Physical Access and Accessing Information about the Opal Assessment and Demonstration Centre Coventry

Recommendations

August 2012
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1 Introduction

Coventry Local Involvement Network or LINk is one of 151 LINks in England set up by the Government through the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The role of a LINk is to enable local people to have greater influence on how local NHS and adult social care services are delivered and commissioned. Coventry LINk is an independent network of local people and local voluntary and community groups.

The Opal Assessment and Demonstration Centre is a partnership between Coventry City Council and NHS Coventry (now known as Arden Cluster). It aims to provide support for people to make the right choices about equipment in order to promote independence, choice and well being. The Opal provides a range of services to children and adults who are disabled and older people who are disabled or require additional support to maintain as much independence as possible, some of these are:

- Assessment for blue badge provision
- Assessment for range of equipment to assist with daily living
- Advice and information regarding a range of disability equipment
- Home adaptations to enable greater independence
- Meeting venue for range of community groups and organisations e.g. living with long term conditions groups, carer groups, wheelchair users group
- Provides a range of training to professional staff and independent sector providers – for example, manual handling, mobility assessment for applying/reapplying to blue badge scheme
- Works in conjunction with the community equipment service (housed on the same site)

LINk chose to do this piece of work as Coventry’s Physical and Visual Impairment Reference Group had carried out some mystery shopping which highlighted some access issues with regards to the centre. This was considered an important piece of work as there are over 7000 users of social care in Coventry, this figure does not account for people who self fund and are not eligible for support from Community Services.

In 2010 Coventry had an estimated population of over 315,000 people which equates to 0.6% of the country’s population. If the recent strong upward trend continues there will be an estimated population of 368,700 residents in 2033. Currently there are over 48,000 people living in Coventry aged 65 years or over, and the number who are over 80 years of age is growing, as it is nationally. About 20% of older people use Adult Social Care at some point in their lives. Currently there are over 7000 citizens who use Adult Social Care in Coventry.

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1 National Office of Statistics
2  Methodology

A preliminary meeting was held between LINk and The Opal Centre Manager, the location of the centre was discussed as it is set on an industrial estate and not directly on a bus route. It was informed that at The Opal Centre’s inception this was the best option available (due to resourcing) and was directly opposite the Equipment Service, which provides a variety of equipment (through loan), which has been recommended through the occupational therapy, community nursing and physiotherapy services. There are some early conversations currently happening within the council about having a city centre contact point that will signpost people to appropriate services. There is no more current information available, LINk will keep updated on these developments. There were also some discussions about what information is available to citizens with regard to the services that the Opal Centre can offer.

Coventry LINk set up a small task group to review the accessibility to information relating to the Centre. The task group met with the Service Manager and raised some concerns about physical access (whilst it is accepted that the building location cannot be moved there are some actions which could improve physical access) and access to information which are described in Section 5.

The manager of The Opal Centre invited LINk to review its information. It was agreed that the task group would look at the standard information that The Opal uses and if appropriate suggest improvements.

3  Findings

3.1  Physical Access

Once people arrive on to Widdrington Road there is no signage for The Opal Centre, which is not helpful as an industrial estate is not a location people would expect for this service. It is important that people know they are heading the right way, particularly if they are walking/using a wheelchair.

At the top of Cash’s Lane it is a shorter journey to get to The Opal Centre to turn immediately left into the Business Centre, continue towards the right hand side where a sign ‘The Opal’ is displayed on the side of the building. Although there is not a pathway until you reach the top of the car park neither is there a pathway the complete length of the roadway if the longer route is taken. The pathway that is available from the main entrance in to the Industrial Estate is often blocked by parked vehicles.

Through the course of the meeting we were informed that The Opal Manager is looking to identify more parking spaces for Opal visitors who are both disabled and non-disabled.
3.2 Access to information

Information that is used as marketing material and information contained in standard letters is not readily available in accessible formats.

The information leaflet’s target audience is currently for both potential customers looking to identify solutions to supporting their independence and professionals who may want to purchase training or hire rooms. This could be confusing for a customer who is a citizen being referred or someone who is self funding.

The information content of some of the standard letters is overly formal and daunting in places. The word ‘assessment’ is overused and does not necessarily inform the recipient of the letter what the assessment process is, which may be off putting for some people.

The information available on the website is not easy to access under the heading of ‘The Opal’ which is the current branding of the services provided at the Widdrington Road provision. Occupational Therapy is the main heading with nothing on this page referring to The Opal. The Opal is under a small heading on the second page. After clicking this heading The Opal is referenced in the second paragraph.

