, Chairman WAAG
Two Left Feet

Two Left Feet is a voluntary group, which offers fortnightly beginners dance lessons in Slough and has just set up a new branch in Woodley, Wokingham.

Two Left Feet are committed to introducing dance in a new, exciting and fun way. We welcome people from all backgrounds and with all abilities and want to appeal to those who 'dream' of dancing but because they believe they have 'two left feet' may not have had the confidence.

Two Left Feet provides an opportunity for people to have an affordable night out, where they will have fun, socialise, learn new skills and engage in physical activity.

The styles of dance taught are many and varied and, range from bhangra to ballet and salsa to street dance. Emphasis is on enjoyment, music and movement rather than getting the moves right!

The dances are broken down into simple and repetitive movements to enable everyone to benefit from the feelings of success and achievement. The teachers also adapt the dance for participants who have difficulties with any particular movements. No partner is needed and people are welcome to come along, watch and enjoy the music and atmosphere if they do not want to join in.

If you want to get involved with Two Left Feet – please call Jodie Newman on 01189 792031 to join our mailing list.

We will then keep you posted as to when Two Left Feet (Wokingham) is off the ground.

Celebration of Age

Thursday October 23, 2008
10am - 4pm
Loddon Valley Leisure

If you are aged 50 or over, come and join us for a celebration of age, hosted by the borough's Older People's Forums.

Free activities include: Tai Chi, Costume displays, Guest speakers, Swimming, Arts and crafts plus lots of useful information. A buffet lunch will be provided

For more information or if you require transport, please telephone Amanda Gordon on (0118) 974 6850

WBC and BME Forum

WBC and BME forum in partnership with African Caribbean Society is organising the following events as a part of Black History Month 2008.

Question Time on 24th of October from 6.30pm at the Council Chambers. Free programme includes refreshments

Taster and performance evening on 8th of November at Woodley Baptist Church Woodley. The event include world music and Dance, Steel band and free Caribbean and Indian food. This year's theme is Nelson Mandela and the Candidacy of Obama.

For further information please contact Ashwani Gupta on 0118 9746790 and mobile 07982250347.
Are you frightened of computers?
Do you think that computers are for the young and skilled only?

Would you like to write letters and read incoming written correspondence, leaflets, and newspaper articles, or send e-mails, or access the internet?

If you answer yes to these questions then the Guide computer System may be for you, even if you are already a computer user with a visual impairment.

I reviewed this system for a friend in his mid 70’s with no previous computer experience or keyboard skills.

Guide strips down complex operations into the bare essentials, removing many of the unwanted and complex operations normally found in such software, providing magnification, audio instructions and if required a version which does not require a keyboard or mouse as it is completely voice activated.

If you already have a computer packages start at £395 and the hands free version at £684. These prices do not include VAT or delivery charges.

However if you are starting from scratch Software Express can provide a complete basic package for £899 plus VAT and a variety of other packages which include all the hardware necessary to get you up and running.

The total Gold Hands Free package with broadband interface costs £1990 plus VAT. This price includes hardware, software and installation with 3 hours training in your own home.

It is possible to obtain relief from VAT if you are registered as Visually Impaired or Blind.

If your requirements are basic I believe the Guide system meets most needs, is easy to use and competitively priced, it has also won acclaim from the RNIB.

In my opinion it compares very favorably with Super Nova (Lunar Plus), and Jaws which require a much higher level of computer and keyboard skills.

If you require more information or a Guide demo disk/cd contact the address below, or have a look at the Software Express web site which includes a video demonstration and a considerable amount of additional information about this product.

Software Express Limited  Telephone number 0845 225 5005
The Old Bakery  e-mail: sales@softwareexpress.co.uk
5Station Road  web site: www.softwareexpress.co.uk
Ushaw Moor
Durham
DH7 9FZ
The Commission for Social Care Inspection recently assessed Wokingham Council’s community care team in three areas: safeguarding vulnerable adults, delivering preventative services for older people and working in partnership.

The council received a ‘good’ rating in each area (services are rated using four grades: poor, adequate, good or excellent). The Council’s capacity to improve was rated as promising (again four ratings are used: poor, uncertain, promising and excellent).

