

Brighton County Court – Witness Statement by Richard Scott
Claim Number: 5BN03502
Bennett -v- Brighton&hove City Council

My name is Richard Edwin Scott and I live at Flat 2, 3 Salisbury Road, Hove. I have hearing that I believe to be reasonable for my age (60 yrs).

In recent years I have taken a great interest in the workings of Brighton & Hove City Council and other civic matters. This has involved attending many Council and other public meetings in Council property such as the three Town Halls (Brighton, Hove, Portslade). I usually sit in the Public Gallery or other areas set aside for the public.

I have noted that the Council does not take much care in making sure that Council meetings can be heard by the public. In the following committee rooms there are no stand-alone, public address systems installed:

1. Committee Room 1 in Brighton Town Hall
2. Committee Room 2/3 in Brighton Town Hall
3. Committee Room 3 in Hove Town Hall
4. Banqueting Suite in Hove Town Hall

As there are no desk-microphone systems in place in those venues then logically there cannot be working induction loops or infra-red technology there when there is no visible means of providing a high-quality clear input of speakers' voices to any such systems.

Up until about 2001 there were functioning loudspeakers at the Public Gallery in Brighton Town Hall. From about that time these loudspeakers ceased to work and my understanding of this was because of a nail driven through the cabling to the loudspeakers. During a period of several months thereafter the problem continued, but eventually the loudspeakers were re-activated. However the central PA system produced very poor sound, in some cases as though speakers were talking into a drainpipe, and so remained unsatisfactory for over two years until, apparently, the main voice amplifier was replaced. However quite often these loudspeakers are not turned on at the commencement of meetings and I have had to call from the Public Gallery for them to be activated.

On several occasions the microphones in front of the Councillors are not working properly (often giving insufficient amplification, compared to others on the day). On some occasions I have had to ask the Chairman of the meeting to make sure the amplifying equipment was working.

On 10 March 2005 there was a full Council meeting in Brighton Town Hall. At the beginning of that meeting the Mayor, chairing the meeting, announced that although the electricians had been struggling all day, no audio equipment was working. The meeting which lasted about 3 hours was held without any audio equipment working. In my view that meeting should have been adjourned to another date, or to call-in emergency facilities from the Council's special events audio-visual services contractor.

On 15 September 2005 I attended a meeting in the Council Chamber of Brighton Town Hall of the Culture and Tourism sub-committee. Again, at no time during that meeting did the audio system work properly. The public took it upon themselves to enter the floor of the chamber where the councillors sit, to try to hear the proceedings, and this 'invasion' was tolerated.

There are loudspeakers for the upper Public Gallery at Hove Town Hall. However, from time to time these do not seem to work well and members of the public have to call from the Public Gallery for them to be turned on to a satisfactory volume (although often at issue is one or more of the desk microphones which do not seem to have been set to give sufficient input to the PA system).

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On 19 September 2005 I attended a meeting of the local Primary Care Trust in the Great Hall at Hove Town Hall. No audio equipment was used and I had difficulty in hearing what was said particularly by those speaking with a soft voice. I discussed this afterwards with the Chief Executive John James and he agreed that the lack of a PA system was a breach of statutory sector policies on providing for 'equalities' issues.

On 27 September 2005 I attended the AGM and a Board meeting of the local Primary Care Trust in Committee Room 2/3 at Brighton Town Hall. It was difficult to hear as no audio equipment was used and I believe there is no such equipment in Committee Room 2/3.

I consider the situations that I have outlined above as unsatisfactory and believe that they should be remedied by the Council both for its own meetings, and for meetings of other statutory sector bodies to whom the rooms are made available for meetings held in public.

Richard E Scott