



## **AccessABZ**

**Friday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2017**

### **Attendees**

Sam Reid (SR)	Deaf Action
Shona Owen (SO)	Service User
Kelly Johnson (KJ)	Aberdeen City Council
Kevin Douglas (KD)	Aberdeen International Airport
Fraser Bain (FB)	Aberdeen International Airport
Margaret Mackenzie	Aberdeen International Airport
Alison Conn	Aberdeen International Airport
Phionna Mcinnes-Pirie (PMP)	Me Too Magazine
Judith Forbes (JF)	NHS
Diane King (DK)	Grampian Opportunities
Graeme Coutts (GC)	G4S

### **Apologies**

Glyn Morris	Friendly Access
Sarah Geoghegan	Alzheimer Scotland – Action on Dementia
Stan Flett	Disability Action Group
Alistair Williamson	Disability Action Group
Xandra Shearer	Orkney Health and Care Partnership Board
Andrea Barclay	Service User

### **Notes from Meeting**

#### Introductions

FB welcomed everyone to the Forum - attendees provided introductions. FB explained that unfortunately there had been some late cancellations for different reasons but those who could not make it had all asked to be included in the distribution of the minutes and informed of future meetings.

*(\*The presentation provided by FB will be circulated to Forum members separately)*

## 1. Airport Operational Update

FB provided a review of 2016 in terms of the overall passenger numbers and specific data concerning Passengers with Reduced Mobility. (PRM's).

Excluding helicopter passenger numbers the airport handled 2,650,690 passengers in 2016. This represented a 12% decline on the previous year - the impact of the global downturn in oil was the main contributory factor.

By contrast the number of recorded PRM's increased on the previous year. In 2016, 20,102 passengers were provided with assistance which represented a 10% increase from 2015. Looking back further PRM numbers have risen each year from 11,436 in 2010 to over 20,000. This is a 76% increase in PRM's in 6 years.

The next slides that were presented looked in more detail at the number of assistance requests made in 2016. It was noted that the period from June through to October and the month of December was the busiest in terms of assistance requests.

We continue to monitor the % of PRM's that are pre-notified as it is widely recognised that this can help ensure assistance requests are met on time. Overall in 2016 78% of PRM's were pre-notified 48 hours prior to the scheduled time of departure. It is accepted that 100% is not possible given the general nature of travel and specifically the late changes that take place with hospital patients travelling to and from ARI.

The CAA, the regulatory body overseeing the provision of assistance at UK airports will shortly be publishing data for all UK airports which will be used as a comparison. The best performing airlines reached close to 90% whereas the worst performing only had 2% pre-notified. The recording of this data allows us to identify where issues may lie with certain airline's communication channels and will lead to an action plan to rectify.

A quarter of all PRM requests in 2016 were recorded as 'no shows' which meant that these passengers chose not to use the service. It is thought that the main reason for such a high number (which can impact on the provision of assistance elsewhere) is because many passengers select assistance for their booking for larger airports such as Hub airports or for transiting between flights. Aberdeen is a relative small airport in terms of walking distances compared to many other airports. There is no means by which passengers can select certain sectors of their flight for assistance or certain airports which means a request for assistance will be made at all of the airports they visit in their journey.

A breakdown of the various assistance requests in 2016 was then presented. Consistently the most popular type of request is for assistance to and from the bottom of the aircraft steps (WCHR) without the need for a lift on to the plane – in 2016 it equated to 64% of all requests. Over a quarter of all requests are for assistance to and from the aircraft requiring the use of the Ambulift vehicle which lifts passengers up and down (WCHS) but only 5% are for assistance to and from the seat (WCHC). Blind passengers represent 1% and Deaf passengers 0.6%. We are seeing an increasing

number of DPNA requests being made. DPNA passengers are classed as self-reliant with an intellectual disability requiring assistance.

A summary of complaints, compliments and enquiries was presented and a discussion took place regarding the nature of some of these and the action taken in response. Although not discussed at the time, the assistance contractor has highlighted that many passengers are very appreciative of the service provided but this is not translated into formal compliments.

## 2. Latest Updates

FB next took the opportunity to update the group regarding progress that had been made since the last forum meeting.

### **New Assistance Seating**

New assistance seating has been provided in the Assistance area landside, in the lower departure lounge and at Gate 10 which is an area used frequently by PRM passengers travelling in particular to Orkney and Shetland. The seating is purpose built and is higher and wider than the previous assistance seats – it also has arm rests and the recognised assistance symbols are embroidered in to the upholstery. The seats stand out as they are blue, which will hopefully make it more obvious that they are not for general use.

