



Disability Assembly
Wednesday 16 September 2026
11.30am –1.30pm
Committee Room 6/Via Teams
Minutes

	Agenda Items
1	Welcome, introductions and house keeping The Chair, Shahina Haider, welcomed attendees to the Disability Assembly and confirmed the meeting was being held in a hybrid format, allowing both in person and virtual participation. Housekeeping was covered, including microphone use, online meeting etiquette, and instructions for submitting questions through the chat. Feedback forms and agendas were made available to participants. An update was also provided on a proposed IT skills workshop being developed with Learn Hillingdon to support residents who are not confident using digital services. Residents were invited to express interest through feedback forms. • Officers present: Shahina Haider (Chair) – Resident Empowerment officer • Guest speakers: Dan Morton, Freya Hodgkinson, Gulshan Sangha, Sarah Durner • Attendees: 20 residents in person, 2 online
2	Update from last meeting You said, we did Review of Previous Assembly Feedback – “You Said, We Did” An update was provided on feedback from the previous Disability Assembly and the actions taken in response. The Chair explained that the Disability Assembly Steering Group had reviewed residents’ comments and used them to make practical improvements under the “You Said, We Did” approach. Changes introduced included adding a comfort break, extending the meeting from 90 minutes to two hours, and reducing the number of guest speakers to allow more time for questions, discussion and resident participation.

	The Chair also confirmed that additional staff support had been arranged for attendees with mobility, hearing or sight-related needs, and that information from stall holders would be shared digitally where possible for residents joining online. The Steering Group reported that four new residents had joined following the previous assembly. Residents were encouraged to consider joining the group to help shape future agendas, review feedback and ensure the assembly continues to reflect the needs of disabled residents and carers. Steering Group Update Details of the next Steering Group meeting were shared, with in-person and hybrid attendance options available. Interested residents were encouraged to leave their contact details so further information could be sent to them.
3	Opening remarks- Cllr Susan O'Brien Councillor Susan O'Brien introduced herself as Cabinet Member for Adults, Children, Health and Care and thanked residents, carers, speakers, stall holders and officers for attending the Disability Assembly. She recognised the importance of the assembly as a space for residents to share their experiences, raise concerns, ask questions and help shape services that affect disabled residents and their families across the borough. Councillor O'Brien confirmed that she intended to stay for the full assembly so that she could listen directly to the presentations, hear the questions raised by residents and take part in discussions throughout the session. She emphasised that resident feedback is valuable and helps the council better understand what is working well, where improvements are needed and what matters most to people with lived experience of disability. She also welcomed the opportunity for residents to engage with a range of services during the meeting and encouraged attendees to participate fully, whether in person or online. Councillor O'Brien noted that assemblies such as this provide an important route for ensuring that services remain accessible, inclusive and responsive to the needs of residents, and she thanked everyone for contributing their time and views.
4	Presentation 1: Benefit support available to people living with disabilities. Diana Stefan - Department of Work and Pensions

Due to unforeseen reasons, the scheduled guest speaker, Diana Stefan from the Department for Work and Pensions, was unable to attend the assembly. At short notice, Gulshan Sangha, Financial Inclusion Manager from the council's internal Welfare Support service delivered a substitute presentation to ensure residents still received information about benefit support and financial assistance available to people living with disabilities.

The presentation provided an overview of key welfare benefits, local support routes and practical assistance available to disabled residents, carers and people with long-term health conditions. Gulshan explained that welfare support can vary depending on individual circumstances, including age, disability, income, housing situation and care needs, and encouraged residents to seek advice before making applications or challenging decisions.

Topics covered included:

- Personal Independence Payment (PIP).
- Attendance Allowance.
- Disabled Facilities Grants.
- Housing adaptations and occupational therapy assessments.
- Council Tax Reduction schemes.
- Blue Badge and Freedom Pass eligibility.
- Financial Inclusion Team support for residents across all housing tenures.

A number of residents shared personal experiences relating to Personal Independence Payment applications, appeals and benefit assessments. Comments were made about the complexity of application forms, the amount of evidence required, the stress caused by reassessments and the difficulty some residents face when explaining how their disability affects them on a daily basis. Residents also discussed the challenges of navigating different benefit systems and knowing where to go for reliable advice.

Gulshan acknowledged these concerns and explained that residents do not have to manage the process alone. She highlighted that the Welfare Support and Financial Inclusion services can help residents understand what support they may be entitled to, assist with benefit checks, provide guidance on application processes and signpost to relevant services where specialist advice is needed. Residents were encouraged to seek support early, particularly if they receive a decision they do not understand or wish to challenge.

	Discussion also covered wider financial pressures faced by disabled residents, including the cost of living, housing-related costs and the need for adaptations or equipment to support independent living. Information was shared on Disabled Facilities Grants, occupational therapy assessments, Council Tax Reduction, Blue Badge applications and travel-related support such as the Freedom Pass. Residents were advised that eligibility criteria apply to each scheme, but that advice and signposting are available to help residents understand which options may be suitable for them. The Chair thanked Gulshan for stepping in at short notice and residents were reminded that a Department for Work and Pensions speaker could be invited to a future assembly to provide further information and respond to more detailed questions about national benefit processes.
5	Comfort break
6	Presentation 2: Safeguarding Voices Group and residents safeguarding survey. Dan Morton - Safeguarding Partnership Dan Morton delivered a presentation on behalf of the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership, focusing on the Safeguarding Voices Group and the resident safeguarding survey. The presentation explained the role of the partnership in protecting adults at risk and emphasised the importance of involving residents, carers and people with lived experience in shaping safeguarding information and services. Different forms of abuse and neglect were discussed, including physical, emotional, financial and domestic abuse, self-neglect, discriminatory abuse and organisational abuse. The presentation also highlighted why older people and disabled residents may be more vulnerable, including isolation, reliance on others for support, communication barriers and uncertainty about where to report concerns. Dan promoted the Safeguarding Voices Group as a way for residents and carers to share their views and influence safeguarding policy, practice and communications. Examples were given of how feedback from residents and carers has helped improve information about available support and made safeguarding messages clearer and more accessible. Residents and carers were encouraged to complete the safeguarding survey to help the partnership understand residents' awareness of safeguarding, confidence in raising concerns and what support or information would help people feel safer and better informed.

