

Northampton Borough Council

Northampton Diverse Communities Equalities Forum

Tuesday, 17 April 2012

Officers at the meeting

1. WELCOMES AND INTRODUCTIONS

John Rawlings in the Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. He explained the forum is open to anyone with an interest in diversity and communities and this normally informs the direction of discussion. Tonight's meeting had been opened up further to host the Northampton Alive debate but sadly it had not drawn a good attendance and fewer people than usual had come along.

People introduced themselves.

The people at the meeting included Luisa Jepson (Northants Police Hate Crimes Unit), Keith Mitchell (Community Programmes Manager, Northampton Borough Council), Morcea Walker MBE, Anjona Roy (NREC and Dostiyo), Cllr Suresh Patel (Councillor Co-Chair of this forum), Cllr David Mackintosh (Leader of Northampton Borough Council), John Rawlings (Community Co-Chair of this forum), Nick Stephens (Northants Police), Mike Kitchen (Northampton Borough Council) and Lindsey Ambrose (Community Engagement and Equalities Officer, Northampton Borough Council), a representative from Stagecoach, a representative from Greyfriars Plus group and other members of the public.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Zahira Case (Pearls of Peace), Sam and Christiana Owusu-Akuffo (Divine Prayer Society), Helen Knight (Northants Police).

3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

Minutes of the last meeting agreed except that Chris Mistry was missed out from the list of those at the meeting.

Matters arising – there were none.

4. NORTHAMPTON ALIVE:PUBLIC DEBATE

Cllr David Mackintosh, the Leader of Northampton Borough Council, led a public debate about a number of regeneration projects due to happen in Northampton and which together are known as "Northampton Alive".

More information about the projects, including a film, can be found at www.northampton.gov.uk/northamptonalive.

Cllr Mackintosh described the Enterprise Zone – the largest in the country and providing Northampton with an advantage for attracting businesses.

The development of the Grosvenor Centre should create lots more jobs.

The Fishmarket will become situated in the cultural quarter of the town, close to the museum, art gallery, Royal and Derngate theatres and the due new cinema.

St John's development will have cafes and other facilities.

New student accommodation and the university locating closer to the town centre will help the town centre economy.

The Marina is now open. Long-term this should help with promoting culture and leisure in the town and make more of the waterside area.

Heritage was also important he said, particularly Delapre Abbey.

There was interest in car parking to meet needs of more people in the town centre. The under-usage of current car parking was noted, but it is recognised that current provision would not guarantee to meet future needs. Cllr Mackintosh said car parking would need to be kept under review as new businesses come to Northampton. The inability to use Greyfriars due to acid falling on cars should be offset by new car parking in the new Grosvenor Centre.

A Roy noted that the "cultural quarter" is brought up in meetings without specifically acknowledging black and minority ethnic presence in the town. She said it misses out geographically parts of the town where such communities live and meet. It would be nice to see a community recognition as this goes forward. The Gateway Centre for example is missed, also the Sikh community centre – key landmarks in the BME community.

In Northampton and other towns in the county, there's a problem about faith space. A Roy said a number of incidents reflect that this is not good for communities. There may be opportunities to build in faith space within the exciting future vision for Northampton.

A Roy said the ambition here creates unique opportunities to have challenging equality targets within the development e.g. like Leicester city centre where there were targets for companies to have commitments to corporate giving and were taking on the council's own equality duties by taking on diverse workforces and apprenticeships for young people in the town.

Cllr Mackintosh welcomed the points made by A Roy. He said he would be pleased to look at growing the cultural quarter further, for example having carnival passing through it, having it truly reflecting the town. He felt having the arts collective working with others would provide opportunities and mentioned they had already come up with ideas what they want to do.

With regard to faith places, Cllr Mackintosh said he was aware that some planning issues in the past were barriers to meeting community needs. He advised he is

working with Northampton Inter Faith Forum to help overcome this.

Cllr Mackintosh said having more students in town centre will bring more diversity too.

Cllr Mackintosh said the new Grosvenor Centre will include a multi-faith prayer room.

With regard to the enterprise zone and requirements on companies, Cllr Mackintosh said he believes it is a two-way process: for the council to show that Northampton is open for business, but also to showcase Northampton and initiatives in relation to communities and volunteering and encourage them to be included. Apprenticeships, for example, he said, were important and the council is already among some looking to do more in this area – and wants to see this culture embedded into companies coming into the area too.

A Roy offered that Northants Rights and Equality Council might propose some more formal equality targets. Cllr DM welcomed this and suggested they meet soon as things are moving fast.

