

**AccessABZ**

**Wednesday 21st March 2018**

**Attendees**

Fraser Bain (FB), AIA

Calum Willins, AIA

Svetlana Adamovic, AIA

Stan Flett, Scottish Accessible Transport Alliance

Alistair Williamson, Bon Accord Access Panel

Pamela Munro, Guide Dogs for the Blind

Andrea Barclay, Service User

Xandra Shearer, guest of Loganair

Katrina Michie, Shopmobility

Joan Allan, G4S

Graeme Coutts, G4S

**Apologies**

Judith Forbes, NHS Grampian

Sam Reid, Deaf Action

Glyn Morris, Friendly Access

Sarah Geoghegan, Alzheimer Scotland

Diane King, Grampian Opportunities

Phionna McInnes, Me Too Magazine!

Shona Owen, Service User

**Notes from Meeting**

Introductions

Each member introduced themselves to the group. Calum Willins is a Security Compliance Co-ordinator and Svetlana Adamovic is a HR administrator. Both are in attendance at today’s meeting as part of their development within the company.

Airport Operational Update

FB explained that the overall passenger number in 2017 had increased on the previous year and was 3,135,235.

The total number of Passengers with Reduced Mobility (PRM’s) was 22,100. This represented a 9% rise on 2016 figures (20,102). This is a similar trend as per previous years at Aberdeen and is also in line with the growing number of passengers requesting assistance across all airports in the UK.

The consistent rise in the number of PRM’s partly reflects the increased awareness of the services and facilities that airports can provide in terms of assistance.

The following table provides a breakdown of the different types of assistance requested in Aberdeen during 2017;



Approximately 60% of requests were for wheelchair assistance through the airport to/from the bottom of the aircraft steps (WCHR)

Combining the WCHS and WCHC totals reveals that 7,755 passengers in wheelchairs required the use of the Ambulift vehicle to get on or off the airplane (35% of all requests). Passengers that are classed as WCHS are able to make their own way to/from their seat in the aircraft and WCHC classed passengers require to be lifted into their seat.

Pre-notification

A summary of overall pre-notification rates and a breakdown of pre-notification rates between airlines was provided.

84% of passengers requiring assistance were pre-notified (48hrs prior to time of travel). This is considered to be an acceptable percentage and one which provides the assistance provider, G4S with the required information to manage resources. It is accepted that there will always be a number of passengers who are unable to be pre-notified due to their circumstances e.g. hospital patient who is checked out earlier or later than scheduled. In addition a small percentage of travellers remain unaware that they are strongly advised to pre-book their assistance requirements.

The lowest pre-notification rates were BMI Regional (58%), Eastern Airways (67%) and Wideroe (62%). The assistance provider has worked to improve pre-notification rates with all airlines but there are no particular reasons known as to why these airlines have lower rates than others.

Lanyards

In the first 6 months of using the hidden disability lanyards (launched in June 2017) the airport has handed out approximately 175 lanyards. The scheme to date has been well received and several compliments have been provided by passengers of both how it has given them the confidence to travel as well as the service they received going through the airport. In reference to the lanyard scheme, the following points have been raised by members of the forum;

* Further training required for airline and handling agent staff of the lanyards and hidden disabilities in general.
* Consider the use of an additional alternative, less ‘obvious’ means of highlighting a hidden disability such as a pin or bracelet. Discussion took place that a pin might be quite difficult to be seen and a metal object may cause a potential issue at Security.
* More effort to be made in promoting the lanyard scheme in the Northern Isles as members of the Access Panel not aware. An article about the lanyard scheme was included in the Disability Equality Scotland (Access Panel umbrella organisation) newsletter at the time of its launch but agreed that promotional material could be given to Xandra Shearer to be distributed accordingly.
* Suggestion that lanyard scheme could be promoted in places such as doctor surgeries, libraries etc. Not everyone looks at the website and not everyone is part of an association or club.
* Suggestion to go through ACVO and AVASHIRE to connect with a greater number of voluntary organisations. Similarly, to do this in Orkney and Shetland.