3.3 Service Provision

Blue Badge assessments are carried out at The Opal but administration and queries are dealt with at Spire House, where there is often a long delay for replacement badges and clocks (these are the cardboard clocks that are displayed in the windscreens of Blue Badge users’ vehicles, which due to the material of the teeth on the dials of the clocks regularly wear out). It is often difficult for people who have queries/applications in relation to ‘blue badge’ to access Spire House if they are dependent on using the city’s mobility scheme or having someone with them to provide additional support. Spire house does not provide face to face contact for the Blue Badge service, only telephone contact within a limited timeframe.

4 Conclusions

Coventry LINk recognises that ‘The Opal’ has a broad remit under its banner of Occupational Therapy Services to provide support to enhance the independence, well being and choice of a large amount of people from a vibrantly diverse city. Therefore it needs to provide information in a range of formats using a variety of communication tools. LINk also acknowledges the positive work ‘The Opal’ carries out in an ever changing financial landscape with reducing resources. Opal is committed to work in a continuous improvement model and has valued LINk’s input.

Coventry LINk welcomes the acknowledgment that The Opal is not ideally situated and understands that having The Opal in this current location is better than not having it at all. Giving regard to this it is fundamentally important that access to the building is as simple as possible and access to information is as easy as possible.
5 Recommendations

Amendments, deletions and insertions are made to the letters as suggested (see appendices).

That the information leaflet should be broken into 2 separate leaflets: one to inform potential customers who are citizens of the different facilities and services that are provided at The Opal, the second targeting professionals, businesses and organisations who may want to purchase services/training/room hire. This will help to simplify the content of the leaflets and contribute to the marketing strategy for The Opal.

5.1 The information leaflet should be available in other formats to include large font, disc and other languages. It is recommended that The Opal researches who its customers have been in the preceding 2 years and the first languages of these customers (if available). This will give a good indication of languages that are required. It is acknowledged that it is impractical to provide information in all languages that are spoken within Coventry. The Opal should follow Council policy guidelines and also invest in one off translations of material (to be kept as standard information) in languages identified through its research.

5.2 That The Opal works with the Estates Department of the Council to agree some additional signage be situated on the boundary of the industrial estate at both the Business Park entrance and the main Widdrington Road entrance.

5.3 As occupational therapies are a large contributory component of supporting a citizen’s independence, choice and well being it is recommended that The Opal has its own page on Coventry City council website giving detail about the services it provides for both citizens who meet the Council’s eligibility criteria for support and for those who are self funding. The Opal is a very important resource to promote citizen’s independence and therefore information should be as accessible as possible.

5.4 On The Opal’s dedicated web page there should be a You Tube link which should provide spoken information in a variety of languages including English and signed information in British Sign Language (BSL). The information should provide details of the services that are offered by The Opal. This will be good investment as it involves one off costs for translation and will reach far broader audiences which will improve access to information as well as contribute to The Opal’s marketing strategy.

5.5 The Blue Badge Scheme should be administrated, assessed and wholly managed at The Opal, which is more easily accessed by most people. The Opal should offer face to face support for citizens applying/reapplying for a blue badge.
6 Acknowledgements

Coventry LINk would like to extend gratitude to volunteers who gave their time to this piece of work. Coventry LINk appreciates and has valued the open way in which the management at the Opal has worked with it.

7 Response from Coventry City Council

The following letter of response to LINk’s recommendations was received from Brian Walsh, Director of Community Services at Coventry City Council. LINk has also had very positive discussion with the manger of The Opal

Dear David,

Adult Social Care has welcomed the involvement of Coventry LINk in working with ‘The Opal’ Assessment and Demonstration Centre.

The focus of the work has enabled Ron Innes, Head of Enablement and Therapy Services and his management team to understand the changes required to improve accessibility to the services offered at ‘The Opal’. The recommendations made regarding improving physical accessibility to the building and for improvements in written information available to potential users, reflect the needs of the side user group of ‘The Opal’.

As you will be aware, arrangements have already been made for the people to visit ‘The Opal’ for support regarding applications for Blue Badges and the provision of clocks. I can also inform you that it is planned for the Blue Badge Administration Team to be based at ‘The Opal’ in the near future.

All of the recommendations from the report will be incorporated into ‘The Opal’ development plan.

Many thanks again for your work in this area.
Appendices

Please note that all of the appended letters as standard have the Coventry City Council logo template as the header (it is not possible to recreate this in the appendix).

Note

Strike through (strike) indicates recommended deletions
Highlight indicates recommended insertions

Appendix 1

Critique of the Information Leaflet – The Opal Assessment and Demonstration Centre

General Comments
The information is clearly set out and quite informative, photographs support the written information well. An easy read version would improve access. The advice foot note on page 2 would be more accessible if it is black font.

Front Cover
Generally considered to be good, the ‘council blue’ font would be more pronounced in black.

Body of text on inside pages of leaflets
The following text is as currently appears in the leaflets with insertions and deletions added.

A partnership between Coventry City Council and NHS Coventry has led to the development of a new assessment and demonstration Centre opened in 2011. Our aim is to offer support for people to make the right choices about equipment in order to promote independence, choice and well being.

