

## **Northampton Borough Council**

### **Northampton Pensioners' Forum**

**Thursday, 29 September 2011**

**People at the meeting:** G. Bartley, C. Darby, I. Heath, R. Heath, E. Henry, D. Hewitt, M. Hill, J. Holton, C. Johnson, M. Lewis, B. Nicholls, G. Okusanya, Cllr B. Oldham, J. Rawlings, J. Smith, L. Spence, E. Sterling, A. Timson, H. Tuttle, H. Tuttle and D. Williams

#### **Officers at the meeting**

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

The Chair, Councillor Oldham, announced the recent death of John Wright from Duston, member of the Forum and member of Pensioner's Voice. Forum members stood in silence as a mark of respect.

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

Apologies were received from Barbara Issac, Archbishop Samuel, Mrs Owusu-Affuko, Roger Rumsey and Lindsey Ambrose.

##### **3. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 9TH JUNE 2011 AND MATTERS ARISING**

The minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 9 June 2011 were agreed.

#### **Matters Arising**

Comment was made that although a newsletter could be a useful way of conveying information the preference of Forum members was for conventional minutes.

##### **4. IMPACTS OF SWITCHING OFF STREET LIGHTS IN NORTHAMPTON**

Forum members related their experiences of streetlights that had been switched off by the County Council as part of its budget savings and questioned the appropriateness of it in these instances in terms of pedestrian or road user safety.

The Chair commented that it was his understanding that if the lamp standard had a "This light is switched off" sticker on it then it would not be switched back on. The County Council planned to switch off 50% of the streetlights across the County. Although appeals could be made, for every light that was switched back on another had to be switched off. The Borough Council at its last Council meeting had passed a motion calling on the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council to write to the County Council requesting "that street lights in Northampton be turned back on in areas where residents/or the Police want them back on and in areas which house predominately vulnerable people."

The Chair reported that the County Council's formal review had ended on 23 September and that 5,000 appeals had been lodged. He also reported that a five year PFI scheme to make improvements to the lights left on, starting with the concrete light standards was due to commence from October. The improvements

would include making them more efficient and environmentally friendly.

Thomas Hall commented that if people wanted to make appeals to the County Council then they could include reference to the Equality Impact Assessment as one would have to have been done and it should have included consideration of the impact of the proposals on elderly people.

The Chair urged people to write to their Borough and County Councillors to raise particular issues and to lobby for their support for a sensible resolution to them.

Forum members queried whether the County Council had considered alternatives such as solar powered lights. They also questioned the level of consultation that had taken place with other public bodies including the Police. The Police still advised people that well lit areas were a deterrent to crime and would not have agreed to the switching off of the lights on the Racecourse (subsequently turned back on)

It was agreed that the Chair write to the County Council on behalf of the Forum expressing it's concerns and to include comments on:

- What action was going to be taken to repair pavements and road surfaces that were hazards to pedestrians and road users in unlit areas;
- What action was going to be taken to improve the condition of white lining and bollards where they were heavily worn in unlit areas;
- What action was going to be taken to cut back vegetation from signs and street lights that were left on but obscured by it;
- That whilst the proposal was designed to save £2m from the street lighting budget it was likely to lead to an increase in insurance claims (and therefore costs) for injuries to pedestrians and road users and damage to vehicles: and
- Despite the testing the County Council had undertaken, the true impact of their decision would probably be felt after the clocks went back at the end of October.

## **5. COMMUNITY CENTRES :UPDATE**

Thomas Hall reported that the Council was encouraging local community organisations to take a bigger role in managing community centres. Part of the reason behind this was that the Council did not have the resources available to it to develop these facilities itself. The first group of community centres to transfer to the new arrangements had been agreed by Cabinet in July. Seven were to be run by Community Spaces Northampton, a consortium of existing organisations including the Doddridge Centre and Alliston Gardens Youth and Community Centre. A further Community Centre would be transferred to DeafConnect. Legal agreements were being drawn up at the present time. The new management were currently meeting all user groups so as to understand what they provided.

Thomas reported that a further three community centres were to go to Cabinet in October. This would leave about half the community centres and further discussions were taking place. It was important to Councillors that the Council was not seen to be abandoning community centres or the people/ groups that used them. The

intention behind doing this was to improve public accessibility but the arrangements had to work for the public as much as for the Council. The Council would maintain some financial support of running costs, repairs, marketing support and advice (including links to national and local networks).

In answer to questions Thomas commented that:

- The Council was aware that young people often did not want to use Community Centres and that the new managing organisations were contacting young people in order to find out what facilities they wanted;
- Protections had been built into the leases in respect of a wide range of activities and broad accessibility to community centres; commercial rents could be charged if this was not the case;
- Councillors could be part of any management committee;
- The managing organisations were being encouraged to form a self help group in the absence of a formal "Community Centres Association";
- As it was unlikely that community centres would be provided in areas that did not have them other solutions were being looked at, such as sharing other existing community facilities; and
- If things went badly wrong the Council would step in.

## **6. IMPROVING NORTHAMPTON OLDER PEOPLE'S HEALTH FORUM MEETINGS**

Forum Members commented that the last meeting of the Forum on 14 September had been poorly attended. Thomas Hall stated that Lindsey Ambrose had also been disappointed in the attendance, as earlier Forum meetings had been well supported, and had asked what changes members would like to see. Some comment was made about the title of the Forum. There was some uncertainty as to the remit of the group.

Comment was made that the event had been combined with the UN Convention for Older People and that the mix of social and business activities, had perhaps, lead to a confusion as to what the meeting was truly about. The flyer for it had given a confused picture that may have put people off. The Forum should be health focussed. The NHS and health related charities should be involved.

It was agreed that this item be reconsidered at the next meeting.

## **7. CHANGES ASSOCIATED WITH PLANS TO REDEVELOP NORTHAMPTON BUS STATION**

The Chair commented that he would ask Councillor Hadland to attend the next meeting to describe the latest proposals for the redevelopment of the Grosvenor Centre and the Bus Station.

## **8. COMMUNITY INFORMATION EXCHANGE**

### Diabetes UK

It was noted that an information and equipment event was to be held on 1 October at the St Giles Church Rooms.

### Pensioners Voice

Two events were to be held, firstly on 9 October a presentation by the Black History Society and secondly on 14 November a presentation by Hearing Dogs for the Deaf.

### Abington Community Centre

Table top sale at the Community Centre on 1 October between 1.00pm and 3.00pm

### Eastfields Residents Association

A meeting of Eastfields Residents Association was to take place later that evening (29 September) at St Albans Church Rooms to discuss the switch off of street lights.

## **9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

### Partnership Meetings

It was noted that no community meetings seem to have been arranged. The Chair commented that community meetings had now been replaced by area based meetings that would take in larger groupings of Wards.

### Fairway

A Forum member commented that she had a problem where she lived that Environmental Health had been unable to substantiate. Details of her local Councillor were passed to her.

### Meals on Wheels

Recent press reports that the County's Meals on Wheels Service was the most expensive in the Country was noted. Some felt that the food was of poor quality and it was queried if the increase in charges was in fact a precursor to ending the service.

## **DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 3RD NOVEMBER 2011**

The meeting concluded at 4.00pm