

**Newcastle Airport Passenger Assistance Forum**

**Minutes of Meeting**

**17th October 2019**

**13:00 – 17:00**

**Present Representing**

Jo Reese-Proud (JRP) Chair

Tanya Wood (TW) Passenger

Gina Tiller (GT) Passenger

Louise Borrell (LB) Deaflink

Tracey Hadaway (TH) Alzheimer’s Society

Chloe Brown (CB) Type 1 Kidz

Vicky Venus (VV) Mencap

Fiona Raje (FR) Airport Consultative Committee

Dionne Smith (DS) Percy Hedley Foundation

Andy Bowey (AB) Consultant Orthopaedic Spinal Surgeon

Linda Oliver (LO) Guide Dogs for the Blind

Roger Bessent (RB) Access Assistant

Angus Huntley (AH) Newcastle Vision Support

David Burdus (DB) Burdus Access

**For Newcastle International Airport (NIAL)**

Tara Hurst (TH) Customer Service Support Officer

Scot Robinson (SR) Passenger Services Operations Manager

Andy Alexander (AA) Terminal Manager

Craig Strickland (CS) Security Supervisor

Danielle Whitfield (DW) Media and Public Affairs Executive

1. **Introductions**

TH welcomed all of the members and thanked everyone for attending the Airport Boardroom. She gave members an outline of the day, and said that there would be opportunities for comfort breaks throughout the session. TH then went on to introduce JRP, and explained that she would be chairing each of the meetings going forward – with DS to deputise. The forum agreed that they were happy with this approach.

JRP said that the purpose of the meeting was to gather together from different groups to discuss the passenger experience and how this could be improved at Newcastle International Airport.

The Chair then asked that the members each introduce themselves and discuss who they would be representing whilst attending the forum. The members introduced themselves as detailed in the above list.

1. **Why are we here?**

TH explained that all airports should have Passenger Assistance Forums to comply with regulations set out by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). AA told the Forum that Article 9(1) of the CAP1228 stated that airports must set quality standards with different organisations representing disabled passengers and passengers with reduced mobility. He added that airports should involve local access and disability groups, as well as passengers, to provide a list of questions that the airport can use to assess the suitability of its facilities.

GT suggested that Newcastle International Airport Ltd (NIAL) staff members are reminded that not all of the attendees are familiar with “airport speak” and industry-specific terms should be simplified for the benefit of the group.

AA explained that accessibility forums should meet twice a year to discuss performance-monitoring systems, quality standards, advice on equipment and advice on new developments. TH said that the CAA also advise forums to undertake practical inspections and walk-throughs, which would be carried out towards the end of the session.

1. **Assistance Regulations and Statistics**

SR carried out a presentation on assistance regulations and statistics. He highlighted the different categories of assisted passengers as follows:

* WCHR – Wheelchair RAMP
* WCHS – Wheelchair STAIRS
* WCHC – Wheelchair CARRY
* DPNA – Disabled Passenger Needs Assistance
* BLIND – Blind Passenger
* DEAF – Deaf Passenger

He explained that all airports are regulated by both the CAA and have to comply with EC 1107/2006 – which is a European Parliament regulation concerning the rights of disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility when travelling by air.

SR explained that the number of passengers with reduced mobility (PRM) had increased significantly over the past two years. He said that in 2019, there had been 19% more PRM’s travelling through the airport than the year prior – with around 73,590 assisted over the year.

1. **Process, Vehicles and Equipment**

SR played a video for the forum which detailed the full passenger journey from landside to airside.

He then talked the group through all of the different types of equipment that the passenger services team use at Newcastle Airport. This included Eagle Hoists, Staxi Wheelchairs and the PaxLift – which has only recently been introduced at the airport.

DB said that he had some problems reaching the ticket on entry to the carpark, as his vehicle is fairly high. He suggested the possibility of having additional ticket access at a higher level.

1. **Hidden Disabilities**

TH carried out a presentation on hidden disabilities. She explained that around 11% of the UK population have hidden or invisible disabilities – and 7% of British people are potentially avoiding air travel because of this. She outlined the difficulties that passengers with hidden disabilities may face when travelling through an airport.