Display of equipment and accessible facilities
We can show you a huge range of equipment to enable you to do the things you want to achieve to, be that getting into the bath again or accessing the shops be as independent as possible. Occupational Therapy staff will be able to showcase you a range of equipment, from level access showers to stairlifts. This expert advice is impartial, whether the equipment is provided for loaned to you or you are buying it yourself.

Information Area

Your views on Your care
You are welcome to come and browse the information we have, or if there is a particular enquiry we will assist you to find solutions and products to help you be more independent, or put you in touch with those who can help you. You will find an internet access point that can direct you to self assessment, identifying solutions for you to try.

**Mobility – Getting around in the best way you can**

Various information is available which will assist you to find solutions and products to help you be more independent, or put you in touch with those who can help you. You will find an internet access point that can direct you to self assessment, identifying solutions for you to try.

**Maintaining mobility – Being able to get around as much as is possible**

Getting around in the best way you can is important and having the right equipment can help to prevent falls. We can show you walkers, wheelchairs and a small selection of scooters.

**A centre for learning**

With so much expertise, equipment and information under one roof The Opal is a great place to learn about how equipment and accessible environments can enable people. We plan to hold product awareness sessions, new equipment demonstrations, training for equipment, manual handling and adaptations. The rooms will be available for bookings.

**In the Demonstration house**

The demonstration house on the first floor is accessible by either the stairs, through floor lift or stair lift. People can see and try a range of equipment including riser/recliner chairs, bed/chair transfer equipment, and dressing aids. You can see telecare products. This equipment which can sense risks such as gas, smoke, flood and can remind you to take medication and even call for help if you fall.

**Showering and bathroom facilities**

This can be an area of concern for many people so we aim to identify issues and work together to seek solutions for you. At The Opal, we can show you level access showers, bath seats/boards and lifts and lots more. We encourage you to try out the equipment. If you would like to try out the equipment, we have a wash/dry w.c that can be used to support more independence. There is a range available.

**Kitchen**

This demonstrates how things can be changed to give access to areas in your kitchen. There are a wide range of aids such as cutlery, kettle tippers, pans and trolleys that can enable you to prepare, cook and carry food and drinks as well as a display of an accessible kitchen layout which shows how to make best use of your space to suit your needs.

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**Opening hours**

Mon – Thurs 9.30am-4.30pm
Fridays 9.30am-4.00pm

Please telephone us to book an appointment for an assessment. If you just wish to view equipment drop in between the opening hours.

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**Getting here**

By car /As a pedestrian (longer route)
When coming from the city centre along Foleshill Road, turn left at Cash’s Lane, left onto Widdrington Road, continue round to the Industrial Estate main entrance and follow the road round to The Opal which will be on your left.

As a Pedestrian
When coming from the city centre along Foleshill Road, turn left at Cash’s Lane, immediately as you turn left onto Widdrington Road, turn left again into the business centre car park, stay to the right hand side of the car park, turn right at the last building on the right hand side and right again.

Parking
There are spaces available in front of and opposite The Opal building.

Bus routes
Route 13 to Sandy Lane (bus stop opposite Somerset Road), and walk along Widdrington Road
Routes 20, 40, 50 and 60 to Foleshill Road (bus stop next to Cash’s Lane) and then walk up Cash’s Lane, turn on to Widdrington Road. Please note Cash’s Lane is uphill and allow 10 mins walk from the bus stop.

Ring and Ride 024 76602177
[be mindful that eligibility is currently under consultation, it may be better to provide the phone number for Ring and Ride without providing additional information as if this changes your information will be null and void]
Ring and ride new users – to register, phone above telephone number and they will register you to book a journey.
Standard journeys – you can book two days before your trip, however we cannot guarantee availability on the bus.
Booking trips in advance – you can book four trips in advance every six months. Please contact Ring and Ride for details.
Appendix 2

Dear

THE BLUE BADGE SCHEME OF PARKING CONCESSIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH WALKING DISABILITIES AND REGISTERED BLIND PEOPLE

I am writing in response to your application for a disabled persons parking badge. An appointment has been allocated for you to attend a Mobility Assessment with an Occupational Therapist. Please bring a copy of your prescription as evidence of proof of medication. This may be one of the following:

- Your repeat prescription
- A print out from UHCW stating the medications you take
- [add any other valid proof]

Please do not bring your medication with you unless you need to take it whilst you are here. If you have had an Occupational Therapy assessment in the past, please provide details at your appointment.

Your appointment details are as below:

Date: [move this up to keep info to 1 page]
Time: [move this up to keep info to 1 page]

To confirm your attendance, or re-arrange the appointment if it is inconvenient, please contact our team on 02476 785252 between [insert opening hours]

If we have not heard from you within 28 days of this letter we will place your application on hold until you contact us.

