

Case study 1: Use of an upstairs room for an event or activity open to the public, where there is no lift.

A new parent has just moved into the village and makes an appointment to meet a representative of the hall management committee to view the hall facilities. He is particularly interested in the activities they have for young people (he is a lone parent with 3 children under 5 years old and is hoping to register the 2 youngest into the toddler group and the older one into the local primary school). After a coffee, he is taken around the hall and notices that the toddler and pre-school sessions are on the first floor. As he cannot see a 'lift' he asks what arrangements there are for wheelchair users. The hall representative explains that they have not done anything as there are no wheelchair users in the village. Besides, the only room on the ground floor (the main hall) is booked for four mornings each week.

As a representative from your management committee, how should you respond?

- Thank him for highlighting an issue; but do not say 'we have no wheelchair users' as you don't know who might want to use the hall but does not, because they know that it does not accommodate wheelchairs!

- Agree to bring the issue to the next management committee meeting and to feedback to him with the response (i.e. an apology) and actions, which could include:
 - a) Inform all users that you are addressing the issues under the Disability Discrimination Act and seeking input and support from disabled people and/or their carers: a poster on the notice board, an article in the parish newsletter/website; make sure that the actions are recorded in the minutes of the meeting.
 - b) Arrange for an access audit which will highlight the work that needs to be done.
 - c) Develop a timed and costed action plan whereby the short term actions are implemented as soon as possible (medium and long term actions to be agreed in terms of timing and availability of financial resources).

d) Make sure you have written documentation to cover 'access' – i.e. what is and what is not 'accessible' and what arrangements you have made to accommodate these gaps. The minimum documentation should be an access or inclusion policy and the hire / letting agreement. These documents should be readily available (i.e. on noticeboard, given out to hirers and new user group co-ordinators). The hire / letting agreement should also include the health and safety and emergency evacuation procedure of the building for disabled people.

- Look at the options for changing the main hall room booking to an alternative room, at least on a temporary basis until there is a lift to the second floor. As sufficient time has passed for the legislation to have been implemented, any non accessible rooms should not really be hired out or charged. So, for example, if this case study related to the hire of the hall for a private party, the hirer takes responsibility for use of the upstairs room, but they are not actually charged for it. If it is too expensive, in terms of cost v benefit, to install a lift, the upstairs room should not be available for public hire.
- Encourage the parent to become involved in the management of the hall, or at least provide some guidance and support as to what improvements would be helpful for him and his family, and other disabled people. However, care should be taken that the disabled person has a good understanding of the needs of people with a range of different disabilities – i.e. sight impairment.
- Do not suggest you carry the wheelchair user up the stairs; disabled people are just like anyone else, they need their dignity and independence.