

Northampton Borough Council

Northampton Pensioners' Forum

Thursday, 13 December 2012

Officers at the meeting

1. WELCOMES AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Co-Chair Roger Rumsey welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Present were: Councillor Brian Oldham (the Co-Chair of the Forum), Jean Anderton, Mary Dyer-Atkins, J Forrest-Smith, Mike Hill, Monica Lewis, Tony Mallard, Brian Nicholls, John Rawlings, Norman Sharp, Joyce Smith and Ann Timson.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Maurice Brown, Hazel Tuttle and Harry Tuttle.

3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2012 were approved.

Matters arising:

The results of the recent advisory poll regarding Parish Councils within the Borough were given. It was noted that there had been a good deal of apathy regarding the advisory poll, even though a letter had been sent to all residents.

There was concern amongst elderly people regarding the proposed cuts to housing benefit and the potential effects on elderly people. It was agreed that a Housing Benefits Officer be invited to address the next meeting on this issue.

Concerns were expressed about the size of the bus interchange, on which work had now started, and that the agreed layout was not available for comment. It had been reported to the Forum's meeting on 13 September 2012 that a letter had been sent to the Council's Head of Planning expressing concerns about the interchange but the letter had not been replied to or acknowledged. It was agreed that a Planning Officer be invited to attend the next meeting of the Forum to provide further information regarding the bus interchange and its layout.

Tony Mallard reported that the first tenants' conference on the future of the Council's housing stock had been held on 3 December 2012, with approximately 250 tenants attending the two sessions held that day. This was an information giving session, not a question and answer session, which is the format of the drop in sessions around Northampton. A tenants' panel and a Housing Options Panel (with some tenants as members) are looking at the issue. The Council would be looking at options for the future of the housing stock in the summer of 2013 and tenants would then be balloted on the issue in April 2014.

4. CUSTOMER AWARENESS

John Rawlings gave a presentation on the techniques used by some shops to sell their goods and the need for customers to be aware of these. He referred, amongst other items, to multi-buy items which were sometimes more expensive than buying items individually, discount shops where items sometimes cost more than at other shops, weighing scales which should be visible to the consumer on market stalls, leftover offers which were less of a bargain than they seemed, shops rearranging their layouts to encourage impulse buys and the cost of attractive packaging of items. It was noted that the unit price was one of the most effective ways of comparing prices of items.

Reference was made to the power of recent consumer protest regarding a chain of coffee shops. It was suggested customers should vote with their feet if they were unhappy with service or quality.

It was agreed that the Market Superintendent and a Trading Standards Officer be invited to attend the next meeting of the Forum to give their advice on consumer issues.

5. CONCESSIONARY BUS PASS SCHEME

Joe Biskupski read out a response from Northamptonshire County Council to comments made at the last meeting of the Forum regarding potential confusion over the arrangements for renewals of bus passes. It was noted that passes which were due to expire on 31 March 2013 could be renewed from November 2012 through to the end of March 2013, with each month dealing with an alphabetical grouping of surnames, e.g. November A-E, December F-J etc. If people sought to renew in the wrong month they would be allowed to do so. Renewal of passes was being carried out at Northamptonshire libraries. A poster on the renewal process had been placed in the bus station and copies were distributed at the meeting.

A member suggested that it was important to use bus passes as everything was under budget scrutiny in the current economic climate and that any concession which was not used might be withdrawn.

6. NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL PARTNERSHIP FUND GRANT SCHEME

Joe Biskupski reported that the Council had launched a grant scheme for the voluntary sector in Northampton. Full details were on the website and members were asked to bring this to the attention of any local organisations with which they had connections. Joe Biskupski could provide details and direct applicants to an application form. All applications had to be received by 21 January 2103.

7. COMMUNITY NEWS EXCHANGE

A member expressed concerns at the very poor state of much of Kettering Road. It was noted this point had been raised at the previous meeting and was being taken up by Councillor Stone.

A member expressed concerns regarding the works being undertaken at Spring

Boroughs and the issues which had arisen from that. There had been poor communication with tenants and poor co-ordination and control of the works. Councillor Oldham undertook to follow up these issues. It was noted that changes to the Council's contract procedures were partly responsible and that this should improve as the new procedures bedded in.

It was noted that the sometime difficulty of obtaining information in the public sector could make it difficult for residents to monitor and challenge works that organisations were undertaking.

Concerns were expressed regarding the "Being the Best" consultation by the East Midlands Ambulance Service on the future of the service. The consultation would end on 17 December 2012. Members gave examples of some incidents from their personal experience and considered that there the ambulance service needed to remain local and not be regionalised. They considered that ambulances needed to be out in the community and not based in ambulance stations.

8. AGENDA ITEMS FOR NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS

Items for the next and future meetings were suggested as:

- NHS/Liverpool Health Pathway;
- Inviting a Planning Officer to provide more information on the layout of the bus interchange (minute 3 above);
- Inviting a Housing Benefits Officer to address the next meeting on the proposed cuts to housing benefit and the potential effects on elderly people (minute 3 above);
- Inviting the Market Superintendent and a Trading Standards Officer to give further information on consumer issues (minute 4 above).

9. DATE AND VENUES OF FUTURE FORUM MEETINGS

It was noted that:

- There would be an All-Forums Budget Consultation Meeting at 6.30pm on 22 January 2013;
- The next meeting of the Forum would be held at 2pm on 7 February 2013 to plan the Forum's work programme for the coming year.

A member suggested that as there would be a community governance ballot in spring 2013 the Forum could consider inviting the Police and Crime Commissioner to one of its meetings around that time.

The Co-Chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting and wished them a Merry Christmas.

The meeting concluded at 4:05 pm