

Minutes London Luton Airport Accessibility Forum (LLAAF)

Thursday, 14 September 2023 10:00 a.m.

Attendees	
Andy Wright - Committee Chair	Denise Hobbs - Accessibility Manager, LTN
Lauren Cox - Luton Council	Samantha Leftwich - Thomas Pocklington Trust
Nicole Gudgin - Autism Bedfordshire	Peta Barratt - Spinal Injuries Association
Apologies	
Libby Herbert - Colostomy UK	Mary Doyle - Disability Etiquette trainer
Phil Rutter - Thomas Pocklington Trust	Laura Hannibal - Alzheimer's Society

Welcome and Introductions
<p>Andy welcomed attendees to the London Luton Airport Accessibility Forum (LLAAF), which was held online via Microsoft Teams. Introductions were made and new attendees were introduced, with apologies shared with the group. Andy provided an overview of the airport Forum, its aims, and ambitions, for the benefit of the new attendees. Before running through the main action points from the previous meeting, which included an update on staff training and the new infrastructure development work due to take place at the airport in the coming months (which was addressed more fully later in the meeting).</p>
LLA Operational Overview
<p>Denise commenced her presentation, which provided an overview of the airport's performance in recent months. Starting by highlighting the airport's positive upturn in performance over the summer months, including a marked improvement by the ground handling teams. The number of passengers currently receiving assistance at the airport was close to returning to pre-pandemic levels, with nearly 75% of PRMs pre-booking their need for assistance in advance. Which greatly helped with more effective resource planning.</p> <p>Denise was happy to share that the recently published <i>UK Airports Accessibility</i> report, which had been conducted by the CAA, also reflected this. As Luton airport had been rated as 'Very Good', in recognition of improvements to service levels and investment into location technology, which helped with better deployment of the Wilson James <i>assistance</i> staff. They also recognised the benefits provided by the DART rail link to assistance passengers.</p> <p>Lauren asked what marketing Luton airport had conducted as a result of the positive report from the CAA. As she felt, the press is very keen to publicise where airports may fail but rarely complement them when they are performing better.</p> <p>Denise acknowledged this and said that she would in future ensure good news was shared publicly and would also share future communications and reports with Luton Borough Council directly.</p> <p>Nicole then raised a point regarding the implication to PRMs when flights are diverted to other airports and how such actions can have significant impact on passengers who require <i>special assistance</i> they travel. She felt it was very important that better policies and protocols should be in place to minimise the distress to such passengers.</p> <p>Denise then went on to discuss some of the ongoing improvements to the terminal infrastructure that are currently being undertaken. Including the arrival of a number of new retail units in the weeks ahead, as well as the relocation of others, to support with the creation of the new Mezzanine floor within the terminal.</p> <p>Denise then highlighted many of the suggestions that had been put forward by Forum members for inclusion into the new <i>Assistance Lounge</i>, that will be created once the new Mezzanine floor is completed. These included a <i>Quiet</i> space, Sensory area, subtle lighting, and height adjustable tables with wheelchair access. There will also be a number of new charging points being installed throughout the terminal, as well as various Kids Play Zones.</p> <p>Denise continued by advising the Forum that the <i>Special Assistance</i> contract was currently being renegotiated and she was expecting bids to be submitted by all of the major <i>Special Assistance</i> companies in the UK. Following submission, these will be evaluated and scored accordingly, with the successful candidates being asked to then present to the airport senior management team. Which is scheduled to take place in October.</p>

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Andy then mentioned to the members that he had been asked to join the management team for the presentations, so would be able to help evaluate the suitability of the varying contenders. For which he would welcome any suggestions or particular areas of concern that Forum members would like him to voice at the presentation meeting on their behalf.

Further information can be found in the attached presentation Document 1.

Next Generation Security Operational Update

Komal then joined the meeting to provide an overview of the Next Generation Airport Security installation, which is currently being rolled out at the airport in preparation for its completion by the Summer of 2024.

Komal advised that the project involves reconfiguring the Security lanes at the airport and installing new equipment, as required by government. There will be a number of advantages once the new system is implemented. Which will provide CT technology allowing passengers to leave electronics and liquids in their bags, rather than removing them for screening.

Komal then advised the Forum members that the next stage would be to invite them to the airport to view the proposed change in layout, prior to installation of the new scanners. So as to ensure the environment is as accessible and appropriate as is possible for those passengers who require *assistance* when they travel.

Further information can be found in the attached presentation Document 2.

LBC 'Disability Friendly Town' Presentation

Lauren then provided the Forum members with a brief presentation on behalf of Luton Borough Council entitled 'Disability Friendly Town'. In which she highlighted the goals for the Council, by using the guidance provided from the *Fairness Strategy* (a document shaped by the voices and experiences of local residents through focus groups) to be recognised as a 'Disability Friendly Town' by 2040. This has included looking at best practice from other areas recognised for their work around accessibility, such as St Albans and Chester. Including developing focus groups into a Disability Network in order for community members to find solutions to meet local needs.

Further information can be found in the attached presentation Document 3.

New Staff Training Module

Andy followed by providing a brief overview on the progress of the Luton airport staff training module, since many of the Forum members had provided feedback and suggestions on how they felt the preliminary version could be enhanced. Confirming that these points had all been noted and the necessary changes had been made to the content. So, the airport was now in the process of testing the online learning modules with a number of different staff members from different departments to evaluate their feedback. Once completed decisions would then be taken as to whether the module needs to be further enhanced or would be ready to go live.

Andy confirmed that more information will be provided at the next meeting.

AOB

Nicole asked to share details of her recent travelling experience using the DART station with the Forum members. Explaining how she and her luggage had become trapped in the gates, accessing the DART, due to what she described as too little time provided before the gates closed. Naturally this experience had increased her anxiety considerably and made her feel less confident to use the DART again in the future.

Denise said she would share this information with the DART management team and ensure that a representative from DART was invited to the next Forum meeting to discuss the matter further.

Andy and **Denise** then thanked Forum members for their attendance and continued support and closed the meeting.

Andy to advise Forum members of airport Security trial dates, as well as future LLAAF meeting dates once finalised.