M Walker noted when it was the ‘cultural mile’ it took in community groups no longer within the ‘cultural quarter’. Cllr Mackintosh said that the new quarter brings together key players and there is no wish to prohibit other activity elsewhere. He said that ideas on how to enhance this would be welcome.

J Rawlings welcomed the relocation of the arts collective to an ideal location.

The Greyfriars Plus group representative introduced himself as one of a group who want to keep bus station in its current location. He asked why not just demolish the car park and offices which refurbishment of would cost £23M but keep the bus station underneath. He accepted it is an ugly building in bad condition. He said he was concerned to read in a local newspaper that while bus interchange plans for the site of the current Fishmarket have not been cleared, the council had already cut down trees around it. He wanted to know whether the council had acted legally in cutting its trees.

Cllr Mackintosh replied that in relation to costs, it is necessary to look at opportunity costs not just those of refurbishing the car park and offices at the Greyfriars site. It is recognised that there is a need for more car parking capacity as discussed earlier and that the building overall is in bad state of repair; but an even greater cost is the loss of income and job opportunities for local people if it were not possible to expand the Grosvenor Centre. This would impact on people’s willingness to come to Northampton. Big name companies have said they would come to Northampton if the Grosvenor Centre is developed.

In relation to the Fishmarket location, Cllr Mackintosh confirmed that others had been looked at for the bus interchange but were rejected for being too far from the town centre and for not encouraging use of the Market Square in way Fishmarket did – for both the market and events. Cllr Mackintosh said that the planning

application for the bus interchange was submitted yesterday and would be considered by Planning Committee in due course. Now it had been submitted people could look at it for themselves. With regard to tree works to the council's trees, Cllr Mackintosh confirmed that the works are not part of the planning application. He said that the laws about the trees allowed the council to do works to them.

Cllr Mackintosh pointed to early signs that showcasing what Northampton has to offer can help the local economy: the Market and its events includes a new branding "Love Northampton" launched around Christmas time to help encourage people to come to live, work and shop in Northampton. In just a few months it had been found to have increased footfall. It had shown good results by getting business, council and other partners working effectively together. Cllr Mackintosh said he felt the Northampton Alive projects should help to continue to do this.

There would be an exhibition with plans for the Bus Interchange in One Stop Shop from Friday 20 April 2012. People would be able to come to drop in.

The Greyfriars Plus group rep said he had concerns that the new plans would not take account of needs of older people in the way the current bus station did. John Rawlings asked if retaining the bus station were not possible, what the representative felt about the proposed alternative bus interchange. He replied that he was concerned about old people's needs and their being obliged to wait for buses in the cold and wet. Cllr Mackintosh advised that lots of views had been gained from older people and others through a number of consultation activities. The plans now submitted provide warm safe places for people to wait for their buses. Cllr Mackintosh said that now the planning application had been submitted everyone could see and form views how such needs have been heard and responded to in the design process.

The Chair thanked Cllr Mackintosh for coming to speak to the forum.

5. GOVERNANCE REVIEW

Keith Mitchell attended in response to the requests from the forum that he bring the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) to the meeting. He confirmed it was quite a long document and wondered if people would prefer him to talk them through it, or if they would prefer to read it for themselves.

Agreed: the EIA be circulated electronically so people could consider it and make any comments they wish in relation to it rather than to go through it in detail in the meeting.

Note further to the meeting: the EIA can be found at http://www.northampton.gov.uk/site/scripts/download_info.php?downloadID=2188

John Rawlings asked how many parish councils do other towns like Leicester have.

John Rawlings noted that in some areas the same individuals appear to be county, borough and parish councillor. He wanted to know what national statistics there are for 3 tier councils and the same person occupying the position at every level.

Action: Keith agreed to look into what parish councils there are in surrounding counties and send a report back on these to the forum.

John Rawlings said he was worried that we're going down the route of having parish councils and that having a unitary authority for Northampton is not part of the debate. The community, he felt, needs to understand why in his view NBC is having powers diminished and staff numbers are reducing repeatedly.

Keith explained that the second stage of the community governance review is the stage at which equalities impacts and these type of questions will be appropriate to be discussed. At that time it will be clear which areas are interested in having some kind of change to their community governance arrangements – whether that is for a new parish council or change to an existing one, for example.

A Roy asked for an update on how the petitions situation has developed since the last meeting.

