

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

DISABLED PEOPLE'S FORUM

Tuesday, 4 January 2011

PRESENT:	Cllr Pam Varnsberry	(Chair)	NBC
	Lindsey Ambrose		NBC
	Cllr B Markham		NBC
	Barbara Barber		Individual
	Larry Barber		Individual
	Chris Swinn		Individual
	Rashmi Shah		Individual
	James Varlow		NCC
	Sonja Noon		NCC
	John Wood		NAB
	Ian Swift		NBC
	Madeline Boys		Individual
	Primrose Landston		Individual
	Martin de Rosario		Individual
	Beverley Mennel		Individual

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked Councillor B Markham for agreeing to update the Forum on Disabled Parking.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Brian Stone, Elizabeth Dewison, Ewart Smith, Elizabeth Harvey, Roger Rumsey.

3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

The Minutes of the Meeting held on the 9th November 2010 were signed as a true record following 2 amendments, which changed John Wood as being an Individual to him representing Northamptonshire Association for the Blind and on page 3 '255 of the receipts' would read 25%.

Cllr B Markham spoke on Disabled Parking bays in Northampton town centre and raised a number of issues. He questioned why, in some Borough Council car parks, some bays remained exclusively for the use of Disabled People 's parking, whereas with street parking some bays that were for Blue Badge holders only become available for all to use after a certain time in the evening and on Sundays. It was agreed that maps would be requested from Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) to show the location of Disabled Parking Bays throughout the town centre and for an examination of their location and use to be carried out and comment given as to whether or not they should be exclusively for the use of Disabled drivers 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

ACTION: It was agreed that Cllr Pam Varnsberry would contact NCC and report back at a future meeting.

4. DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT AND ADAPTATIONS

The Housing Solutions Manager, Mr Ian Swift, introduced the report and updated the Forum on the current situation with regards to the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG). It was explained that between 1st December 2008 and the 1st December 2009, 574 requests had been made for DFG's. A pilot scheme was introduced in December 2009, which ran for a year and saw an increase in the number of people applying for DFG's increase to 1114. The average cost of a DFG in the year prior to the pilot scheme was £6,300 and post pilot scheme had been reduced to £5,600.

Another key improvement made was the time taken between customer contact and the actual completion of work; from 64 weeks to 38 weeks – an increase in performance of 40%. It was explained that 38 weeks was still not an ideal time to wait and that there was room for improvements and whilst Northampton Borough Council had protected the Disabled Facilities Grant and would increase its funding in the next financial year, it would not, however, meet the anticipated demands of all of those applying.

It was reported that a part of the pilot scheme involved encouraging tenants to move into more appropriate housing which would also help to protect the housing stock. People in private rented accommodation would also be at a slight disadvantage as there is no security and therefore any work carried out under the DFG could lead to the increased value of the property at a cost to the Council.

It was explained that the combined money used on DFG's was £2 million - £475, 00 of which came from Central Government the rest was gathered from Council Tax with the Borough Council looking at ways of working with the County Council and Health Agencies.

In response to a question from a member of the Forum, Ian Swift, the Housing Solutions Manager, informed the Forum that the 'Supporting People Review' was still ongoing. Another member of the Forum reported that a number of people would have to move out of their accommodation should their disability status change or they have to endure operations.

Mr. Swift informed the group that the previous Government had removed the ring fence surrounding Supporting People and the County Council had followed suit. Following the Comprehensive Spending Review, the Government had removed £3 million from the administration of Supporting People and had made a 60% savings on the budget. He further explained that one of the biggest problems facing Councils was the increased demand on services with less money allocated from Government, which was undeliverable.

A member of the Forum expressed concern that not everybody was able to access the DFG application form. Mr. Swift notified the forum, that this may have occurred pre December 2008 and since that date it had been well publicised and NBC had been the first Council in the Country to provide it on line for people to download.

A further member of the Forum asked of the 574 DFG requests made in 2008/09 how many had been completed. He was informed that just over 300 had been completed with a backlog of 36. It was noted that in 2009/10 1114 requests for DFG's had been made, a number of which had been refused on different grounds.

