

Accessibility Forum meeting - 1st December 2022 at 1400

Venue – Conference Centre at George Best Belfast City Airport

Attendance list:

Bill Doole	George Best Belfast City Airport,Duty Manager
Judith Davis	George Best Belfast City Airport,Operations Manager
Nikki Farmbrough	CCS Manager
Darren Mawhinney	Mitie aviation security
Crystal Burns	Mitie Contract Administrator
Michelle Kelly	Consumer Council
Michael Lorimer	IMTAC
Julie Morton	Alzheimers Society
Olive Rodgers	RNIB
Nichola Booth	Autism
Donna Watson	Urostomy Association
Andrew Murdock	Guide Dogs NI
Nicola Tipping	NOW group

Apologies:

Julie Guilar	Shopmobility
Rebecca Browne	AccessAble
Siobhan Winston	Disability Action

Agenda

- 1.Welcome
- 2.Introductions
- 3.Airport Update
- 4.CCS presentation
- 5.Consumer council audit report – responses
- 6.AOB

Welcome

The meeting started with a welcome by BD. Although we had met for a walk round tour on the 4th April 2022 this was the first time since the pandemic that we had been able to meet in this format and BD expressed his thanks to all for their attendance

Introductions

BD advised that we had received 3 apologies for the meeting and then went round the table for introductions

Airport Update by Judith Davis (Operations Manager)

JD reported to the Forum how quickly the business had started to recover from earlier this year. Since April we had seen a steady increase in passenger numbers and flight schedules. Currently we have BA, easyjet, Loganair, KLM,

Aer Lingus , Aer Lingus regional and Flybe operating at the City Airport

This Summer had been a very challenging one for airports due to staff shortages in areas such as ground handling and security especially in some of the larger airports.

JD also provided an update on a project within the airport on our road layout with works ongoing especially in the short stay car park

JD updated the meeting regarding new x ray machines in security that will become mandatory in all UK airports by mid 2024 – with the new machines passengers will not be required to remove liquids , laptops etc – machines of this type are already in use in European airports such as Amsterdam

ML (IMTAC) enquired about the provision of blue badge spaces but was assured that we still have provision for these during the works

AM (Guide dogs NI) ask a question re ‘spend areas’ for assistance dogs when they go airside and JD advised that we can facilitate this

CCS presentation by Nikki Farmbrough (CCS Station manager)

NF – short presentation from CCS outlining Belfast stats, PRM numbers and categories, changes since last meeting and what equipment is available for passengers’ requiring assistance.

Also highlighted need for desk move because dealing with everything especially car parking at current desk, dilutes the focus on PRM. Looking forward to the new desk being refurbished and a bespoke PRM desk and waiting area opposite being created.

Advised that ad hoc numbers have improved but all PRM’s should be encouraged to book through airline as it can have an impact on waiting times if we have numerous ad hocs at busy times.

Discussed the skills fade since Covid and how it takes time for new staff to gain confidence. The security restrictions that have to be undertaken can also take considerable time as references are needed for the last 5 years without gaps and there are numerous checks that also have to be carried out before an airside pass can be issued.

Consumer Council report – GBBCA responses by Bill Doole (Duty Manager)

The next agenda item was to go through our responses to the report that was compiled by the Consumer Council following the audit that was done on the 4th April 2022 during a walk round tour

The main items highlighted were:

1. relocation of the assistance desk to move it closer to check in – BD explained that this was definitely going to happen but there is work that needs to be done to make sure the new desk fit for purpose

2. signage – larger signs both airside and landside on accessible toilets including our changing places toilet on the main concourse – some new signs are in place and others are on order and should be arriving very soon

3. seating at security – some additional seating in place – current location of seating will be unchanged as there can be congestion in the area at the back of security

When the walkround audit was carried out in April the airport was much quieter than it is now and the area in central search can become more congested so any move of seating could present H and S issues

There was general approval from Forum members for the responses to the Audit – it was accepted that not all issues raised can be addressed but were happy that action has and is being taken as a result of the audit

AOB

The last item on the agenda was to give the members a chance to raise any other matters

From Julie (Alzheimers Society) – made the Forum aware that there they are working on an online course that could be valuable for future training

From Olive (RNIB) – before Covid there had been a visit facilitate by security for a group with vision impairment – Olive enquired if this would be possible again – contact details exchanged with Darren (Mitie)

From Nichola (Autism) – the hope that we can restart ‘Autism in the air’ - this was a program where we brought small groups of children with Autism to the airport with a parent for a tour - BD agreed that we very much want to start this again and most likely for May / June 2023

Nichola also asked about the chances of a ‘sensory room’ this had been in our planning before Covid – this had also been looked at prior to the pandemic

Michael (IMTAC) – asked about the staircase at international arrivals – it was explained that we have a procedure in place whereby the ambu lift vehicle is used for any arriving international passengers who need wheelchair assistance

AM (Guide Dogs NI) – before the pandemic we had also facilitated on site training for guide dog pups - subject to having an aircraft available this is something we would like to be part of again in 2023