

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

DISABLED PEOPLE'S FORUM

Tuesday, 9 November 2010

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| PRESENT: | Councillor Pam Varnserry | NBC |
| | Lindsey Ambrose | NBC |
| | Councillor Perkins | Portfolio Holder for Finance |
| | Noor Homayoun, | Individual |
| | Larry Barber, | Individual |
| | Barbara Barber, | Individual |
| | Connie Mulliner, | Individual |
| | John Wright | Pensioners Voice |
| | Norman Adams | Individual |
| | Chris Swinn, | Individual |
| | Ewart Smith | Individual |
| | Martin de Rosario, | Individual |
| | Beverely Mennell, | Individual |
| | Rashmi Shah, | Individual |
| | John Wood, | Individual |
| | Sue Campling, | NHS Northampton |
| | Tom Welsh, | Individual |
| | Anne Timson, | Individual |
| | Madeline Boys | Individual |

1. WELCOME

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Chris Grethe

3. UPDATES FROM LAST MEETING

Railway Related Issues

T Welsh confirmed that the proposed redevelopment of the railway station was being drawn up. It was reported that the development outlined a 3-storey building with the toilets located on the top floor. It was suggested that a more thorough consultation should have been conducted with regards to the involvement of disabled people, as it would be unreasonable for disabled people, the elderly and those with young children to be expected to go up several flights of stairs to get to the toilets.

Disability Facility Grants (DFG)

N Adams suggested that there were differences between those who were entitled to the DFG in private housing and social housing and expressed concern that there

were people who were unaware of entitlements that could assist them in living independently.

B Mennell concurred with N Adams and requested feedback be given from Occupational Health with regards to the Disability Grants. She also reported that many people did not know where to go or where the first port of call was.

It was agreed that the Housing Solution Manager be invited to the next Disabled People's Forum to address members on the DFG developments.

Northampton General Hospital and GPs

S Campling from Northampton General Hospital informed the Forum that 20 percent of hospital attendees had some sort of disability and that Risk Assessments were carried out. It was reported that 'Disabled Go' had carried out an audit on the hospital and that the hospital now had an action plan, which would be implemented in order to improve problems.

S Campling informed the group that she would invite the Head of Estates from Northampton General Hospital to a future forum meeting to explain the plans for the future.

R Shah suggested that more information should be issued to ensure that there is accessibility for all and that patients should be listened to.

The Chair commented that she knew of someone who had been in the Northampton General Hospital and that when discharged there was no aftercare, an experience of which was also had by M Boys.

M Boys shared her experience of her stay in hospital for 21 days and voiced her concerns that people were not doing their jobs properly. She had no after care or physiotherapy follow up appointment and that the help that she did receive was from Age Concern.

S Campling apologised for the experiences had by some people and notified the group that there was a discharge team whom she would report back to.

C Swinn questioned what the effects would be on GP's taking over from Primary Care Trusts and if this would impact on community nursing. L Ambrose reported that the information was still filtering through from Central Government with regards to the white paper and the affects of this would not yet be known.

Equality Act 2010

It was noted that most of the Equality Act 2010 had been implemented in order to replace the existing antidiscrimination laws with a single Act. It would simplify the law, removing inconsistencies and make it easier for people to understand and comply with. It would also strengthen the law in important ways to help tackle discrimination and inequalities.

Byelaw Consultation

It was reported that Cabinet had identified £250k of capital to be spent on a Skate Park facility in the Northampton area – the location of which had yet been identified. It was noted that some young people with disabilities were among those who wanted the skate park.

4. FINANCIAL CHANGE IN NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cllr Perkins (Portfolio for Finance) presented a report on behalf of the Leader of the Council. The Government had announced the Comprehensive Spending Review on the 20th October 2010, which included an indication that finances to Local Government would be reduced by 28% over the next four years. Cllr Perkins informed the group that this was only part of the picture and that the full impact of the spending review was not yet known.

It was reported that the accepted level of government debt was 40 percent of the national income but that in 2008 there had been a very large increase. It was explained that 2031 would be the expected date that the debt would level at 40 percent. It was noted that there had been an expectation that this would happen and that it was not a problem locally but nationally and that there were expectations to provide the same level of services, but without an increase in Council Tax. Therefore, with limited resources it would be necessary for NBC to prioritise what services it provides and where cutbacks could be made.

A distinction was made between statutory and non-statutory services that the Council provided. R Shah questioned what the effects would be on the Disabled Facility Grants (DFG) and whether or not it would be ring fenced. Cllr Perkins responded by explaining that the DFG would not be ring fenced but noted that the Council had a statutory obligation to commit to the provision of it. R Shah also asked if the Council's recent asset disposal was considered value for money. Cllr Perkins explained that there were 2 issues that were considered: identifying assets to get rid of and the timing of the sales.

B Mennell asked if there would be a decrease in parking charges, which would attract more people to Northampton especially on weekends and public holidays. Cllr Perkins understood the concept of such an arrangement but stated that £4 million of gross income came from car parks and that a reduction in that would result in an increase in cost elsewhere and emphasised the necessity to balance the needs of the people with balancing the resources available. B Mennell congratulated the Council on the DFG and spoke of her knowledge of people who have successfully been awarded a grant.

Cllr Perkins notified the forum that further information about the topic could be downloaded from the Treasury's Comprehensive Spending Review and insisted that there was a need not to commit to unrealistic promises and deal with the spending review with honesty and confidence.

N Adams expressed his belief that Northampton Borough Council had squandered the money from the receipts of the right to buy sales and that they had not put the money back into housing. Cllr Perkins insisted that this was not true and informed the forum that all receipts were accounted for with 25% of the receipts being put back into housing and the other 75% going to central Government.

As a way of increasing spending within the area, J Wood suggested that with the announcement of the performance of Elton John, was there a way in which Northampton could promote itself on the back of the event. T Welsh agreed with the idea and that this would allow the town to boost its image and develop an appreciation of the town's heritage.

5. COMMUNITY INFORMATION EXCHANGE

It was explained that the Central Area Action Plan (CAAP) was the plan, which would ensure that the any future development opportunities arising within the Central Area would be used in a way that meet the visions of the future. The Council had based the Action Plan on a vast amount of evidence, which ranged from technical studies through to the outcome of public consultation exercises. It was noted that the views and input of residents and businesses would be highly valued in shaping the policies of the Action plan.

T Welsh reported that he had been on a 'walkabout' within the town centre looking specifically at issues affecting people with a disability. He further went on to voice his concerns that the issue of disability access would be deferred until after the planning stage and be considered more as an after thought rather than being placed at the apex of the planning consultation.

Particular concerns were aired about the reliance on pedestrian crossings and that accessibility issues were being pushed too far into the future. She explained that it was currently as a plan and had not yet been submitted to Government. J Wood requested that in future, consultation be undertaken at an early stage with organisations such as the Northamptonshire Association for the Blind (NAB).

B Mennell informed the group that she was concerned about the water meters that had been secured in the ground could pose problems for disabled people as some appeared to be at an angle and had not been fitted flush to the pavement. In response, Cllr Varnsberry said that she would contact Anglian Water and Northampton County Council about the issue.

It was agreed that the next items to be discussed at the next Disabled People's Forum, to be held on the 4 January 2011 would include:

- Disabled Facilities Grant and Adaptations
- Northamptonshire County Council Assisted Transport Consultation

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as being the 4th January 2011.

The meeting concluded at 8.22