	Discussion also took place around carers' rights, carers' assessments and local support services. Residents raised questions about GP services, safeguarding processes, carers' rights and how residents can be more involved in decision-making. The presenters acknowledged the feedback and encouraged residents to use the Safeguarding Voices Group as a route to continue sharing views and influencing future safeguarding work. The session concluded with residents being encouraged to take part in the survey and consider joining the Safeguarding Voices Group. The presenters thanked residents for their questions and confirmed that feedback from the assembly would help inform ongoing safeguarding engagement with residents and carers.
7	Presentation 3: Hillingdon Stop Smoking Service Freya Hodgkinson, Hillingdon Stop Smoking Service Freya Hodgkinson delivered a presentation on the Hillingdon Stop Smoking Service, outlining the health risks of smoking, harmful chemicals in cigarettes, the benefits of stopping and the support available for residents who want to quit. Key areas covered included behavioural support, nicotine replacement therapies, local stop smoking clinics, referral pathways and a case study showing successful smoking cessation after many years of smoking. Residents raised questions about vaping, smoking prevention, school education, shisha use, mental health and addiction. Freya explained that vaping may be used as a harm-reduction tool for adult smokers trying to stop, but is not recommended for non-smokers or young people. She also highlighted the importance of early education and clear public health messages. The discussion also covered how smoking can become linked to daily routines, stress and coping strategies. Behavioural support was described as an important part of helping residents understand triggers, manage cravings and access the right support. Freya also advised that shisha smoking is not risk-free and can expose people to harmful substances. Residents were encouraged to access local stop smoking support or share service information with family, friends and others who may benefit.

8	Resident Empowerment Updates Shahina provided an update on upcoming opportunities for residents to get involved, share their views and help influence council services. Residents were encouraged to take part in the different forums and groups available, as these provide regular opportunities to raise issues, discuss service improvements and ensure that resident feedback is considered in future planning. Residents were reminded that these meetings and forums are open to residents who wish to contribute their views, raise local issues or support wider service improvement. The Resident Empowerment Team explained that involvement can take different forms, including attending meetings, joining discussions, completing surveys, sharing lived experience or helping to shape future agenda items. Attendees were encouraged to complete feedback forms and leave their contact details if they were interested in joining a group, receiving future meeting information or being involved in planning future resident engagement activity. The team confirmed that feedback gathered through assemblies and forums would continue to be used to identify resident priorities and improve how engagement opportunities are delivered.
9	Any Other Business Residents discussed a variety of local concerns and future topics, including: • Rebooking a Department for Work and Pensions speaker. • Accessibility of the council website. • Environmental services and waste collection issues. • Recycling bag availability. • Accessibility and planning issues affecting disabled residents. • Potential future presentations from environmental, planning and accessibility-related services. • Community support and accessible weighing facilities. Age Friendly Festival An update was provided on: • The upcoming Age Friendly Festival at the Platinum Jubilee Leisure Centre. Public Health Update – Flu Vaccination • Flu vaccine eligibility for the 2026/27 season.

	Vaccination arrangements for different resident groups. Importance of annual vaccination due to changing flu strains. Advice for eligible residents who have not yet received invitations for vaccination. Priority Services Register Presentation A representative from Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks presented information on the Priority Services Register. Residents were advised that: • Vulnerable residents can register for additional support during power outages. • Support may include welfare checks and provision of power banks for essential medical equipment. • Registration can provide reassurance and assistance during service interruptions. • Questions were raised regarding existing utility provider priority services, and clarification was provided on the distinct role of the network operator.
10	Close Councillor Susan O'Brien thanked residents, carers, guest speakers, stall holders and council officers for attending and reflected positively on the range of discussions held during the assembly. She acknowledged the valuable contributions made by residents throughout the session and noted the importance of continuing to provide opportunities for residents to share their experiences, raise concerns and influence local services. Shahina Haider, Chair of the assembly, also gave closing thanks to everyone who had taken part, including residents attending in person and online, presenters, stall holders and staff supporting the event. She thanked attendees for their questions, feedback and active participation, and highlighted that resident input would help shape future Disability Assemblies and wider resident engagement work. Shahina also asked attendees how they had found the assembly with the changes put forward by the Disability Assembly Steering Group. These changes included extending the meeting to two hours, introducing a 15-minute comfort break and reducing the number of guest speakers to three to allow more time for questions, discussion and resident participation. The majority of attendees were in agreement

	that they would like to continue with this new format for future assemblies. Residents were reminded to complete the feedback form before leaving, as this would help the Resident Empowerment Team understand what worked well, identify areas for improvement and gather suggestions for future topics, speakers and accessibility arrangements. Attendees who wished to join the Disability Assembly Steering Group or receive information about future engagement opportunities were encouraged to leave their contact details.
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