### **Manning of Assistance Area**

The assistance area prior to Security is now manned permanently throughout the day by the person who co-ordinates the assistance service. This has been widely welcomed by passengers who feel reassured that there is someone who can answer questions and provide updates as well as organisations who rely on the PRM service e.g. Red Cross.

### **Lanyards**

We are in the process of placing an order for lanyards which will be offered to passengers who feel that they would benefit from letting airport staff know that they may require additional support as they pass through the terminal. Lanyards are in use at other UK airports and have proven popular in particular with passengers with hidden disabilities as it can help in terms of retaining independence. It was discussed that it will be very important that all airport staff are fully aware of what the lanyards signify so they are in a position to help if required and FB confirmed an awareness campaign would precede the introduction of the lanyards.

## **Airport Website**

The assistance pages of the Aberdeen International Airport website ([www.aberdeenairport.com/assistance](http://www.aberdeenairport.com/assistance)) have been updated in recent months with a new section introduced on Travelling with Additional Support Needs. This explains the services and facilities that we currently offer and provides visual guides of a journey through the airport. We have provided familiarisation tours of the airport for several years but we are now trying to make more people aware as the feedback we receive is nearly always very positive.

## **Training**

We have been busy providing our front line operational teams with Basic Disability Awareness and Equality training. The training package was designed in association with several large disability organisations to ensure the material was up to date and relevant for an airport. It covers specific issues faced by passengers on the autistic spectrum and those living with dementia, mental health, learning difficulties, sight and hearing loss and epilepsy.

We have also provided more in depth training through a Dementia workshop organised by Upstream Scotland, an organisation that works with people affected by dementia to improve mobility services. This led to the provision of 2 Dementia Friends training sessions by Alzheimer Scotland in the last quarter of 2016. Most recently both Upstream and Alzheimer Scotland attended the airport with a Positive Dementia Group (3 persons living with Dementia plus their carers) to understand what the airport currently provides and potential changes that could be made.

Looking ahead we will be carrying out more in depth training for our teams on Autism and Sensory Issues with the help of two organisations; Friendly Access and North East Sensory Services. We also plan to hold further Dementia Friends training sessions.

## **Use of Social Media**

We have recognised the power and reach of our Social Media channels to increase awareness of our assistance service and facilities and it was pleasing to note that our recent post about our Positive Dementia Group reached the largest number of people out of all of AIA's marketing messages that week.

We were keen to use the recent Disabled Access Day (10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> March) as a way of promoting our services to the local community and although we did not hold an open day we used our Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts to share what we do.

## **World Autism Awareness Week**

We will be taking part in World Autism Awareness Week and will be hosting the National Autistic Society on Monday 27<sup>th</sup> as they launch a Virtual Reality roadshow.

## **Assistance Contract**

Lastly we advised that the Assistance contract is currently up for tender and 4 companies have entered the tendering process. It is hoped that the successful company will be confirmed in May.

### 3. Terminal Transformation Update

A couple of slides were presented with the latest pictures of the Terminal Transformation project. Phase 1 of the project, which includes new International and Domestic Arrivals areas and new Executive Lounges is on schedule to be completed in the summer.

### 4. Hidden Disabilities

FB discussed the guidance document that the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has produced for airports with regards to hidden disabilities and reviewed the airports progress towards meeting these guidelines.

### 5. Updates from elsewhere

FB presented a slide with some headlines from the media following the publication of the CAA guidelines. The headings referred to the need for airports to provide 'quiet' areas for passengers and a way of bypassing retail areas.

A discussion was also held on signage changes being made by some companies for Assistance toilets. In line with the realisation that PRM extends beyond passengers requiring wheelchair assistance or physical mobility issues, the main supermarkets have changed their signs at Accessible Toilets to make it clear that passengers with non-visible conditions are just as entitled to use these facilities. FB explained that Aberdeen Airport are currently looking at this.

The recent announcement by the NHS in Shetland that patients will start being transported by ferry unless there is a specific clinical reason meaning patients must travel by air, was discussed.

#### 4. Open discussion with members present

##### **Pre-notification & Hospital patient transfer**

JF enquired whether the NHS could help any more in terms of improving pre-notification rates. She advised that the trend is now for patients to be released earlier by the hospital (due to growing pressures on number of beds available) and that the Air Ambulance is now used more often.

