

Walsall Society for the Blind.

Statement for the Special Health Scrutiny panel meeting to be held on 9th April 2014.

The Society has been consulting with Day Centre users in relation to this matter for over a year. Initially the decision to cease transport was made in February 2013, but after a meeting with the Chairman and the Day Centre Group Representatives on the 4th March 2013, the Board agreed to continue the transport for a further 12 months. Our agreed aim was to increase the numbers accessing the Day Centre to make the transport a more viable option, however one year on, there has been no increase in the numbers of individuals accessing the Day Centre or transport service.

Only 31 people utilise our transport, of which the cost to keep the transport in the last financial year was in excess of £34,000.00. We receive no funding towards the running of either the Day Centre or transport, which combined together cost the Society in the region of £78,000.00 per year. Following the Board meeting held on the 17th February 2014, the decision was made to cease the transport service as of the 30th June 2014.

The Board of Trustees understand the importance of transport to our clients and have created the post of a Community Engagement Officer, who will be working with all those affected by the removal of transport to support them in continuing to access the Day Centre.

We are keen to look at the use of volunteer escorts and drivers and setting up partnerships with local taxi firms, to ensure our clients are able to access a safe and secure, door to door transport service. The Board has also proposed that following the removal of transport, that no charges will be made for any person attending the Day Centre, making it the only free Day Centre provision within the Borough.

Walsall Society for the Blind is a local charity that has provided a lifeline to the visually impaired in the Borough since 1885. We are a specialist charity that provides expert support, advice and information to anyone in the Walsall area affected by sight loss, we do not receive any funding towards our Day Centre, transport, community work, Talking Newspaper and Magazine service or Transcription service. We currently spend in the region of £300,000.00 on the delivery of these services, employing

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17 members of staff, assisted by over 50 volunteers and we support 1,705 people affected by sight loss within the Borough of Walsall.

The Society like many other charities has been affected by the Local Authority austerity measures, the impact of the current recession and the introduction of benefit based charging within the Walsall Borough.

It is the responsibility of the Board of Trustees, for controlling the management and administration of the charity, which includes ensuring the charity is and will remain solvent, to use charitable funds and assets wisely. Our Board is made up of 11 individuals, of which 4 are visually impaired.

The Board of Trustees are looking towards the future of the Society, as we wish to continue to deliver our services to support all those affected by sight loss within the Borough of Walsall, for today and in the future.