

Facilities Committee May 14th 2019 – Item 10 – Correspondence

Test extract from email received 30th April 2019 from Rachel George

Thank you for being so keen to discuss the issues I raised today at your launch event.

I attended with excited anticipation that I would be taking photos and promoting the facility widely, but I cannot promote something that we know many people cannot use, certainly not when my own son cannot use it.

As I mentioned, Adam is 12 years old, and will be 13 in a few months. He is over 5ft tall and was 8.5 stone last time he was weighed. He is going to be bigger than me soon. A lot of changing places users are bigger than their carers.

Many carers have injuries and cannot use a mobile hoist at all, myself included. Many individuals have needs which make it unsafe for them and for carers to use a mobile hoist. At least two carers are required for safe use and most users do not have two carers with them at all times. Family users will also be used to ceiling hoists at home, and many will never have used a mobile hoist before so will not know how to use it. My son has PAs who support him at various times and none of his team are trained to use a mobile hoist as we know it is not safe for Adam or for the carers. I have attached a copy of the letter his Occupational Therapist wrote after assessing a mobile hoist for suitability at another venue.

My son is not the only person a mobile hoist is not suitable for. Adults find them particularly hazardous as knees get bumped a lot, and many who depend on hoisting have weak bones which are at increased risk of breaking. Many users who have cerebral palsy will be unable to control all their movements and a mobile hoist would be very dangerous for them. Some users are able to hoist themselves independently, as described here by an Iraq war veteran. <https://ordinaryhopes.com/2019/04/09/iraq-war-veteran-changing-places-user/> It is important to know how people use these facilities. This man became a wheelchair user due to war injuries, but became a Changing Places user due to an injury sustained in a poorly designed toilet.

The room at Liskeard is slightly smaller than the required minimum size so could only be registered as a Changing Places toilet if it had a ceiling hoist. There is a government consultation happening right now which will lead to these facilities becoming mandatory in certain developments, and that range will be widened as time goes on. Part of the consultation is going to be about the standard required and users are very clear that mobile hoists do not work for them. Not only do they require extra carers, they also add a lot of time to the process and that can make the difference between making it to the toilet, and not. The Changing Places Consortium has publicly stated that they are recommending that ceiling track hoists must be the standard, “We will make the case that ceiling track hoists should be a mandatory requirement for Changing Places toilets given the recognised manoeuvring issues associated with mobile hoists.” http://www.changing-places.org/news/mobile_hoists_.aspx

Unfortunately, the Town Council were given poor advice. Architects, sadly, often have very limited knowledge of these facilities. When they thought that the ceiling might not support a hoist they should have called in a specialist company, like Closomat, to discuss options. And, if it really couldn't be done in that space, a different space should have been considered. You should not have been advised to go ahead with a project that will not be a Changing Places

toilet, especially not when there is a government consultation happening. These facilities need to include all and this one does not.

I mentioned Closomat during our discussions as they installed ceiling hoists at both Newquay Zoo and Exeter Services even though neither of those places had ceilings which could support it. I am not affiliated with them, but I have attended a site visit with their expert, Kelvin Grimes. If anyone can find a solution to the issue in the current space, it is Kelvin. <https://www.closomat.co.uk/index.php/changing-places/changing-places.html>

There are also several smaller issues with the room layout, which suggests that poor advice was given. The lack of a privacy screen, for example. Carers often cannot leave the person they are supporting, but it is not appropriate to use the toilet in front of the person they care for. The privacy screen is vital to enable carers to use the facility. Another is regarding space either side of the toilet. Many users can self transfer, but only if they can get their chair in the right position beside the toilet. That would involve reversing round the sink on one side, and avoiding the shower unit on the other. A shower is not an essential in these facilities, though nice to have, but the remote control feature will have added unnecessary expense. Things like the mirror being tiny makes it unusable for many and there should be a full length one in the room. The soap dispenser is in the wrong place, the towel dispenser cannot be reached by an independent user with wet hands and the hand dryer is behind the hoist, some distance from the sink, which is a very odd location for all users. I know that Jamie Hanlon, from Accessibility Cornwall will be in touch about those things as that is his area of expertise. I don't profess to be an expert in these facilities, which is why I offer a user perspective but defer to expert companies which install the facilities for the extra details.

I am so very sorry that I am not able to celebrate the launch of the facility. I had planned to bring my son along to it and decided at the last minute to come alone. It is lucky that I took that decision as we would have had to leave immediately as he would have travelled for an hour to find that he was unable to use the facility. The nearest facility with a ceiling hoist is at Cornwall Services, so we would have needed to dash there to avoid an accident. My son would have been devastated.

I am also sorry that you were not given better advice. The Changing Places Consortium are keen to ensure that people offering advice about these facilities are better informed so that this sort of thing does not happen.

I am happy to be involved in any way that I can help. Getting it right is so important.

Many thanks for wanting to be inclusive and for your assurance that you will find a way to make it work.

Rachel George