TH showed the group the hidden disabilities lanyard – and outlined the purpose of it as to discretely raise awareness amongst all airport staff to respond accordingly to that particular passenger.

She also outlined the other services available to hidden disabilities passengers where needed – including assistance at check-in, fast track, escort and priority boarding. TH explained that there are a number of different downloadable materials on the Newcastle Airport website that might be useful for members to feed back to their relevant organisations.

LO stated that as a passenger booking assistance, once you have contacted the airline that was the extent of the service. She said she was not aware that you could contact passenger services directly to arrange being collected from the car park. She asked if it would it be possible to create a simple leaflet signposting steps. TH advised that this was something currently being developed.

TH told the Forum how a calming sensory area had recently been installed in Gate 31 to aid passengers with hidden disabilities. An ADi Roommate had also been installed in the toilets to aid visually impaired passengers when using the facilities.

LO suggested that Sighted Guiding training would be beneficial to support staff assisting blind or partially sighted passengers. She said that she will advise on possibility of The Guide Dogs providing ‘Train the Trainer’ sessions for the future meeting.

1. **Customer Feedback Methods**

TH then carried on her presentation by discussing how passengers can give feedback to the airport. She explained that there are five main ways in which any passenger can give feedback – by social media, email, verbal, letter or by using the survey apps within the terminal.

She explained that the Airports Council International (ACI) carry out airport service quality (ASQ) surveys to assess passenger experience. In 2018, over 1,330 surveys were carried out for 88 different destinations – and NIAL won the title of Best Airport by Size and Region (5–15 million passengers in Europe). She explained that this title was also awarded in 2017.

DB advised the forum of a successful trial in LHR where a mobile app is used to communicate passengers location and requirements to the airport. He said that the passenger’s details are held on their account and comms are made in real time, allowing greater independence and wayfinding. He said that feedback is now available on the trial and suggested it would be useful to NIAL.

1. **Lunch**

The members broke for lunch and refreshments in the Denyer Suite.

The Chair needed to leave due to other commitments, and the Deputy Chair took an acting role.

1. **Passenger Journey Walk-around**

The members did a full walk-around through the airport as though they were passengers. This started at check-in and went all the way to the gate, before turning back and taking the journey of an inbound passenger though Border Force and the International Arrivals hall.

The walk-around took approximately 90 minutes.

1. **Q&A and suggestions**

The Acting Chair said that an official Terms of Reference should be drafted for the group. DB suggested that the group needed to be officially formalised.

TH asked the forum if they had any questions for NIAL staff. AH said that it was good to know what the Airport have done so far to improve services for assistance passengers, but asked how NIAL wanted to improve further. He also asked what developments the airport has coming up, and how the newly-established forum could help with this going forward. SR said that he would take feedback from the meeting to look at how services could be further improved. TH said that the forum would be updated on new projects in any future meetings, and consultations could take place.

DB said it would be good for NIAL to look at intersectionality within assisted passengers – and gave the example that there are no non-binary disabled toilets. \*\*\*But there are\*\*\*

AH suggested that it would be a good idea to put a phone number for car parks and for passenger services all in one place on the Newcastle Airport website. He also said it would be a good idea for this to be circulated within the group.

LO raised that it would be a good idea for a key number of staff to be properly trained when it comes to sight guiding. She said that there is more to guiding than just taking someone’s arm, and thought that this would significantly improve the passenger journey for visually impaired travellers.

GT asked how the airport feels about tipping assistance helpers. SR said that it is a matter for individual discretion, but he would advise staff to politely decline unless the passenger was insistent.

AB suggested it would be a good idea for a video to be developed for passengers before travelling. He said other airports use virtual reality videos to get young passengers ready for the airport experience to help with anxiety. He also stated that he didn’t feel the majority of his patients would need to use a hidden disabilities lanyard, but said that they could still use many of the other initiatives in place.

1. **AOB**

The Acting Chair closed the meeting, as there was no other business.

1. **Date of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting is to be communicated to each of the members once decided by NIAL.