

Blind man wins battle with council

A BLIND man with hearing difficulties has forced a council into paying £2,500 to charity after he claimed the authority did not comply with disability legislation.

Colin Bennett, 66, of Lansdowne Place, Hove, complained in early 2005 that Brighton and Hove City Council had breached the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) by not providing working induction loops at Brighton and Hove town halls.

Mr Bennett, who was also awarded £1,500, said eight rooms did not have functioning induction loops or an infra-red system to relay sound.

In 2006, the council agreed to commission an independent survey by the Royal National Institute for Deaf People and Hard of Hearing (RNID) to find out what equipment was required.

by LAWRENCE MARZOUK

But while the council claimed that the inspection gave it a clean bill of health, Mr Bennett insisted that it had still broken the law.

The council continued to dismiss allegations and after two years of legal wranglings, both parties have now agreed to a settlement, avoiding a trial.

The council has agreed to pay Mr Bennett £1,500 to cover his costs and to pay £1,250 each to the National Deafblind and Rubella Association and Deafblind International.

But the council and Mr Bennett have yet to agree a joint statement.

Mr Bennett suffers from Usher syndrome, a genetic condition which means people are born deaf or hard of hearing then gradually start

to lose their sight.

He said: "All I wanted the council to do they have done and I didn't want to push them into a corner.

"I do think that some people hope I would walk in the path of a 49 bus but I have become a campaigner on these issues because people do not challenge these problems enough."

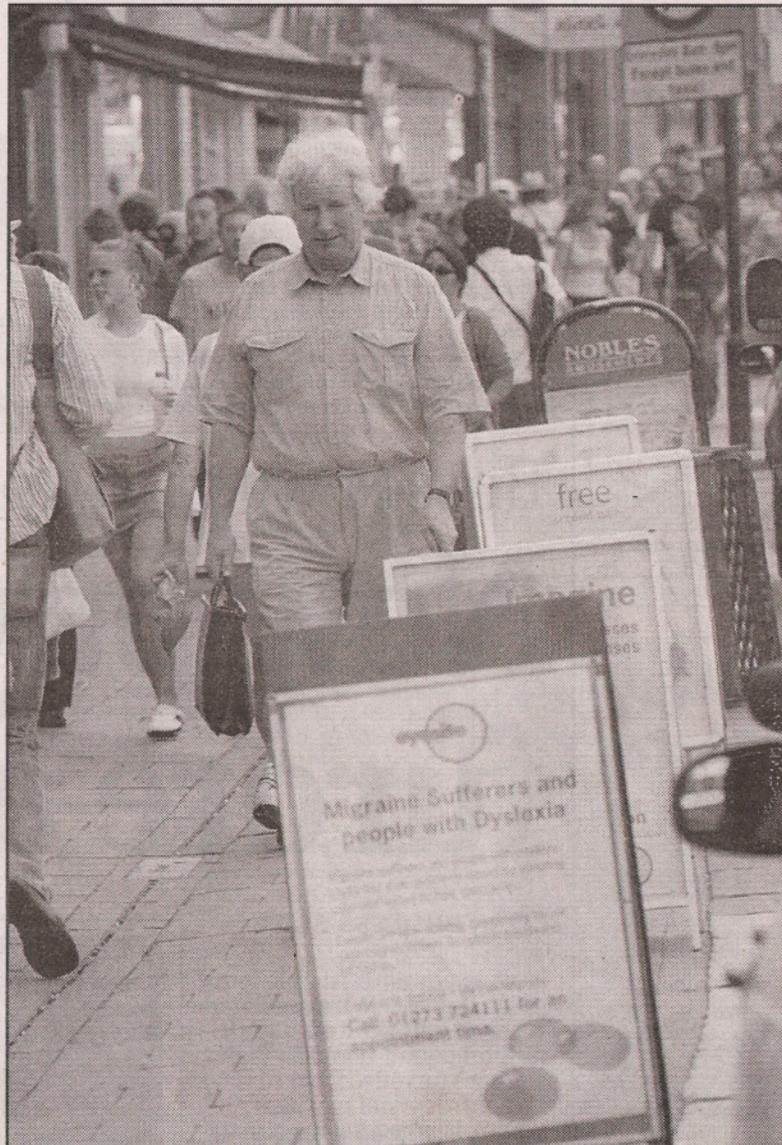
A spokeswoman for the council said: "An independent survey carried out by the RNID last year found that the council had loops and hearing systems in our public rooms and that they were working satisfactorily.

"The case has brought about welcome improvements to the council chambers and committee room areas at our town halls."

For more on the case, visit bennettsworld.blogspot.com.

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PICTURE: SKYE BRACKPOOL



DETERMINED: Colin Bennett, seen negotiating obstacles on a typical high street, has become a campaigner on issues affecting the deaf and blind