

MINUTES

Assembly for People with Disabilities and Carers

Thursday 11 December 2025

Committee Room 6, Civic Centre, Uxbridge

11:30am – 1:00pm

	Agenda Item
1	Registration, refreshments and information stalls
2	Welcome, introductions and housekeeping The Chair, Shahina Haider, welcomed attendees to the Assembly for People with Disabilities and Carers, including those joining online, and thanked everyone for their attendance. Shahina outlined the agenda and confirmed that the meeting would follow the printed programme provided on attendees' desks. Housekeeping information was then shared, including fire evacuation procedures, confirmation that there was no planned fire alarm, the location of toilets, and a request for mobile phones to be switched off or placed on silent to avoid disruption. Attendees and presenters were also reminded to use the microphone when speaking to ensure everyone could hear clearly.
3	Cllr Palmer Opening remarks Cllr Palmer welcomed attendees and commented positively on the strong turnout. She explained that she attends the Assembly to hear directly from residents using services in her portfolio, stressing the importance of honest feedback about what the Council does well and where it can improve. She recognised a former colleague, sent good wishes to the public health presenter who was unwell and joining online, and wished everyone a happy festive period, inviting residents to approach her informally after the meeting.
4	Steering Group Grace (Disability Assembly Steering Group member) Grace, a member of the Disability Assembly Steering Group, was unfortunately unable to attend due to unforeseen circumstances. In her absence, Shahina Haider explained the purpose of the Steering Group and the important role it plays in helping to shape the Assembly agenda, identify key issues affecting disabled residents and carers, and support meaningful resident involvement. Shahina encouraged attendees to consider joining or attending the next Steering Group meeting, noting that it provides an opportunity for residents to share ideas, influence future discussion topics and help ensure the Assembly continues to reflect the priorities and experiences of the community.
5	Presentation 1: Keeping Warm in Winter Sarah Durner, Senior Officer, Public Health, Hillingdon Council Sarah Durner, Senior Officer in Public Health at Hillingdon Council, joined the meeting online to present the Council's Warm Welcome Centres programme. She explained that the programme has been running for three consecutive winters and provides residents with warm, safe and welcoming spaces during the colder months. The sessions offer opportunities for residents to access hot drinks, activities and informal support, while also encouraging social contact and reducing isolation. • In the previous year, 13 centres took part in the programme, with 547 individuals making more than 8,000 visits to warm-space activities. • Sessions are delivered across a range of community venues, including community centres, faith venues and libraries. Examples included St Margaret's Church in

