

## **Northampton Borough Council**

### **Northampton Pensioners' Forum**

**Thursday, 9 June 2011**

**People at the meeting:** Councillor Brian Oldham  
Joyce Smith  
Jacqueline Forrest Smith  
Harry Tuttle  
Hazel Tuttle  
Christine Owusu – Akila  
Brian Nichols  
M Brown  
Mike Hill  
Liz Percival  
D Hewitt

**Officers at the meeting** Lindsey Ambrose- NBC  
Paul Starr- NBC  
Gracie- Northamptonshire Link  
Bridget- Northamptonshire Local Involvement Network

#### **1 WELCOMES AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chair, Cllr Oldham, welcomed everyone to the meeting and as this was his first meeting in the Chair introduced himself and told them a little about his background and history.

Members of the Forum also introduced themselves.

Lindsey informed the Forum that Liz Percival had recently been given an Anne Frank award. It recognised her work to help people in the community. Members congratulated her.

#### **2 BENEFITS TAKE UP**

Paul Starr, a member of the housing benefits and revenues team advised the Forum of the work that he and his colleagues did. They help people to claim benefits. He told the Forum that there were members of staff who were willing to visit groups of interested people. The team would also visit people in their own homes to help them to claim benefits. He emphasised that the benefits available were not just for Council tenants; advice was available for a wide range of benefits such as Council Tax and Housing Benefits and for pension credit.

There was some discussion concerning why people did not claim benefits. There was a feeling that this was because the forms were too complicated and some people did not want to disclose information about their income and savings which they considered to be private.

Most Forum members felt that these problems would not happen if state pensions were higher. There was a feeling that means tested benefits deterred people from claiming.

Sara Essex (tel: 01604 837887 or email: [sessex@northampton.gov.uk](mailto:sessex@northampton.gov.uk)) is the person to contact if anyone would like to find out more or arrange a visit by the benefits team.

### **3 APOLOGIES FROM PEOPLE WHO CAN'T MAKE IT TO THE MEETING**

Mary Dyer Atkins and Roger Rumsey sent apologies that they could not be at the meeting.

### **4 MINUTES (PAGES 3-7)**

The Forums agreed the minutes of the meeting on 27th January 2011.

There was a wish from one member of the Forum that meetings be held more frequently in order to ensure that there was a momentum of issues and clear progress. He was unhappy that there had been such a big gap since the last meeting. Lindsey Ambrose explained that the unusually long break had been due to a legal restriction known as "purdah". This prevented the council from holding meetings in the period ahead of the local elections.

### **5 UPDATE ON FORUM PRIORITIES, ACTIONS AND DECISIONS FROM THE LAST MEETING**

The Forum discussed issues of interest.

#### **(a) Bin Collections**

Members felt that there was a lot of confusion over the new system. Items had not been collected and people were unsure as to whether they should leave them out. The Chair encouraged people to continue to report problems into the Contact Centre or to their local Councillor.

(b) Customer Contact Centre – One member reported that she had been unable to get through to the Contact Centre to report a housing repair. She had been trying over a three day period. This was because of the extremely large number of calls that were being made with regard to the refuse collection. In her case the repair was not urgent, but she was concerned as to what would have happened if the repair related to an urgent health and safety matter.

#### **(c) Community Centres**

There was concern over the future of Community Centres. In one example (Abington Centre) there was a considerable amount of money required to make urgent repairs to the centre which the Community Centre Committee is expected to raise. The Centre is also well used and requires a caretaker. There was concern about the level of support Northampton Borough Council would be providing to run the Centre. There was worry that the Council would

not be providing staff such as wardens. Parklands Community Centre has problems with parking as it is sited in a park and there is no parking only for the community centre users.

There was some discussion over the fact that there had been public consultation over the future of Community Centres but it was felt that the resultant proposals did not reflect community opinion

It was suggested that Thomas Hall and the Community Engagement Portfolio Holder should attend the next meeting of the Forum to further discuss concerns. It was also agreed that Community Centres should be a standing item on future agendas.

#### (d) The Link

Gracie from Northamptonshire Link attended the meeting . Copies of the June 2011 The Link newsletter were available.

## **6 CONSULTATION ON THE NBC EQUALITY STRATEGY**

Lindsey Ambrose gave a presentation on the NBC Equality Strategy. She had promised to involve the Forum with equalities work at a previous meeting. Once approved it will become a key governance document – something the council has to follow. Before it went out to consultation the views of Forum members were wanted to help make sure people would understand what was published in due course. The strategy is a long document that the council needs to consult people about. It is written in simpler English than previous documents, but some people might find it difficult to read due to its length. A powerpoint presentation had been prepared which set out key points from the strategy – by way of an introduction to it. Lindsey wanted to know the views of the Forum on

- Whether the presentation was clear - did it make sense?
- Was it clear or did it have too much jargon?
- Was it something they thought community would find helpful or not?

Lindsey outlined that she hoped the consultation would have an online form for people with internet access; also short survey forms on paper that people could do in the community without needing to read the long strategy document first. This would mean people had a number of ways to take part.

The Forum members gave feedback. There was a sense that such a formal presentation style might make some people feel like the council was only talking to them because it had to – not because it wanted to. They referred to one by the NHS recently on their equality strategy which they felt had been similarly formal. Some people said they would prefer simple survey forms.

The Forum members discussed what they felt about council and other consultations. They felt that there were several recent examples where the views of the residents

had not been taken into account. They did not like the questions or style of some recent consultations by the council. They felt that sometimes the questions limited them from giving their views. Sometimes they felt the Council had already decided what action they were going to take. Some people felt that the views of residents were not taken into account regarding additional residential development in their areas.

