

LETTER SENT BY BLIND PEOPLE TO COUNCILLORS + M.P's.

Dear

I wish to bring to your attention my dissatisfaction with the current arrangements for meeting the needs of Blind and Visually Impaired people in Leeds. As a person with a visual impairment, I depend on these services and I am extremely unhappy with the changes which have been made recently.

In June of this year, the contract for provision of services for Blind, Visually Impaired and Dual Sensory Loss people was awarded by Leeds City Council to Leeds Vision Consortium (LVC). A number of services which were facilitated by the previous providers, - Leeds City Council Adult Social Care, and Cohearent Vision, were not included within the new contract. This has meant that several groups for Visually Impaired people no longer have a venue in which to meet; namely the OAKS, SOS group, craft group, Macular Degeneration group, women's group and the Federation for the Blind. Also the Textile Group, Readers Group and Musical Appreciationn.

I and the other members have relied for many years on these groups, which provide us with a place to meet and socialise with others who have similar impairments, and prevent us from becoming isolated in our own homes. It is disgraceful that these established support networks for people like myself should have been ignored within the new service provision.

Many other essential services previously provided by Shire View no longer exist, as they are not included in the LVC contract and therefore have lost all funding. These services include:

- Training Kitchen, for those learning to live with Visual Impairment.
- Low Vision Aids Room, for demonstration and access to products.
- Talking Book and Braille Library.
- Computer Room adapted for use by the Visually Impaired.
- News / Sports tapes.
- Annual holiday for those with Visual Impairment or Dual Sensory Loss.
- Cafe, tailored to the needs of Blind and Visually Impaired people.

The volunteers who have led or assisted with these groups and services are highly valuable in that they have a high level of awareness of the needs of sensory impaired people, and they are willing to continue to offer their time. However, due to the action of Leeds City Council the groups and services mentioned above have either already closed, or currently find themselves in an extremely vulnerable position. We have grave concerns about the future of the groups which have continued to meet since June at Centenary House, as this building is closing. The prospect of losing this important contact with peers and the support of our volunteers during the week is very distressing. Apart from this, some of the Groups mentioned above, and not housed at Centenary House, are now scattered around the City. This has meant the Rehabilitation Officers, and the Guide Dog Mobility Instructors, having to teach us, and our dogs, new routes. All very time consuming!

I know that many people including myself, were very disappointed to have to leave our previous venue, Shire View. This was a specially adapted building which had an award winning sensory garden which was enjoyed by all. Shire View also provided us with the opportunity to handle and buy equipment, which no longer exists.

Not only have the above facilities been removed; but those of us who attend the services which are now provided by LVC have found them to be sub-standard. For example,

- LVC have provided only one toilet for use by both men and women, on the same floor as the group is held. This means that we often queue to use these facilities, with many people having mobility problems and therefore being reluctant to use the alternative facilities further away on another floor. This has already led to the occasional accident.
- It is not possible for the access buses to drop off clients close to the door of the venue in Fairfax House. The mobility problems of members of the group mean that the walk of around 50m from the access bus to the venue is unpleasant for many people, and would be extremely difficult in winter weather conditions.
- LVC are unable to provide a hot meal during the day., which necessitates going over the road to the Merrion Centre. What will happen during the winter months as some Members are 100years old?

These factors alone mean that the service provided by LVC is entirely inferior to that provided by Shire View and is below the standard of service which we would expect to receive.

I look forward to receiving a response from you addressing the issues which

I have raised about the groups which fall outside the LVC contract, and about the LVC service provision itself. I respectfully ask that you take these concerns forward so that these matters can be resolved.

Yours sincerely,