	Uxbridge, Crane Community Centre in Harlington/Hayes and local libraries offering activities such as board games and reading groups. Other examples included Charville Community Centre, a new “Focus on Football” conversation group in Northwood, coffee mornings at Hayes Muslim Centre and “Welcome Wednesdays” at Hayes Methodist Church, which include a light lunch, exercise and guest speakers. Sarah confirmed that each Warm Welcome session provides at least a hot drink and an opportunity for residents to meet others. Some venues also offer light meals, exercise sessions, talks and other activities. The current programme runs from December to the end of March 2026 and is promoted through posters and leaflets in libraries, as well as through partner organisations such as Age UK, so residents can find information about venues, dates, times and activities. The programme is also linked to wider health initiatives, including pop-up vaccination clinics and health-check sessions delivered by roving teams. Talks on topics such as winter wellness, falls prevention and hypertension are also being held at selected centres to support residents to look after their health while using the warm spaces. Sarah explained that the Warm Welcome Centres also help reduce social isolation and support residents with the ongoing cost of living. She noted that the range of activities available, including coffee mornings, conversation groups, exercise sessions and reading groups, is intended to give residents regular opportunities to leave home, meet others and build a routine. This is particularly important during the winter months, when some residents may be more likely to stay indoors. By holding sessions in familiar community settings such as churches, community centres and libraries, the programme aims to feel welcoming, informal and accessible. Sarah further highlighted that the offer is designed to complement existing community provision rather than duplicate it. Some venues have adapted their usual groups, such as knitting or craft sessions, to form part of the Warm Welcome timetable, while others have introduced new activities specifically for the programme. She encouraged residents to check local publicity regularly, as additional talks, health sessions or pop-ups may be added during the winter period in response to resident feedback and emerging needs.
6	Presentation 2: New Hillingdon Advise Partnership (HAP) Service, Susan Walden, Head of Information and Advice, Age UK Susan Walden, Head of Information and Advice at Age UK, introduced the Hillingdon Advice Partnership (HAP) as a new, council-funded information, advice, guidance and wellbeing support service. The partnership is led by Age UK Hillingdon, Harrow and Brent and delivered in collaboration with Disability Advice and Support Hillingdon (DASH), Bell Farm Christian Centre and Nucleus Legal. Who can HAP help? Support is available to all adults aged 18 and over, including those with physical disability, learning disability, autism or ADHD diagnosis, and mental health needs including dementia. What does HAP offer? - Free, independent information and advice on welfare benefits, housing, finances and debt, care and support needs and health and wellbeing services. - Personalised guidance to help navigate disability-related benefits and support services. - Information to support access to community activities, walking groups and volunteering opportunities to promote health and wellbeing. - Community-based services delivered with partners across Hillingdon, including advice surgeries and events. To demonstrate impact, Susan shared data from the first six months of operation (2 June to 30 November 2025). In that period HAP supported 1,694 new clients and dealt with 2,399 separate enquiries, with 9,116 repeat contacts as cases progressed. Through this work, the partnership identified £494,000 in potential benefit income and secured £380,000 in confirmed annual awards for residents. How to contact HAP: - Advice line: 020 8044 5676, open Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 5:00pm.

	• Online: Quick contact form available at www.hillingdonadvicepartnership.org.uk; a trained adviser will call back. • Face-to-face outreach: Drop-in at Ruislip Manor Library (Monday mornings), Bell Farm (Tuesday), and appointments at Fassnidge Community Hall in Uxbridge (Friday), with plans to expand venues in 2026. A further point emphasised in the Hillingdon Advice Partnership presentation was the importance of partnership working and early intervention. Susan explained that by linking legal advice, welfare benefits expertise, community-based support and disability-specific knowledge in one service, HAP aims to resolve issues before they escalate into crises such as homelessness, unmanageable debt or health deterioration. She noted that the single point of access model is designed to reduce the need for residents to retell their story multiple times to different organisations, instead coordinating support so that complex cases receive joined-up responses tailored to individual circumstances.
7	Presentation 3: Accessibility and Editorial Panel. Shahina Haider, Customer Engagement Officer, Hillingdon Council Shahina Haider, Customer Engagement Officer at Hillingdon Council, presented the Accessibility and Editorial Panel, which supports the Council's commitment to clear, accessible and inclusive communication. Purpose of the panel: • To ensure Council information is clear, accessible and inclusive for all residents. What the panel reviews: • Websites (navigation, readability and accessibility features). • Printed materials (booklets, leaflets, newsletters). • Boroughwide notices (public announcements and signage). • Policies (language clarity and accessibility compliance). • Strategies (inclusive communication and engagement). As an example of the panel's work, Shahina shared feedback on eight Building and Fire Safety posters that had been reviewed. Residents appreciated the relevance and clarity of the messages but noted inconsistencies in design and messaging; for instance, one poster encouraged the use of plant pots whilst another discouraged placing them outside homes. Residents suggested ensuring consistent messaging, using high-contrast colours and clear fonts, and including visuals reflecting real-life scenarios in the borough. The posters were subsequently revised to reflect this feedback. Attendees were invited to express interest in joining or working alongside the panel, particularly if they had experienced difficulties accessing Council information or had ideas for improvement. They were asked to indicate this on the feedback forms on their tables, and officers committed to contacting interested residents after the meeting to discuss possible involvement and next steps. Accessibility and Editorial Panel dates for 2026: • Thursday 8 January 2026, 10:00am–11:30am, Committee Room 3A • Thursday 9 April 2026, 10:00am–11:30am, Committee Room 3 • Thursday 9 July 2026, 6:00pm–7:30pm, Committee Rooms 3 The Accessibility and Editorial Panel sits alongside other resident groups such as the Building and Fire Safety Panel and Special Interest Groups, giving disabled residents and carers multiple routes to influence how the Council designs and communicates its services. Panel discussions are used not only to critique existing materials but also to inform the design of new campaigns and statutory notices, so that accessibility is considered from the outset rather than as an afterthought. This helps embed inclusive communication principles across different departments and projects. Shahina highlighted that involvement in the panel can be flexible, with opportunities to attend meetings in person, review documents between meetings, or contribute feedback on specific themes such as web content, fire safety information or housing and tenancy letters. Residents' comments are logged and tracked so that changes can be demonstrated back to the group, reinforcing that contributions lead to visible improvements and strengthening trust between the Council and the disability community.