Keith said that so far there are 7 petitions in all. The website is updated frequently with this information. Parklands had 160 of a required 375 validated signatures currently. Rectory Farm (most of that ward) had 111 validated signatures of target 250 signatures. Sunnyside and Obelisk wards 338 validated signatures towards a target of 667. West Hunsbury has 374 validated exceeding 355 required to reach threshold. Westone ward has 84 validated signatures target 336. Moulton Leys (about half a ward) has 4 validated signatures and needs 250. St James ward validated 373 just crossing 372 threshold.

A Roy wanted to know what would the CGR process do to help encourage people to get engaged.

Keith said that it is intended to have public briefings in the areas where petitions are validated and council agrees for them to go to the second stage which is a consultation stage. The meetings will be advertised in media and on NBC website. This will go through to about October 2012. If the original proposal needs to be amended as a result of the consultation and listening to what people have said, for example if there is strength of feeling about a boundary this could happen. Those final proposals should then go to Council for a decision to approve having referendum in the relevant areas. Voting in the relevant parts of Northampton should then be 15 Nov 2012.

John Rawlings referred to Article 12 of Northampton Borough Council's Constitution's and the Neighbourhood Partnerships which appear to be part of current community governance arrangements. Keith replied that in its considerations, Northampton Borough Council would need to make decisions about

what would happen to any existing community governance mechanisms.

Note further to the meeting

Community Governance Review has to be conducted following legislation and statutory guidance about when such reviews can and should be done (e.g. it is not advisable to do this during a ward boundary review, it is suggested that a good time to do such review is when an area has seen a lot of demographic change). The guidance includes factors to which councils should have regard such as community cohesion, and the scope of reviews. This guidance is available on the internet at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/743628.pdf>

More information about Northampton's Community Governance Review can be found at www.northampton.gov.uk/cgr .

6. COMMUNITY INFORMATION EXCHANGE

Hate Crimes Unit and Stop and Search

On behalf of the Northants Police, Luisa Jepson and Nick Stephens attended.

Luisa updated on changes to staffing within the Hate crimes unit which have continued to date. It was noted that Detective Inspector Helen Knight has this week come into post in the Unit. Three new staff should join in May/June time.

Luisa said the Police are unsure what this forum would want as information and engagement with the Hate Crimes Unit. She suggested that there are statistics provided to hate incident review meetings which might be useful and could be shared.

Nick Stephens introduced himself as community engagement officer for the Police. He also wanted to know what the forum would find helpful in terms of his work.

It was noted that the unusually poor attendance at the particular meeting made it difficult to discuss needs in detail. It was also noted that attendance has normally filled the meeting rooms with people from lots of communities and organisations attending. It was believed that duplication of items in tonight's agenda, which had happened for various reasons, was likely to have led to some people deciding not to attend.

It was also noted that the forum has a large circulation network with over 100 regular followers on its Facebook page where events, news and opportunities are shared day to day, an email network and the mailing list for these meetings too, which includes former members of the Community Reference Group.

With regard to engagement it was noted that the forum does operate a number of ways of holding meetings. These can include closed groups for discussing specific issues and sensitive information. They also include attending events and open meetings at the Guildhall. The forum is happy to work with organisations to look at ways of meeting their needs as to how engagement takes place.

Nick referred to the fact that tonight there is not much attendance and that with low turnout it would be difficult to get staff to attend or engage with the forum, especially senior staff.

Agreed: Co-Chairs and Lindsey Ambrose to look at meeting with Detective Inspector Helen Knight

With regard to the brought forward request for stop and search information, Nick Stephens said he was the messenger and could email statistics for circulation but did not feel able to give a detailed presentation or answer any questions about them. He apologised that he had not personally been made aware of the particular information about disproportionate stop and search which the forum had requested so he could not provide any such information. Nick suggested he would forward the information he had to Lindsey Ambrose to forward to the forum and then people might contact Lindsey for her to forward questions and queries by email to him to pass on to appropriate officers to answer and reply to him for him to reply to Lindsey who in turn would then pass on the answers to the forum.

In response Morcea Walker said she was concerned about people passing information through lots and lots of people – it's being too complicated to communicate effectively. She highlighted that it was good to have Keith attend as an expert on his area so people didn't have to pass information through lots of people but could simply talk directly taking just a few minutes. Morcea's preference would be to periodically have an Agenda item with attendance by someone who could go through the figures and ask what is that about as Sgt Paul Colhoun used to do. Morcea felt this was better for building relationships and mutual understandings, rather than have messengers unable to speak about things or emailing things around to people to try to make sense of on their own. Morcea also raised concerned that it might be risky to rely on email communication as emails could go anywhere and this might not be helpful.

