

Assembly for People with Disabilities and Carers
Thursday 11 September 2025
Committee Room 6, Civic Centre, Uxbridge
11:30am – 1:00pm
Minutes

	Agenda Item
1	Welcome, introductions and housekeeping The event was opened by a Shahina from the Customer Engagement Team, who welcomed attendees and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to engage directly with residents. Emphasis was placed on the importance of co-producing services with residents rather than delivering them in isolation. Housekeeping notes included: • Emergency exits and fire safety procedures. • Location of toilets. • Mobile phone etiquette. • Microphone use for questions. • Online participants were asked to use the chat for queries. Attendees were reminded of how to report issues or make service requests via the Council's switchboard (01895 250111), the Hillingdon website, or the contact numbers listed in the <i>Hillingdon People</i> magazine.
2	Opening Remarks Councillor Jane Palmer (Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care) Councillor Jane Palmer opened the Assembly with a heartfelt welcome, expressing her appreciation for the opportunity to engage directly with residents. She emphasised the importance of co-producing services with the community, stating: "We don't do unto our residents; we do things for our residents and with our residents." She acknowledged the valuable role of NHS colleagues who were present to offer health checks and praised the Assembly as a vital space for honest dialogue. Councillor Palmer noted that residents are never shy to "say it like it is," which she deeply values. She also recognized the current challenges facing society and wished everyone well, affirming her commitment to staying for part of the event to speak with attendees.
3	Steering Group Following the welcome and housekeeping, the Customer Engagement Team introduced the Steering Group for the Assembly for People with Disabilities and Carers. This group plays a vital role in shaping future assemblies by ensuring that the voices of residents—particularly those with lived experience—are central to planning and decision-making. Attendees were reminded that the Steering Group had previously been active and was now being restarted to better reflect current needs and priorities. The team emphasized that the group is open to anyone who wishes to contribute ideas, raise concerns, or help co-produce future events. The Steering Group will: • Help identify topics of interest for future assemblies. • Advise on accessibility and inclusion. • Provide feedback on Council services. • Support outreach and engagement with underrepresented groups. Those interested in joining were encouraged to speak to the Customer Engagement Team after the session or indicate their interest on the feedback forms provided on tables. Participation can be in-person, online, or hybrid, depending on individual preferences and accessibility needs.
4	Presentation 1: Accessibility to Literature Robert Sisk Events & Promotion Officer, Uxbridge Library

	Robert Sisk, Events & Promotions Officer for Hillingdon Libraries, delivered a comprehensive and engaging presentation on the various ways the library service supports accessibility to literature for residents with disabilities, mobility challenges, or sensory impairments. Overview of Services Robert began by emphasizing that Hillingdon Libraries operate across 16 locations in the borough, ensuring that most residents live near a branch. However, for those unable to visit in person, the library offers several outreach services: Home Library Service • Designed for residents who cannot physically access a library due to age, illness, disability, or sensory impairment. • Books are delivered directly to homes once a month. • The service currently supports around 90 active users, ranging in age from 26 to 102. • Users can request specific genres or authors, and feedback is used to tailor future selections. • Large print books and audiobooks are available, with 27% of issued books being large print. Mobile Library • A fully stocked library van that visits care homes, schools, and community events. • Also serves areas of the borough without a permanent library branch. • A printed timetable was made available at the event for attendees to check local stops. Reading Groups Standard reading groups are available for community members. A dedicated Visual/Print Impaired Reading Group meets monthly at Uxbridge Library. • Members receive USB sticks with audio content. • Playback devices are available, including speaker boxes with Braille buttons. • If a member cannot attend in person, their USB stick can be posted via Royal Mail’s specialist service. Digital Library Services Robert highlighted several digital platforms that extend access to literature: • BorrowBox: Free eBooks and audiobooks accessible via mobile devices or computers. No fines, and automatic returns after three weeks. • PressReader: Offers access to over 700 UK newspapers and magazines, and 7,000 international titles. Includes back issues and supplements. • Transparent Language: A web-based platform offering over 110 languages, including English as a second language and regional dialects. Also includes a children’s version for school-age learners. • Hillingdon Libraries App: Allows users to search the catalogue, reserve and renew items, and even check out books using their phone. Events and Outreach • Robert organises annual events such as Sight Loss Awareness Fortnight, which rotates across library branches. • These events include sensory workshops, clay modelling, and visits from organizations like RNIB and Middlesex Association for the Blind. Joining the Library • Membership is free and easy to obtain. • Residents can sign up online or in person with two forms of ID. • Lost cards can be replaced, and a Hillingdon First card can be converted into a library card.
5	Presentation 2: Cancer Awareness Talk and Vaccinations Sarah Derner senior public health officer (Public Health, Hillingdon Council) and Judith George Involvement manager (NHS NW London) Cancer Awareness Talk & Vaccinations Sarah and Judith opened their presentation by highlighting the importance of national cancer screening programmes. These programmes are designed to detect cancer early—often before symptoms appear—when treatment is more effective. They emphasized that screening is for people who feel well and fall within specific age ranges, not just those who already have symptoms. Breast Cancer Screening Judith explained that women aged 50 to 71 are invited every three years for a mammogram. The NHS now automatically rebooks missed appointments, helping more women stay on track. She shared that 8 out of 10 breast cancers occur in women over 50, and around 10,000 women under 50 are diagnosed annually.