8	Future agenda items - Priorities for 2026 Main suggestions raised - Residents asked for a future session with someone from the Council’s budget team linked to the forthcoming budget consultation, so disabled people and carers can better understand proposals and give informed feedback. - There was a request for an item on Council grants and benefits for disabled residents, covering eligibility criteria, application processes and an opportunity to share feedback on how these could be improved. Priorities for 2026 Assemblies - Continuing focus on cost-of-living support, including Warm Welcome Centres and other help to keep warm and well in winter. - Ongoing attention to advice, welfare rights and income-maximisation, building on the work of the Hillingdon Advice Partnership. - Improving accessibility of venues and Council communications, including through the Accessibility and Editorial Panel and Building and Fire Safety Panel. - Maintaining and strengthening resident involvement through the Disability Assembly Steering Group and the wider programme of special interest groups and panels.
9	Questions, answers and discussion Warm Welcome information and accessibility: Sarah confirmed that printed Warm Welcome timetables were available, including from Uxbridge Library, and offered to check specific venues where residents had questions about participation or accessibility. It was noted that libraries and community centres were expected to be accessible, although access at individual church venues could not be guaranteed. Public Health follow-up: A resident asked Public Health to review a document relating to preventative healthcare and “GCSE medicine”. Sarah agreed to provide her email address, receive the document and share it with the Director of Public Health, Dr Sharon Stoltz, for consideration. Transport and access to services: A question was raised about transport to HAP outreach, Warm Welcome Centres and similar sessions. Transport was noted as an access concern, and residents were encouraged to speak to officers so individual issues could be picked up and signposted to appropriate support. Future agenda actions: Residents requested future sessions on the Council budget consultation and on grants and benefits for disabled residents. Officers agreed to invite a budget representative to a future Assembly and to liaise with social care colleagues about including an item on grants, benefits, eligibility and application processes. Carers’ ID cards: Residents asked whether carers could have a recognised ID card and how existing cards could more clearly confirm carer status. Officers agreed to check with the borough’s carers’ support provider what is currently available, how residents can access any scheme, and whether further work is needed on a more standardised approach. Garden centre closure: A resident raised concern about the closure of the garden centre and the impact on regular users. Cllr Palmer explained that the Council could no longer continue subsidising a loss-making garden centre given financial pressures and statutory responsibilities. She confirmed that social care officers had reviewed users with assessed eligible needs and discussed alternative support options with them. Cllr Palmer emphasised that no one with assessed social care needs had been left without support and invited residents to raise any individual concerns with her after the meeting or by email so these could be followed up.
	Close Shahina Haider, Chair, brought the meeting to a close by thanking all attendees for their participation and contributions throughout the Assembly. She also thanked the guest speakers and officers for their presentations, responses to questions and ongoing support. Shahina encouraged residents to continue sharing their feedback and ideas for future agenda items, and reminded attendees that their views help shape future discussions and improve Council services. She wished everyone well and formally closed the meeting.