Another Forum member suggested the Council should ensure that the work carried out is completed to a high standard. Mr. Swift assured him that there was 100% customer satisfaction.

5. NORTHANTS COUNTY COUNCIL ASSISTED TRANSPORT CONSULTATION

Sonja Noon (Northamptonshire County Council - Service Development Manager) submitted a report and informed the forum that the draft policy had been developed using feedback from the Fairer Charging consultation. It was recognised that there had recently been an increase in the costs of charges on assisted transport, which had been approved at an NCC Cabinet meeting. There would be a continued consultation on Adult Social Transport that would run until the end of January 2011.

A Forum member stated that bus passes were being taken over by the County Council and asked whether a more flexible approach could be taken with regards to disabled people and assisted transport. It was reported that NCC were looking across the Country and would want to allow people to make choices and have freedom, which would give them more flexibility. Another Forum member reported that if people are on Disability Living Allowance, their involvement in future meetings and events would be jeopardised as they would be less inclined to attend events due to the costs of transport, which would not always be subsidised, and those most vulnerable would be further marginalised.

It was noted that whilst there had been an increase in charges from £1 to £4 per journey, the actual costs of the journey was £12.50 but that the cost of the journey did not take into consideration distance and that the consultation sought to be more fair and equitable. Whilst the importance of transport for people with disabilities was recognised, it was noted that the provision of transport was not a statutory service and the current transport services budget currently stood at £1.4 million per year.

6. COMMUNITY INFORMATION EXCHANGE

Lindsey Ambrose informed the Forum that the Northamptonshire Older People's Health Forum would be held on the 21st January 2011 at the Guildhall between 2-4pm. The meeting would also cover the Northamptonshire County Council Travel Consultation.

It was requested that the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement be invited to attend a future meeting to give an update on the Byelaw Consultation with in particular the fire laws with regards to Houses and Building of Multi-Occupancy (sprinklers).

Consideration was given to the Draft Budget Consultation – the end date of the consultation would be the 31st January 2011 with a decision being made on the 28th February 2011. A Forum member stressed the importance of people being involved

in the budget consultation and thanked Officers involved for their hard work. Cllr Pam Varnsberry stated she had attended a number of Residents Associations' meetings where she had witnessed a lack of enthusiasm on the topic. Another Forum member suggested that if the information be given to him, he would be happy to publicise it in his area. A Forum member suggested that a more concise and simplified version of the Budget Consultation would be appropriate as people want to know how much it will cost them and how they will be affected as not everyone has access to the internet.

Consideration was given to the number of cuts that would be affecting a variety of services within the Council. There was some suggestion that the 'Interpretation Service' (languages) was an unnecessary expense. Lindsey Ambrose reported that diverse communities should be able to access information and there had been an examination of ways to reduce the costs, which had included working towards people bringing in friends to translate for them.

John Wood (Northamptonshire Association of the Blind) informed the Forum that 2 meetings were being held to give views on a new chip and pin payment machine for getting money from which would be accessible to all disabled people. John Wood further reported that there was a campaign for improving disabled passenger rights on buses. In December, thanks to the hundreds of campaigners who wrote to their MP about the importance of accessible bus travel, we achieved some great results during European negotiations to agree better legislation for disabled people's rights on buses.

However, in order to become law, the compromise now needs to be agreed by EU transport ministers and Members of the European Parliament in early 2011. The RNIB is therefore asking more people to write to their MPs - and those who wrote to their MPs before, to do so again using their new template. The link takes you to the information and template documents to help you if you would like to find out more or ask your MP and/or MEP to support the cause.

http://www.rnib.org.uk/getinvolved/campaign/gettingaround/Pages/passenger_rights.aspx

7. ITEMS FOR NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS

It was agreed that the next items to be discussed at the next Disabled People's Forum, to be held on the 22nd February 2011 would include:

- Consultation on disability awareness training for people providing public transport services

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting is the 22nd February 2011

The meeting concluded at 20.14