	She encouraged attendees to perform regular self-examinations and offered practical tips: • Choose a consistent day each month (e.g., the 1st). • Check underarms, above and below the breast, and around the nipple. • Look for lumps, swelling, skin changes, rashes, discharge, or pain. To make appointments more accessible: • Request female staff. • Ask for a pre-visit to the venue. • Bring a scarf for modesty. • Request a language interpreter if needed. Bowel Cancer Screening Sarah introduced the FIT test, which is sent by post to people aged 50 to 74. Those over 74 can self-refer by calling 0800 707 6060. She acknowledged that collecting a stool sample can feel awkward and shared a practical tip: use a clean takeaway container with tissue inside, placed in the toilet bowl to catch the sample. She also warned not to discard the liquid in the test tube, as it preserves the sample. Symptoms to watch for include: • Blood in stool • Changes in bowel habits • Bloating • Fatigue • Unexplained weight loss Lung Cancer Screening This newer programme is offered to people aged 55 to 74 who currently smoke or have smoked in the past. Eligible individuals receive a phone assessment with a nurse, followed by an MRI scan if appropriate. Sarah noted that this programme has already helped detect not only lung cancer but other conditions. To request a Lung Health Check, call: 020 3835 1600 Cervical Cancer Screening & HPV Vaccination Judith explained that women aged 25 to 64 are invited for cervical screening. If the test is negative for HPV, no further investigation is needed for five years. The NHS App now sends reminders when screening is due. She also highlighted the HPV vaccination programme: • Offered to Year 8 students (boys and girls) • Helps prevent HPV • Reduces risk of cervical, genital, and some head and neck cancers
6	Presentation 3: Supporting autistic people to discover their true potential & lead purposeful, fulfilling lives Natalie Oliver, Health & Wellbeing Co –Ordinator, Hillingdon Autistic Care & Support Natalie began by introducing HACS (Hillingdon Autistic Care & Support), a local charity that provides a wide range of services for autistic individuals and their families. She explained that although her role focuses on adult services, HACS supports people across all age groups—from children to adults—and across multiple areas of life. The presentation was structured around five key service areas: 1. Family Support HACS offers practical and emotional support to families navigating autism diagnoses and related challenges. This includes: • Drop-in autism surgeries for advice on education, EHCPs, and school support. • One-to-one appointments and helplines. • Parent coffee mornings and workshops. • Guidance on managing anxiety, toileting, eating, and sleep difficulties. 2. Children & Young People’s Services Natalie described a vibrant programme for children and young people aged 8 to 25, including: • Youth clubs and Saturday clubs. • Holiday play schemes. • Personal development programmes to help young people understand their diagnosis, build confidence, and develop independence. • All children and young people must undergo an assessment before joining, to ensure their individual needs are met.