Electric Mobility Aids

47 Electric Mobility Aids were handled by G4S in 2017. G4S explained the process they need to follow prior to going on the plane.

Complaints and Compliments

A breakdown of PRM complaints and compliments per month in 2017 was presented. Overall, 21 complaints and 6 compliments were formally registered. Over half of the complaints (11) were received over the course of the two busiest months in July (6) and August (5). Further analysis of the nature of the complaints highlights that 4 were due to ‘waiting times’, 3 were categorised under ‘General PRM Service’ and 3 were due to ‘Facilities, Equipment and Accessibility’

* Ahead of the busiest summer months this year an action plan will be put in place to minimise any issues from occurring.

3 of the compliments received were for ‘Staff’ and 3 were allocated under ‘General PRM service’. It was commented that a lot of compliments are passed on informally to staff and that a concerted effort has been made at the start of this year to capture more of the positive comments.

Complaints – Facilities for Northern Isle passengers (NHS patients)

In our discussions about passenger complaints the opportunity was taken to discuss the situation regarding the welfare of passengers travelling on the Northern Isle flights, in particular, those who had recently been discharged from hospital. A presentation slide had been prepared regarding this subject to advise that in the past two weeks every effort was being made to allocate the Loganair arrivals on one of the available front stands. Due to aircraft size and the size of the stands this has not always been possible but G4S confirmed that the feedback received from assistance passengers was very positive when this was achieved as walking distances are vastly reduced and the front stands are accessed off the main departure lounge.

Further confirmation was given that it is the intention of the airport to improve the facilities for assistance passengers in the Northern Walkway part of the airport which services gates 7-12. Currently there is a designated seating area (PRM compliant seating) beside Gate 10 with a direct phone link to G4S, the assistance provider. We are aware from passenger, airline and MSP/MP feedback that this work is needed.

* Request from the forum that Access Forum members are consulted with regards to the planned changes and given the opportunity to provide input so that facilities provided are in line with demands.

Complaints – Distance to Domestic Reclaim

Further discussion took place regarding the extra distance now to the domestic reclaim area and the difficulty this can poses for passengers with mobility issues. Suggestions were made for seating and some extra reassurance for passengers heading in this direction. G4S explained that they offer passengers the option of staying in the assistance area while a member of their team collects the bag (description provided).

* The feasibility of seating in the corridor leading to the new domestic reclaim area is being considered.

Complaints – PRM baggage

The issue of bags being checked in by assistance passengers not arriving at their destination was raised by a forum member and a suggestion made that airlines could provide a tag for the bag that would indicate the importance of the bag making the journey e.g. medications in bag etc.

Focus on Compliments

FB wanted to take the opportunity to highlight some of the compliments that had been received in the first 3 months of the year as 6 passengers already had taken the time to get in touch with their positive comments. Three of the compliments were about the great service provided to passengers on the autistic spectrum and mention was made of the lanyard scheme. A blind passenger who flies through the airport every month, a passenger with a broken foot and assistance passengers who had been impacted by the recent bad weather had also thanked the assistance team in writing for the care and support they provided.

* A question/suggestion was made by Pamela Munro that the assistance team should have a ‘pat on the back’ type scheme in place to highlight good service and motivate other members to do the same. G4S are looking further into this. AIA are currently revamping their employee recognition scheme.

Terminal Transformation Update

FB provided an update on the Terminal Transformation project and confirmed that Phase 2 which consists of a new Security area, new World Duty Free and other retail outlets was on schedule to be completed by the 19th June.

The final phase, Phase 3 will begin immediately after and will involve the upgrading of facilities after Security.

A question was asked whether the pillars in the new Security area would have sufficient colour contrasting to help people with sight issues. FB was unclear as to the ‘finished look’ but advised that a tour of the new facilities will be organised for later in the year and an audit should take place.

FB also confirmed that the landside assistance area would be getting upgraded to improve both the privacy and comfort of passengers.