Your Mobility Assessment will take place at our assessment centre below:

The Opal, Unit 17-18 Bishopgate Business Park, Widdrington Road, Coventry. CV1 4NA [present address on continual line to keep info to 1 page]

Parking is available on site for the duration of your appointment.

Yours sincerely

Blue Badge Assessment Team
Appendix 3

Dear

We are writing in response to the referral for an occupational therapy assessment concerning the difficulties you are having around the home, and we would like to offer you an appointment to attend the Opal Assessment Centre where your needs can be discussed and an assessment made.

Date of the appointment:
Time:
Place: The Opal Assessment and Demonstration Centre, 17–18 Bishopsgate Business Park, Widdrington Road, CV1 4NA

Please find the enclosed map for directions. Parking is available.

Please go to the reception upon your arrival.

You do not need to confirm that you will attend but if you are unable to attend you are required to inform us of this by calling 02476 785252. If you do not attend we will assume that you no longer require the service and your case will be closed.

Prior to the appointment we ask you to complete the enclosed information and to bring this with you to your appointment. Providing us with the dimensions required will enable us to establish the most appropriate equipment to meet your needs. It is essential that you have this with you for us to make an assessment recommend the right support equipment for you.

As some provision is financially assessed: Please bring with you any evidence of income related benefits i.e. income support, guaranteed pension credit, housing benefit, council tax benefit, working/child tax credit.

If you have any concerns regarding this appointment, please contact us on 02476 785252 and ask to speak to a member of the Intake Team.

We look forward to seeing you at the centre
Yours sincerely

Chris Green/Alison Nixon
Clinical Team Leaders Therapy Services

Please read carefully
Data protection Act 1998
The Data Controller is Coventry City Council
The details you provide on this form will only be used in connection with your request for an Occupational Therapy Assessment and your information may be shared with other Social Care/Health Agencies
Appendix 4

Dear

Thank you for your recent enquiry to the Occupational Therapy Service. Following an initial assessment of your needs, we have made arrangements for the following services to be provided:

If further assessment gaining a more in depth understanding of your needs has been recommended by the Service, you will be contacted in due course of the assessment to inform you of the meeting date.

For all enquiries related to provision of minor adaptations (such as grab rails, stair rails etc), please contact 7683 2960 quoting your job reference number .......

Whitefriars tenants should contact 7676 7160.

For Equipment Provision please contact Integrated Community Equipment Service on 024 7625 6145.

Yours sincerely

Ron Innes
Head of Therapy Services
Appendix 5

Dear Sir/Madam

Outcome of Assessment

CHRONICALLY SICK AND DISABLED PERSONS ACT 1970

I am writing to inform you that:

Has been assessed met with a member of by the Occupational Therapy Service, Community Services Directorate. The outcome of this meeting the assessment has highlighted the need for the provision of:

Community Services will be making arrangements for the work to be provided at the property. If you have any objections to the nature of the work then please contact us on the number above. If we do not hear from you within 10 days then we will presume that you are happy for the work to be undertaken. We can assure you that all work will be carried out by either by a contractor under the supervision of the City Council or the Tenant if they elect to have a direct payment. There is no charge to you for this work as it will be funded in part or in full, by the City Council under the terms of the above Chronically Sick And Disabled Persons Act 1970.

Yours sincerely

Ron Innes
Head of Therapy Services
Appendix 6

Dear

Thank you for your application for a Disabled Persons Parking Badge received on XX/XX/XXXX.

The council is authorised and required to determine the eligibility of applicants for a Disabled Persons Parking Badge under the below relevant statutes and related Government guidance. Your Application was considered under regulation 8, 4 (2) (f) of the Disabled Person's (Badges for Motor Vehicles) Regulations 2000.

The Council must adhere to the Department for Transport Guidance for Local Authorities and the council is not permitted to issue a parking badge to an applicant who does not meet the specific eligibility criteria.

I regret to inform you that your application for a Disabled Person's Parking Badge has been declined, under Regulation 8 (2) (b) of the Disabled Person's (Badges for Motor Vehicles) Regulations 2000. Information regarding this legislation can be found by visiting www.coventry.gov.uk/bluebadge and clicking on the Direct Gov link on the right hand side of the page.

The reason for this decision is:

The decision to decline your application at this stage will not affect further applications made by yourself should any of your conditions deteriorate or you become entitled under the automatic criteria, details of these can be found in the leaflet "Can I Get a Blue Badge" issued by the Department for Transport.

Yours sincerely

Blue Badge Service
Coventry LINk is an independent network supported by the charity Voluntary Action Coventry, which acts as the Host organisation.

Coventry LINk is one of 151 LINks in England.

Coventry LINk
C/O Voluntary Action Coventry, 29 Warwick Road
Coventry, CV1 2ES