	3. Training & Consultancy HACS delivers autism-specific training for parents, carers, and professionals. Topics include: • Understanding autism and sensory differences. • Autism and anxiety. • Promoting positive behaviors. • These sessions are co-developed with autistic individuals, ensuring lived experience is central to learning. 4. Adult Support Hub For adults aged 18+, HACS offers a range of social, educational, and well-being activities: • Monthly social outings such as bowling, mini golf, and restaurant visits. • Peer-led webinars to help adults understand their diagnosis. • “Living Life to the Full” – a CBT-based wellbeing course adapted for neurodiverse adults. • “Give Space” – a drama therapy programme delivered by mental health practitioners. • Natalie emphasized that these activities are designed to foster independence, build friendships, and reduce isolation. 5. Health Hub This is a newer initiative aimed at improving access to healthcare for neurodiverse adults. Natalie explained that many autistic individuals struggle with navigating health services, especially when attending appointments or screenings. The Health Hub offers: • Monthly workshops on topics like cardiovascular health, diabetes, cervical screening, and mental health. • Training for healthcare professionals to improve accessibility and understanding of autism. • Support for individuals before and during health appointments to reduce anxiety and improve outcomes. • Natalie shared that she had just delivered training that morning at Hillingdon Hospital, and that the programme is expanding across GP practices and NHS services. 6. Skills & Employment HACS supports autistic adults and those with learning disabilities to find and maintain meaningful employment. This includes: • Pre-employment support: CV writing, interview preparation, confidence building. • In-work support: Job coaching funded through Access to Work. • Supported internships: Year-long placements at Hillingdon Hospital and the Civic Centre, in partnership with Orchard Hill College. Interns complete three 10-week rotations across departments. • Eligibility for internships includes being aged 17–24 and having an EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan).
7	Presentation 4: Community Equipment Service Update Gary Collier - Health & Social Care Integration Manager Gary began by introducing the Community Equipment Service, a vital support system for residents with disabilities and mobility needs. He explained that the service provides a wide range of daily living equipment, from simple aids like walking sticks and perching stools to more complex items such as hoists, slings, and electric beds. The Community Equipment Service, jointly funded by health and social care, supports over 23,500 residents—mostly aged 75 and above—with essential daily living aids. Following the liquidation of the previous provider (NRS Healthcare) in August, the Council swiftly appointed Medequip Assistive Technology Limited, a familiar provider in Hillingdon. Gary Collier assured attendees that existing users would not be affected equipment will remain in place if still needed. New contact details for repairs and collections were shared and will be circulated. While the transition caused some delays, Medequip is now fully operational and expected to be running smoothly by the end of the month. Residents not currently using the service can explore eligibility through tools like AskSARA, the Living Made Easy charity, or by requesting a social care assessment via Hillingdon Council.

	AskSARA: A self-assessment tool that helps identify suitable aids and services. • Living Made Easy: A charity offering independent advice on daily living equipment. • Hillingdon Advice Partnership: Offers local guidance and can be contacted on 020 8044 5676. • Social Care Assessment: Residents can request an assessment by calling 01895 556633. He emphasised that the service includes not just the supply of equipment, but also installation, servicing, and collection when it's no longer needed. The goal is to support independence and safety at home, especially for older adults and those with long-term conditions. During the Q&A, one attendee asked whether any stock had been lost during the provider transition. Gary responded that the situation was still being assessed, as the previous provider's stock was held in multiple locations. He couldn't confirm whether any equipment had been lost but assured the audience that the Council was working to clarify the details. Gary concluded by encouraging anyone with questions or concerns to speak with him after the session. He reiterated that the service is there to support residents in living safely and independently and that the Council is committed to ensuring continuity and quality of care.
8	Items of interest The final segment of the Assembly focused on upcoming opportunities for residents to stay involved, informed, and engaged with Council services and community initiatives. The team began by acknowledging the success of the hybrid format, which allowed both in-person and online attendees to participate. They expressed appreciation for everyone's contributions and encouraged continued involvement through future assemblies and forums. Several upcoming events and engagement opportunities were highlighted: Upcoming Assemblies Older Person's Assembly • Date: 23rd September 2025 • Time: Morning session • Location: Civic Centre Residents were invited to attend and could register by speaking to staff, calling the Customer Engagement Team on 01895 277038, or booking online. Tenant & Leaseholder Conference • Date: 26th September 2025 • Time: 11am-3:30pm • Location: Civic Centre Council Chambers This annual event is being co-produced with tenants and leaseholders to ensure it reflects their priorities. Both in-person and hybrid options will be available. Spaces are limited, so early booking is encouraged. December Assemblies Assembly for People with Disabilities & Carers: 11th December 2025 Older Person's Assembly: December 2025 (TBC) Special Interest Groups The Council is running several targeted engagement sessions to gather feedback and co-design services: Tenancy Management & Welfare Reform SIG • Date: 7th October 2025 • Time: 10:00am – 12:00pm • Location: Civic Centre Carers Forum Location: Civic Centre Open to anyone who is a carer or interested in learning more about support available. Complaints, Compliments & Learning SIG This group helps shape how the Council responds to feedback and improves services.