* As per the suggestion previously a request was made for the Access Forum members to be involved in a ‘working group’ for the upgrade of this area.

Website Accessibility

FB wanted to take the opportunity to highlight a software solution the airport is reviewing which potentially will make the airport website more accessible.

Recite Me is a cloud based web accessibility software program that allows users to customise the website the way they would like it to be. The software was demonstrated on a ‘landing page’ (not public) of the airport website.  The software includes text to speech functionality, dyslexia software, an interactive dictionary, a translation tool with over 100 languages and many other features.

Some immediate feedback was provided that any users of the website with higher levels of sight loss would find it difficult to find the navigational toolbar. A question was raised about whether the site would remember your previous selections and a comment was made that you should be able to book assistance/find assistance information from the same link.

* FB is really keen to get feedback from all Forum members on their thoughts about website accessibility in general and specifically the functionality of the Recite Me software. Forum members will be able to access the Recite Me software on the London Gatwick airport website (click on Accessibility – top right of home page, to bring up Recite Me toolbar). The airport values the feedback from forum members and this will help us decide whether software such as this will be a worthy investment.

Accessibility Work in progress/updates

FB provided the forum with updates on activity taking place and work in progress this year.

* The airport have met with SensationALL, a charity based in Westhill who provide multi-sensory experiences for children and adults with disabilities, to discuss enhancing the visual information the airport provides about accessibility.
* The airport has registered as a Disability Confident Committed employer and is currently reviewing the steps required to become Disability Confident.
* FB mentioned to the group that the airport and G4S had attended an Accessible Transport Summit the previous day along with representatives from various equality groups and other transport providers. Discussions took place about the main accessibility issues that are faced and potential solutions.
* FB highlighted that a regular assistance passenger (Mr Foster who is blind and travels fortnightly to London Gatwick) was to be featured soon on the airports social media channels to promote the good work done by the assistance team. Andrea Barclay suggested that the airport should be more vocal about the good work it does and discussions took place over the various places this could be done. FB mentioned it is his intention to put on a ‘roadshow’ later in the year visiting various organisations and groups in Aberdeen City and Shire to increase awareness of what we can provide.
* FB made the group aware that Friendly Access had been successful in being granted funding to develop the iSense app it is producing in association with Glasgow School of Art. The airport features as part of this and is very keen to see this progress.
* FB reported that an organisation called Appaws for Autism had been invited to the airport during World Autism Awareness week to provide further autism awareness sessions and to introduce Harley, a therapy dog to the airport with the aim of reducing stress levels among passengers in general.
* During Dementia Awareness week in May, Alzheimer Scotland will attend the airport and provide further Dementia Friends training to our staff.
* FB reported that the airport was now listed on Euan’s guide which allows passengers to provide reviews about accessibility/assistance. FB is keen to promote this and appeals to forum members to share this within their organisations in order to increase the number of reviews.
* The airport is in discussions with a company called Neatebox about using their app called Welcome. The app allows users to get in touch with the venue they are visiting (i.e. a shop, museum, hotel, airport etc.) and provide information which will allow them to meet their needs. The app has some very useful features including the ability to upload your photo and also notifying the venue you have arrived so they are ready to help. The use of the system requires an investment by the airport and again feedback from Forum users is encouraged to help the airport make an informed decision.

Route News

FB highlighted that the start of 2018 has been challenging with a few disappointing route cancellations. Nevertheless there were many positives to look forward to with TUI basing one of their aircraft in ABZ to operate their leisure routes and the new Malta route starting with Ryanair in the next week.

Draft guidance for airlines on hidden disabilities.

There was not sufficient time at the forum meeting to discuss the draft guidance provided by the CAA for airlines on hidden disabilities. The guidance is similar to that produced for airports previously.

The guidance can be viewed on the following link and although the consultation period is now closed we would welcome the views of forum members;

<https://www.eraa.org/system/files/cap1603assistingpeoplewithhiddendisabilities_draft-1011.pdf>

The next Access Forum meeting will be held in September – date to be confirmed.