Forum members felt that proper consultation would mean giving people a chance to influence decisions at an earlier stage and maybe shape proposals rather than simply responding to specific proposals already put forward by the Borough Council.

The Chair assured the Forum that he was very willing to listen to their viewpoints and would urge his fellow Councillors to actively encourage participation at all stages of decision making.

Some members felt that it would be more productive if the Council examined the numbers/types of complaints and acted to resolve those. In particular performance figures relating to communication deadlines, achieving promised response times etc.

It was noted that consultations/communications should not be solely internet based. While many pensioners now have access to the internet, the Forum wanted the Council to ensure that consultations also involved those people who do not.

A query was made about the number of people attending local meetings, forums etc. It was noted that with a population of more than 200,000 it was disappointing if only 12- 15 people attended, say, the Pensioners Forum. It was noted that people may get involved in a number of ways. The Forums for example have people who are on email and Facebook networks as well as those who like to attend meetings. A member of the Forum commented that there seemed to him to be a reluctance by councils and other organisations such as the NHS to get involved in meeting people at neighbourhood partnerships and other meetings. The Forum noted that there were many demands on people's time which could make it difficult to attend meetings.

## **7 COMMUNITY NEWS EXCHANGE**

There was some interest in having an event in September to mark the international day for older people.

There was interest in having a meeting with members of Northampton Youth Forum in October again for Local Democracy Week.

## **8 SUGGESTIONS FOR ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS OR FORUM ACTIVITIES**

It was agreed that the following items should be borne in mind for a future forum meeting:-

- Community Centres
- New priorities for new administration
- Town Centre
- Planning
- Housing Issues
- Absent Landlords.

## **9 DATE AND VENUES OF FUTURE FORUM MEETINGS**

The following dates have been agreed for future Forum Meetings

15<sup>th</sup> September 2011

3<sup>rd</sup> November 2011

15<sup>th</sup> December 2011

The meeting concluded at 4:10 pm

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### **Northampton Borough Council Framework for Future of Community Centres**

The Council wants to support community organisations as true partners in achieving benefits for local communities, in part through their management of community facilities.

The Council recognises that successful relationships of this kind must be built on mutual trust, backed up by a mutually agreed, clearly understood set of responsibilities for both sides. The framework below sets out the process whereby arrangements for community centres that are fair, equitable and mutually beneficial to all parties, will be arrived at.

The Council will identify centres where there is known to be interest from the existing management committee in taking fuller responsibility for the centre. These will be progressed without undue delay, and provide examples for the remainder. The Council will then seek expressions of interest through a formal procurement process from organisations (the Council's preference will be for those which are charitable or community based) to take on leases for one or several of the Council's remaining estate of community centres.

1. **The Organisation must have a satisfactory governance document, approved by the Council.** This shall include
  - that the organisation is, or shall become within two years of the commencement of the lease, an incorporated body such as a charity, company or community interest organisation
  - appropriate procedures for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, accounting for money and health and safety of staff and users of the centre(s)
  - an appropriate documented equalities policy which ensures that its activities and the use of the centre(s) adequately reflects the diversity of the local population and does not discriminate unfairly against any group.
  - the right of the Council to nominate at its discretion one or more representatives as observer(s) on the organisation's governing body. This right would be exercised only in case of serious concerns over the management of the centre
  
2. **There will be a formal lease of the building to the Organisation,** which shall set out the Organisation's responsibilities in regard to:
  - payment of the rent for the lease of the centre(s). This would be discounted to a notional rent which is below market value for the term of the lease on condition that the Organisation meets its SLA responsibilities
  - payment of all operating costs of the centre(s) including maintenance and decoration of the interior of the premises, all services (eg electrical and heating installations) together with all fittings, fixtures and equipment
  - payment of utilities bills and rates
  - insurance against loss of or damage to contents, third party risks and employer's liabilities
  - cleaning, caretaking and security of the building
  - all liaison with actual and potential users of the building, whether groups or individuals, and with other agencies and neighbours as necessary – this includes dealing with any complaints or disputes between any of these parties
  - providing reports and its business plan (see below) to the Council as appropriate

The Council shall be responsible for:

- maintenance of the structure and external fabric of the building
- insurance against rebuilding costs

3. **The Council and Organisation will jointly negotiate and agree a service level agreement (SLA)** for the life of the lease which will include a broadly-based demonstration of community benefits, in return for a discounted rental if the SLA is complied with. The SLA will provide that:

- community centre(s) and activities must be of benefit to both their local community and where appropriate the wider community of Northampton Borough and neighbouring areas
- activities may be of a community, social and commercial nature but the Organisation must be able to account on an annual basis for how it has
  - (a) ensured the opportunity of fair and equal access to all members and groups within the local and wider community;
  - (b) consulted and otherwise engaged with the community in developing its programme of activities; and
  - (c) made a strong contribution through activities held within the centre or through external activities funded by the Organisation to one or more of the following aspirations
    - the improved health and wellbeing of the community
    - improvements to the local environment to deliver safer, greener and cleaner communities
    - to have identified specific needs within the community and have responded through appropriately planned and delivered activities at the centre(s) or within their localities.

4. **The organisation shall produce a business plan**, initially covering at least a three year period and updated regularly thereafter, and shall provide a copy to the Council. The plan will show:

- how the organisation can deliver against the aspirations detailed in items 1 and 2 above
- how the organisation plans to become in due course operational on a self-funding basis following commencement of the lease. The Council recognises the organisation's right to make and use profits from the operation of the centre
- relevant targets and outcomes, with appropriate measures