

Northampton Borough Council

Northampton Disabled People's Forum

Tuesday, 8 November 2011

People at the meeting: Cllr Larratt (Chair) M de Rosario (Co-Chair), Cllr B Mennell N Adams, M Boys, H Barber, B Barber, P Landstowne, G Okunsanya (LINK) S Noon (Northamptonshire County Council)

Officers at the meeting I Swift (Housing Solutions Manager)
F Rodgers (Head of Strategic Housing)

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair and Co Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and members took the opportunity to introduce themselves.

Apologies were received from Bill Broaddribb, Rashmi Shah and Chris Woodams.

3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the meeting held on the 5th October 2011 were signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising.

There were none.

4. COMMUNITY INFORMATION EXCHANGE

- The Forum were informed that Favell House – which offered support to people with a range of neurological conditions including Multiple Sclerosis – was looking at becoming a charitable trust and discussions about future options were ongoing.
- Disability multi-sports club: there are plans for a new club at Danes Camp Leisure Centre as part of their Inclusive Fitness Initiative facility. It's hoped to have a launch event on Sat 11 February 2012 which is officially 200 days until the start of the Paralympic Games. The club should then start running fortnightly on a Monday evening 5pm - 6pm. More information from Graeme Wilson at Northamptonshire Sport email: gwilson@northamptonshire.gov.uk tel: 01604 367953 tel/text: 07736 008902
- The Fire Service had expressed an interest in attending a future Disabled People's Forum meeting.

A representative from LINK explained that whilst unable to deal with individual concerns or complaints, they would be able to act and deal with major concerns as

an independent adviser and explained that various Patient Participation Groups were run, for people to attend who wished to learn more about the proposed changes to the Health Service, the details of which she could advise after the meeting.

5. DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT

The Housing Solutions Manager commented that the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) spend was going well. Of the £1.5 million for Council accommodation it was noted that £1.3 million had already been spent, with only £900,000 remaining which would be spent by the end of the year. In response to a question, the choice based letting system did allow for people to transfer from private accommodation to council owned accommodation or Housing Association.

A forum member reported that there was a lack of information in the one stop shop and that more application forms should be provided. The Housing Solution Manager explained that the issue of this had been addressed after discussion at previous forum meetings, but he had arranged for a meeting with the Head of Customer Services and would request that more forms be made available in the one stop shop. Cllr Mennell informed the forum that she had attended a meeting with the relevant Cabinet Member to air the issue and stands had been provided and suggested that perhaps the lack of forms stemmed from replenishment issues as she felt it important for people to be able to access hard copies of the forms as a provision for those who were unable to access the internet. The Chair commented that he had been into the One Stop Shop and had been impressed with the service he had received and the assistance offered with regards to accessing ICT services. He stated that staff had been very pro active and encouraged members of the forum to access floor walkers in the shop, should there be a lack of forms, and staff would oblige in printing a hard copy for them.

A forum member asked for clarification with regards to the recent Ombudsmen report with regards to the Councils provision of DFGs. He further questioned whether there had been an ongoing maladministration relating to the law that was introduced in 1999 and what actions the council would take as a result of the report and further questioned whether the Council had fulfilled their statutory duties. The Housing Solutions Manager explained that the Council was currently in the process of reviewing the Ombudsmen decision. He stated that it was believed that the Council's procedure; the law and best practise was being followed and that the Borough Solicitor was reviewing the case. Any subsequent findings and reports produced would be bought back and reported on at future meeting.

The Head of Strategic Housing explained the legal requirement to assess people to serve their best needs but that there was an obligation to protect public funds – the solutions offered were not always what people wanted but that a lengthy debate would need to be had with the Ombudsmen and any findings or recommendations made would be considered and acted upon. In relation to Occupational Health, it was noted that legislation stated that medical staff were not able to make decisions relating to housing needs and therefore there was a need for the Occupational Health team to make assessments when necessary. It was reported that the Occupational

Therapists received extensive in-house training, one advantage of which was the cost efficiency.

6. NCC PREVENTION CONSULTATION

A representative from Northamptonshire County Council gave a presentation on the NCC Prevention Consultation.

Should members of the forum wish to find out more about the Prevention Consultation and what has happened since:- you can find the reports about Prevention that went to the County Council Cabinet via this link:

<http://cmis.northamptonshire.gov.uk/cm5live/MeetingsCalendar/tabid/73/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/410/Meeting/2003/Committee/399/Default.aspx>

or you can find the Prevention Report and Executive Summary via this link:

<http://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/en/councilservices/asc/services/prevent/pages/prevention-consultation-2011.aspx>

or please contact Sonja Noon to obtain paper copies or copies in another format to meet your needs:

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7. ITEMS FOR NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS

- Fire Service Update - (15 Mins Max)
- Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Panel 1 – Hate Crime (Core Questions)
- NBC and possibly NCC Budget Update.

8. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the Disabled Peoples Forum is 19th January 2012.

9. FURTHER INFORMATION - COMMUNITY EXCHANGE

1. Northampton Disabled Peoples Forum 8th November 2011 Community Information Exchange

The Forum members were informed of the Local Government Ombudsman's report on Disabled Facilities Grant. The Forum was informed that in 1998, the

High Court ruled that local housing authorities are not entitled to have regard to their financial resources in determining whether or not to approve an application for a DFG for purposes within the Section 23(1) of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

The Forum was informed that the Court held that, in making the decision to treat Section 23(1) DFG differently from other, discretionary DFG grants, Parliament recognised the importance of obliging local housing authorities to approve grants to disabled occupants whose occupants fulfilled the purposes of Section 23(1).

The meeting concluded at 7.21pm