The inspectors, spent five days in the borough during June and questioned more than 100 older people about the standard of service they receive, as well as staff, service providers and partners.

The report highlighted many strong points. In addition to those relating specifically to services for older people these included:

- The council takes prompt action to protect people whose needs or circumstances make them vulnerable
- Investigations into harm or poor treatment are generally thorough and involve appropriate partners.
- The role and contribution of the adult safeguarding coordinator was described as impressive.
- Staff approach their work with energy and passion to deliver high quality, person-centred support.
- The council gives a high priority to partnership working with local people and is continuously working to improve its responsiveness and to ensure its priorities are shaped by the needs of the community.
- The council has a good working relationship with local organisations including social care and housing providers and community and voluntary sector organisations.
- The holistic and person-centred approach taken to services has led to a high rate of satisfaction.
- The council has a clear and strong vision for its service and the council’s senior leaders and elected members are improvement driven and ambitious to deliver the best services. Front line staff feel well supported and senior managers are seen as approachable.
- Social care budgets are well managed and services are arranged to ensure best practice and effective use of resources.

Despite the glowing report, Wokingham Borough Council is not complacent and is already studying the recommendations made in the report as to where further improvements can be made. These include: improving consistency of access to advocacy support and continuing to develop a strong focus on the needs of carers and fully embed approaches to contingency planning.
Putting People First

Putting People First is a completely new way of providing adult social care: it will transform the way services are provided across the country and local authorities, including Wokingham Borough Council, are leading the transformation.

From the traditional system of care professionals allocating services and controlling budgets for service users, Putting People First will empower people with all levels of need to take control of their own care and support.

The council are already setting the pace for this change with its preventative services and In Control pilot project that has put some of the principles of Putting People First into practice on a small scale.

Putting People First is about ‘personalising’ services and allowing individuals to make choices. With this freedom and choice comes a certain level of risk but we will not lose sight of the need to safeguard the most vulnerable individuals.

If you are interested in talking to someone to find out more or would like to consider having an individual budget please contact Matt Pope, Putting People First Project Manager, for a chat on 07770 730878 / 0118 974 6764 or email Matthew.pope@wokingham.gov.uk

Communication Group News

The Communications group would like to invite our partner organisations to work more closely with us. Please let us know what you are up to, by telling us what events or projects you are planning. we may be able to link in with them or help with promotion. We would also like to hear your suggestions on how we can encourage you and your members to get more involved in the work that we do, for our mutual benefit.

In addition, we are still working towards submitting an article into as many local Parish Magazines as possible. To aid this initiative We are again asking all members who are involved with a local church, parish council or neighbourhood group, to supply us with the contact details of someone who could provide a link to the local magazine or would be happy to promote WAP within their congregation or organisation.

If you would like to come along to one of our group meetings or would like to pass on any parish contact information, then please get in touch with Kirstie Grice or Margaret Reeves via the WAP e-mail address which is wokingham.ability@gmail.com

Olympic Spirit at MS Centre

There may not have been medals but there were plenty of Olympic spirit when members of the Berkshire Multiple Sclerosis centre tried a few sports out. The MS therapy centre in Brook Gardens was transformed into a sports hall for it’s own Olympics Day when members played bowls, tennis and raced along a wheelchair obstacle course.

Fundraising Emma Saunders said:“It was a great day and we had a good turn out. We had a coach from the Lawn Tennis Association and you could tell that a lot of the members had played before. We tried to encourage some of then to have a go at things they may not have thought they could. Some them will be going back to play more tennis. We also had bowls and I think some of the members really enjoyed that and will be taking it up.”

Centre members also took part in a wheelchair obstacle race—with a test of their basketball skills thrown in. The Olympic day was part of the celebration of the centre’s 20th anniversary celebrations which culminated in a ramble.
News From WBC

All4sport – Get Active, Get Healthy, Get Out!
Following the successful event at the Loddon Valley Leisure Centre on 4th July, more sport and leisure events are being planned.

A new programme of activities – All4sport will commence after Christmas. Activities on offer will include boccia, table tennis, tai chi as well as Nintendo Wii sessions.

For more information, please contact Marlena O’Donnell, email: Marlena.O’Donnell@wokingham.gov.uk, tel: (0118) 974 6776.

