

From: "Colin Bennett" <colinbbennett@onetel.com>
To: "CaseWorker" <CaseWorker@drc-gb.org>
Sent: Tuesday, May 24, 2005 11:48 AM
Subject: Re: Disability discrimination enquiry

Dear Amanda

Thank you for this email. The email i sent you on 23 May did not contain any potent information. It was as you surmise merely a gentle request for an update.

I was out all day Thursday. Incidentally i was helping a freind of mine at an Appeals Tribunal. He had written before the hearing to check whether there was an induction loop in the room but receieved no reply. When i arrived at the building which is City Gate House in Brighton, i was cordially greeted by a clerk who told me that the Hearing was being moved to a room where there WAS an induction loop. There was a large notice to say so on the door. In fact, there was no working induction loop during the hearing that lasted nearly three hours. I pointed this out to the chairman at the beginning and told him that no induction loop could work without microphone/s. He was courteous and told me that he thought there was a microphone embedded in the ceiling.

At the end of the hearing, i told him that i was unable to hear most of the proceeding because of the lack of induction loop or whatever. I gave him a one minute information brief on induction loops etc. He promised to refer my points to the management of the building. He is a barristor called Christopher Smith/e. All that i have written above is just an aside but i will pursue the matter.

I turn to your questions now:

1. The Falmer public enquiry resumed on 2 Feb 2005 in the Council Chamber at Brighton Town Hall. I have attended meetings there over many years and can assure you that there has never been a working induction loop or infa-red system in the public gallery. The Council contend that there is an induction loop in the public gallery but despite requests they have never demonstrated it to me. They say that they cannot use it because it interferes with meetings in Commitee room number 1 which they say is below.

Prior to 2 feb i engaged in correspondance with bot h the Council and the Planning Inspectorate in Bristol, in particular with Barbara Bay (the "Programme Officer") I think thats the term!) And Baljeet Mann who is the "Disability Officer" at Bristol. They were helpful.

On attending the enquiry on 2 Feb i spoke to the inspector from the public gallery. i told him that there was no induction loop or similar installed or at least working. I told him that there was now a PA system working in the public gallery which is a fairly recent innovation. He knew who i was from the correspondance i had had with Bristol. He invited me to leave the public gallery and make my way to the floor of the council chamber where the Members sit. He told me that an induction loop had been installed surrounding soem of those seats. I had the impression that that had happened recently. Sure enough, in a seat i was shown to, i was able to hear the proceedings by means of that local induction loop.

Obviously, during normal council meetings those Members seats are occupied by Members and so i cannot go there. In any case i am a member of the public and expect to be able to hear the decisions made by my elected representatives from the public gallery. I happen to know that several of the members have hearing problems. It seems to me unreasonable that those Members should be asked to go to a certain part of the chamber where the mini loop is fitted as they may wish to sit with their Party colleagues or elsewhere according to their wishes.

It is ironic that Committee room 1 (alluded to above) is a room in which I have attended many meetings particularly since 1997 when Brighton and Hove were amalgamated. I am an active member of the Disability Access Advisory Group (DARG). I am constantly complaining that there is no induction loop in that room and so I have great difficulty following the meetings. When DARG doesn't meet in that room we meet in the Council chamber at Hove town hall where there is a functioning induction loop with at least 78 microphones. I know this because that was as the result of a successful campaign by me. The problem there is that at most times the induction loop is either not turned on or not working. According to the management of Hove town hall the induction loop has been out of operation for several months now. They are always waiting for some mysterious component to be delivered. I often attend

Hove town hall Council Chamber, for example to attend planning committee meetings, and I am constantly frustrated by the failure of the very expensive induction loop system to work.

I believe I have answered questions 1, 2 and 3 above. I did ask Heather Jones, secretary (or something like that) to the chief executive, in about December 2004, if I may be

present for a demonstration that there is an induction loop in the public gallery of the Council chamber. This was declined although Barbara Bay was eager for me to be present. At this juncture I would like to say how helpful Barbara Bay has been before 2 Feb, on 2 Feb and subsequently.

It may be helpful to tell you that the procedure whereby PINS (the planning inspectorate) which is based in Bristol arrange Public Inquiries is that they require the appropriate Local Authority to provide a suitable venue for the PI. It is the duty of the LA to meet the requirements of the DDA and the LA must assure PINS that the venue does so. The tricky bit is when PINS have doubts (as for example contacted by awkward people like me) that the venue does not need the DDA. It is not easy for PINS to challenge what the LA says and that's where I come into play.

Question 4: I have never encountered any interference to the induction loop arrangement from committee room 1 to the public gallery or vice versa. I have never heard speech via an induction loop in either venue, nor had it such alleged working demonstrated to me.

5. NO. As far as I am concerned, there is no working induction loop in committee room 1. For many years I have asked for this alleged induction loop to be

revealed. Similarly, there has never been any interference from any alleged induction loop in the public gallery to the alleged induction loop in committee room 1. I should add that committee room 1 is on the ground floor and the council chamber and public gallery are on the second floor. I only have it from the council that the council chamber is vertically over committee room 1.

6. No I did not respond. I thought that the question was cynical. He knows perfectly well that I have attended meetings at Brighton council chamber many times and have complained always of the lack of induction loop. Until recently I have also complained that there was no PA system there and that even when it had been installed it was usually not turned on.

It's interesting to note that several Council members told me that at a council meeting on 10 March 2005 (I think) there was no sound amplification whatsoever. The council meeting was told that the electricians had struggled for three hours earlier that day but had failed to get any of the microphones or

loud speakers to work at all. One might have thought that a way forward then would have been to have adjourned. I think this episode indicates the sloppy attitude the council has to ensuring that people, including elected members, hear what is being said in the public domain.

I remind you that these problems of lack of induction loops apply to nearly all the venues in the council buildings. In particular i mention the difficulties cause to me by the fact that there is no induction loop in committee room 3 of Hove town hall. I pften attend meetings in this room, the last being on 18 May 2005 when i attended a meeting of the Local Access Forum (set up under the CRoW act) of which i am an elective member. am sorry ive gone on a lot but this concerns a big issue in my life. At 1 pm today i am attending a Board meeting (as a member of the public) of my local primary care trust. These Board meetings have often been held in the above mentioned CR3 of HTH. The meeting today is in the Ausitorium of the Brighthelm Centre where there is an induction loop. I know this because i campaigned for that and subsequent to it being installed i had to campaign further for it to be turned on! I am a little bit of a thorn in the side of the NHS bodies but we are making some progress.

Thank you for your attention, yours sincerely

Colin Bennett