9	Questions and Answers Presentation 1 – Accessibility to Literature (Robert Sisk) Q1: Can you possibly order copies of the Care Act 2024? A: Robert said he would pass the request on, as he doesn't personally handle orders. He confirmed the library doesn't currently hold copies but will look into it. Q2: Do you do a talking programme? Everything seems to be on computers or laptops, but I can't see any of that. I find it disappointing that I can't get hold of a talking programme without paying a lot. A: Robert clarified that they offer talking books via CDs and USB sticks, which can be played on speaker boxes with Braille buttons. These are available through RNIB and the library's visual impairment group. He acknowledged that interactive, voice-controlled programmes aren't currently available but noted that technology is evolving rapidly, especially with AI. Q3: I've got a Daisy book reader for audiobooks, but I can't talk to it as an individual. A: Robert acknowledged the limitation and reiterated that while Daisy readers are useful, they don't offer conversational interaction. He mentioned emerging technologies that may offer more interactive features in the future. Q4: What about people who don't use computers? Everything seems to be digital. A: Robert introduced the "Learn My Way" programme—a free, modular digital skills course available in libraries and online. Marian added that the Council had secured laptops to run IT skills workshops across the borough. Presentation 2 – Cancer Awareness & Vaccinations (Sarah Derner & Judith George) Q5: How do you do the test for prostate cancer? A: Sarah explained that it's a blood test called a PSA test, which can be arranged through your GP. Q6: Does the chance of getting prostate cancer diminish after age 74? A: Sarah clarified that the risk does not diminish with age; in fact, it may increase. Since there's no national screening programme, it's important to monitor symptoms and request a PSA test if concerned. Q7: Why can't GP surgeries do the COVID vaccine? I'm having to find a chemist because my GP isn't offering it. A: Sarah explained that vaccine delivery is based on contracts awarded each year. Some GP practices may not have the contract, but many pharmacies do. She advised contacting your GP for home vaccination if needed. Q8: If you've already had RSV, is it worth getting the vaccination as well? A: Sarah wasn't certain and advised checking with a GP, as eligibility and recommendations may vary depending on individual health history. Updated Received 22/09/25 Judith George Q: The resident asked whether they still need to take RSV vaccine as they have had a lung infection and a respiratory virus in the last few years. A: The resident should seek advice from their GP who will be able to review the resident's medical records, assess and advise accordingly. Also included here is the NHS link regarding the RSV vaccine RSV vaccine - NHS (and who is eligible) which says: Getting vaccinated if you're unwell · If you have a high temperature, wait until you're feeling better before having the vaccine. · Contact your GP surgery, pharmacy or maternity service to rearrange your appointment.
10	Closing Shahina thanked all attendees, presenters and partner organisations for their valuable contributions to the Assembly. She expressed appreciation for the questions, feedback and shared experiences provided during the session. Any outstanding queries or actions will be followed up by the relevant teams where appropriate. The meeting was then formally closed, with thanks extended to all those attending in person and online.