Leisure ! Indoor & Outdoor Activities in the Wokingham Borough
This updated document provides detailed information of leisure activities & venues suitable for those with physical or sensory special needs. A copy can be obtained from WBC on Access@wokingham.gov.uk.

User involvement guidelines
Through partnership boards and user groups, service users are becoming increasingly more and more involved in the planning, delivering and monitoring of social care services.

For the last few months, we have been talking to various groups of users, carers, Wokingham Borough Council staff as well as service providers about opportunities for service user involvement, what works and what doesn’t work well and what we should be doing differently in the future.

Following various focus groups and meetings, we are now in the process of preparing draft guidelines on how to ensure that user involvement is effective and beneficial both to service users and to Wokingham Borough Council.

We will be presenting this draft document to WAP for comments within the next few weeks. For more information, please contact either Mike Stillman, email: mike.stillman@wokingham.gov.uk; tel: (0118) 974 6776 or Marlena O’Donnell, email: marlena.o’donnell@wokingham.gov.uk, tel: (0118) 974 6773

Taxi Driver Training
The recently updated Wokingham Borough Council Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy now contains the following statement

1.2.9 Training in the Assistance of Disabled Persons
All applicants must be able to show that they have undergone training in the assistance of disabled persons, to a standard acceptable to Wokingham Borough Council. Current examples of acceptable standards are the Passenger Assistant Training Scheme (PATS) or Wokingham Borough Council’s in-house Disability Awareness Training.

This training is now compulsory for all licensed drivers and so far 90 drivers have attended the WBC in-house training. This is held twice a month, and is ongoing, with the aim that all drivers already licensed will attend before their license is renewed, and new drivers will attend as part of the application process.

By giving taxi drivers a better understanding of their duties under the Disability Discrimination Act, plus an increased awareness of how best to help passengers with disabilities, WBC are hoping to ensure that the experience of using a taxi in the borough is a better one for all those residents with special needs.
Reading Deaf Centre

Deaf Centre members face a long cold winter
The Reading Deaf Centre is facing a cold winter unless they get help soon. The boiler, which was very old, has broken down, and with winter just around the corner, the OAP group (the Sunflowers) will have no heating, just little oil heaters.

We are appealing for donations or fund raising ideas to get a new boiler installed so that they can carry on the good work started back in the 1890's.

Please contact Karen Wall, Information Officer for Reading Deaf Centre by email on readingdeafcentre@tiscali.co.uk

UPDATE: Reading Deaf centre is closed due to essential works being undertaken until mid November, Karen Wall can be contacted at Whitley Health and Social Centre, 286 Northumberland Ave, Reading, RG2 7RJ, or by telephone 01189 207603

Dates For Your Diary

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| Tuesday 21st October 2008 in the WBC offices at Shute End. Meet at 10.30 for a 10.45am start. Cllr. Keith Baker will make the | November 11th, 1-2.30pm, Westmead Centre
This is a work plan meeting, all sub group members welcome. |
| Notification of AGM 2008, November 20th at Shute End, Wokingham, 7.30 pm. | November 19th, 10-12 noon, Westmead Centre
December 10th, 10-12 noon, Westmead Centre
January 14th, 10-12 noon, Westmead Centre |

WAP Quarterly Meetings
Held at Crescent Resource Centre, Lower Earley, 10 - 12noon.
October 22nd 2008 January 16th 2009

Useful Contacts

Steven Bowers – Chairman of the Board, telephone 01189 731 419

Zoe Tomes – Development Worker, telephone 0778 619 7626
wokingham.ability@gmail.com

Wokingham Area Access Group (WAAG) – www.waag.co.uk

Reading Deaf Centre, Karen Wall, telephone 0118 959 4969/01189 207603
readingdeafcentre@tiscali.co.uk

Margaret Reeves/Kirstie Grice – Co Chairs of Communications Group
wokingham.ability@gmail.com

WESS (Wokingham Employment Support Services) 0118 989 0500
WESS@wokingham.gov.uk

Wokingham Ability Partnership (WAP), PO Box 154, Wokingham, RG40 1WN
wokingham.ability@gmail.com