Anjona said she agreed with Morcea that it has seemed in recent months that the Police have kept changing things without consultation, while other public bodies have been struggling to continue engaging with communities rather than relying on one-off events. She said that this made it a difficult time to form constructive, critical relationships which would be valuable to tackle hate crime. There was discussion that older people in the community who have done a lot of work with councils and the Police remember how things used to be. When BME communities were smaller than now, there was more focus on doing that engagement with local government leading and Police piggybacking on to it – which was then understood to be good for both local government and the Police. Senior people would appear at meetings and the community valued this.

Anjona said forums meetings have wanted different info at different times. In recent months, some more requests have been made than in the past via the forum as a result of loss of other engagement and ways things could be dealt with previously. Some engagement with forums could be bypassed by restoring direct engagement with community e.g. NREC gets very little direct contact from the Police though it considers itself a hate crime specialist and refers people to the Police.

Anjona referred to cold case review happening in other parts of the country as a means of building community confidence. These are not minority agendas but are mainstream agendas for building confidence in the community. These happen in other counties. These recognise people may not be happy to go straight to the Police but will engage with community organisations and community networks.

In terms of stop and search for example, Northants had been fourth worst in the country – that was quite shocking to Anjona. The new Chief Constable came from an area where the disproportionality was less and there was higher community confidence and he wanted to push that locally in Northants.

Burglaries: Meeting Saturday 21 April 2012 from 12 noon at Northampton Guildhall

Nick Stephens said the Police were aware of some concerns among some Asian communities about thefts of gold and cash from their homes and shops. There is a rumour that Eastern European gangs are responsible. Police aware some Eastern European people are involved in some crimes like this, but have no evidence that this is targeting of Asian communities exclusively or mostly by Eastern European. But there is a general perception that Asian families tend to keep a lot of gold at home. A meeting was due to be held to discuss this on Saturday 21 April 2012 from 12 noon in the Godwin Room at Northampton Guildhall.

Northants Police Force Open Day is Sat 12 May 11am – 4pm at Police HQ

This would include helicopters, dogs, Police vehicles and a community engagement stand. Free event. All welcome.

Olympic Torch Relay 2 July

This would be coming through town including Becketts Park. Morcea reported disappointment route has changed no longer including schools.

Euro 2012

Nick Stephens said there was potential for celebrations and tensions in community in relation to this event.

Northants County Council: Developing Local Communities Commission

Anjona said that NREC been meeting with North Northants groups interested in making a legal challenge to the Equality Impact Assessment on this. Any Northampton groups interested in finding out more or getting involved should please contact Anjona Roy at NREC tel: 01604 40080 or email: info@northamptonshirerec.org.uk

NREC

Free training for voluntary sector organisation was coming up on 24 April 2012. Spaces still available. This is the first of a series of workshops to help community organisations strengthen their relationships with public sector organisations. For more information please contact Anjona Roy at NREC tel: 01604 40080 or email:

info@northamptonshirerec.org.uk

Rainbow Bridge Festival

There would be a fundraising Gig on 28 April at Thomas A Beckett public house in Northampton. Tickets £8 with all profit going towards funding for the 2013 Rainbow Bridge Festival. For more information people should contact Sean Silver. Email: sts34@btinternet.com or tel/text: 07912 480 537.

Zimwomen Association – Africa Day celebrations

Africa Day celebrations - 25 May 2012 7.30pm at Marriott Hotel, Northampton. These were due to include speakers, fashion show, performances, poets, exhibitions, music, raffle, 3 course African meal. Tickets £25. Dress code African attire or formal.

For more information and to book a place people should contact Rutendo tel/text: 07951 588 733 or the Zimwomen Office tel: 01604 779 008 or email: zimwomennorthampton@ymail.com .

7. ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Northampton Carnival Archive Project – since the last meeting an approach was made to the Co-Chairs by Ajaib Hussain asking if this project could come and talk to the forum. The project is looking to find out what communities would like the outcomes of the project to be and how they would like to get involved.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of this forum is due to be on 6 June 2012 at 6.30pm at Northampton Guildhall.

Meetings after that are due to be: 18 July, 27 September and 22 November 2012.

The first few meetings in 2013 are due to be 24 January, 14 March and 23 April.

If anyone is aware of any significant clashes e.g. with religious calendar dates, please let the Co-Chairs or Lindsey Ambrose know as soon as possible in case forum dates can be changed to take account of these.