##### **Booking Assistance for other passengers**

SO queried about the process for booking assistance for another passenger and explained that she had recently found this to be very difficult. FB and KD explained that airlines now have clear instructions for booking assistance on their websites but without a booking reference, a call directly to the assistance contractor at the airport may be required. SO explained that contact details for these services are very difficult to find at some airports.

##### **Check in and seating**

DK raised the issue of long queues for holiday charter flights and the lack of seating in the check in area for people who found it difficult to queue. KD advised that we are able to help with pre check in and by arranging assistance with the assistance contractor or directly with the airport queues can be bypassed. DK also explained that ASL, the airline operating the charter flights in 2016 (and confirmed for 2017) had problems with allocating seats in advance. KD explained that this was an issue earlier in the year but this problem had been eventually resolved.

##### **Airport 'Upbeat' magazine**

It was mentioned by a couple of attendees that it would be beneficial to have an article in Upbeat magazine about the assistance service to increase awareness of the service and facilities on offer. This could potentially focus on the familiarisation trips that are offered ahead of travel. FB will be working on an article to be published in the summer edition of Upbeat.

##### **Making initial contact with Assistance provider on arrival at the airport.**

FB and GC highlighted that there has been a few delays/issues due to not being able to locate assistance passengers once they have checked in for their flight. FB explained that handling agent staff will be asked to direct assistance passengers to the assistance area to 'check in' for the assistance service as soon as they have checked in for the flight. In this way, the assistance provider will be able to make arrangements directly with the passenger e.g. to meet at the gate or to return to the assistance area at a certain time. DK asked that this information is updated on the website so passengers are aware of what to do before they travel to the airport.

### **Assistance Telephones.**

A discussion was held about the assistance telephones that are used by passengers to contact the assistance provider. There are two situated in the Forecourt/Drop off area, one in the Short Stay car park and one beside the Car Rental Building. There is also a phone located at the seating area in Gate 10. The point was raised that many deaf passengers would be unable to use these phones and a suggestion was made that a mobile number could potentially be displayed to allow people to send a text instead. The action was also taken to review the signage for these phones to ensure they are up to date and consistent.

### **Badge worn by staff**

A suggestion was made that a recognised badge or symbol could be worn by staff members which would reassure passengers requiring assistance.

### **Signage for Assistance area at Terminal Entrance**

It was mentioned that it is perhaps not that obvious for passengers to know where the assistance area is located when they enter the terminal building. An action should be taken to review signage in this area.

KD highlighted that the assistance area will be relocated with the commencement of Phase 2 of the Terminal Transformation works. The location of the area has not been confirmed yet.

### **Loganair**

KD also advised that Loganair will start to operate scheduled flights as an independent airline, out-with the Flybe franchise from September.

### **Aberdeen City Council website**

KJ mentioned that Aberdeen City Council will shortly be reviewing the content and layout of their website and will be carrying out a wide consultation on this matter.

### **Me Too Magazine**

PMP explained that Me Too Magazine have been working closely with Sport Aberdeen recently and have introduced various 'relaxed' activities and sessions which are proving very popular. They have been nominated in the upcoming AVCO awards for the Big Aberdeen and Best Newcomer categories.

### **Suggestion for Lanyards**

PMP suggested that the lanyards that will be shortly available could feature some form of visual/social story on a card.

FB asked the group what they thought might be the most effective way of distributing the lanyards. It was suggested that Access Forum representatives could become ambassadors of the airport and that a number of lanyards could be given to each member to distribute accordingly. It was also agreed that lanyards would be available at the airport.

### **Deaf Action**

SR explained that Deaf Action's contract with Aberdeenshire Council is due to end on the 31<sup>st</sup> March and there is a lot of uncertainty as to what the future holds.

### **Link with Taxi Operators and bus companies.**

It was suggested that it will be important to try to link in the assistance service provided at the airport with the taxi operators and bus companies to ensure a more seamless service. FB advised that this is something that is being looked at.

### **Date of next meeting.**

It was confirmed that Monday 18<sup>th</sup> September is the planned date of the next Access Forum meeting.

FB thanked everyone for attending and their contributions. FB suggested he would look at organising a tour of the new airport extension close to the date of the next Forum.

FB brought the meeting to a close with the low level flypast of the RAF Tornados!