

Belper Town Council Report

It has been another challenging year for the Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centres. With no grant support from Amber Valley Borough Council or the Derbyshire County Council the organisation has again had to look towards external project funding from charitable trusts and grant giving bodies in order to be able to deliver services in Amber Valley. We are grateful for the support of town and parish councils in the borough who have continued to support us through these difficult times.

Our service this year has not been what we envisaged. Our hope was to move into the new library on Derwent Street. However, when we were finally given the all clear to move in it was evident that the room we were being offered was not suitable. Our report read as follows:

Belper library have a meeting room which can be booked and block booked. It is currently available any weekday apart from Wednesdays. Shared use with the adjacent Ada Bellfield (old persons' home) and on a busy corridor away from the library. Ground floor with disabled access. £7.20 per hour. (So 3 hours per week x 51 weeks = £1101.60). Potentially, the library could invoice DUWC for payment each month. The library is open 0930 to 1700.

The room has a table with around 8 or 10 chairs and no other furniture or equipment. All brand new and in good condition. Picture window to the outside and ditto to the inside corridor – so there is no visual privacy. Wi-fi and a power socket for a laptop. Public toilet nearby. Unknown if the room can be briefly locked when an advisor visits the toilet. I was unable to photograph the room as it was in-use when I visited. I did not check the phone signal with my DUWC phone.

There is no waiting area outside the room, but there are a few odd seats nearby which may or may not be vacant. We would not be allowed to place seats in the corridor. Acceptable for a small sandwich board to be placed outside the door when a surgery is taking place. Presumably okay to place one outside the building too, but I didn't ask about storage. The library would be happy to display a poster advertising opening hours and signpost any enquiries.

There is potential free car public parking, not off Derwent Street but by via the Morrison's Island and behind Aldi. Disabled parking bays outside via Derwent Street. Access is less than ideal for those on foot and the library is away from the main part of the town.

It was decided not to proceed and to pursue a better, confidential and more secure setting.

As a result we have now decided to start offering advice services from Thursday, November 3rd 1.0pm until 3.30pm at The Strutts community and business centre. A worker gave the following report:

Herewith a report on the suitability of the Strutts Centre, Belper for a potential outreach.

[Room Hire Costs - Strutt's Community & Business Centre \(strutts.org.uk\)](http://strutts.org.uk)

Rooms. *Wide availability. Small rooms upstairs, but no lift access. Standard rooms (former classrooms) downstairs. Rooms have tables and chairs. Visual and oral privacy.*

Cost. *The price for a standard room is £9 per hour for voluntary groups and £13.50 per hour for organisations with paid staff. Billed per half hour. Payable via invoice for regular bookings. See the link above for full prices. (£13.50 x 2.5 hours per week x 52 = £1755 per year).*

Client waiting area. *Clients could wait in the large communal hall/lounge area with many seats, but no special waiting area outside each room.*

Reception. *Open whenever the centre is open. Staffed by volunteers, who could direct clients to the correct room.*

Toilets. *Available ground floor.*

Access. *Two steps to access the main entrance and reception. Potential level access from the rear car park, but signs would be required and a long walk for non-car users. For a first time visitor, noting it is a large site with several buildings, it is unclear where to enter the building and some walking is required.*

Parking. *Lots of spaces, but depends upon booking by other users. Quite a walk for disabled clients.*

Buses. *On the frequent Trent Sixes route from Bakewell and Ripley to Derby.*

Power socket for laptop. *I forgot to ask, but would assume that there is one in each room.*

Kettle / kitchen for the advisor to use? *No.*

Photocopier? *No.*

Advisor leaving the room to visit the toilet - security of property? *Probably okay, but depends upon which room. The centre can be busy at times.*

Comment

The centre is run by volunteers with the objective of keeping the building open and in good repair. It is used by many groups and classes, especially older people, so has a good foot-fall to notice any advertising of our services and times. The volunteer I spoke to was keen to have our business and considered that a welfare rights surgery would be well-received.

The main drawbacks appear to be distance from the town centre; a complex and sprawling site layout necessitating walking; poor disabled access; no dedicated waiting area; and lack of copier, scanner and kettle facilities for the advisor.

We are going to work here until March 30th 2023 when we will review the merits of this outreach location. If all goes well, we will continue to offer outreach services throughout 2023 we will be advertising our service broadly across the Belper area and will be proactively targeting groups of people (particularly the elderly) in order to make sure they are accessing all the benefits that they are entitled to. As winter approaches, and the cost of living crisis bites it is very important that we help people to maximise their incomes through this period. Our feedback tells us that many people come to us following recommendations from friends/neighbours/family so please help us by spreading the word.

Recently at one older peoples group in the north of the county, following one talk by our advisor, nine people made successful applications for attendance allowance (non-means tested) with two more pending.

We hope to replicate this sort of initiative in the Belper area. If anyone is aware of venues where people meet that might benefit from our services - please let us know.