

Northampton Borough Council

Northampton Diverse Communities Forum

Thursday, 27 September 2012

Minutes of meeting

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS (Chairs – Councillor Suresh Patel and John Rawlings)

Everyone introduced themselves. People at the meeting included: Cllr Suresh Patel (Cllr Co-Chair), John Rawlings (Community Co-Chair), Morcea Walker, Anjona Roy (NREC), Lindsey Ambrose (NBC), Joe Biskupski (NBC), Matthew Toresen (FAN and Northampton Volunteering Centre) and Jo Wood (Northants County Council).

Cllr Patel thanked Lindsey Ambrose for her hard work and support. John Rawlings expressed his sadness at Lindsey leaving.

2. APOLOGIES

There were none.

3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the discussions of the meeting of 18 July 2012.

Matters arising – catch up with Police – John Rawlings to follow this up.

Housing update – this will take place tonight

4. NCC – HATE CRIME REPORTING IN SCHOOLS: UPDATE (Jo Wood, School Improvement, Northamptonshire County Council)

Jo Wood (NCC) provided a breakdown of the current position. Jo is the single point of contact for Hate Crime reporting within the education service. This is not a statutory requirement. With the widespread introduction of Academies, the local authority is stepping back.

Jo has developed an online reporting system. This is based on a system used by all schools, with software adopted to allow reporting of protected characteristics. The system went live in July 2012.

AR: NREC wrote to schools in the county, encouraging them to report and reminding them that they have to incorporate equality objectives within their service planning. Schools wrote back saying that there were problems with the software. A number of schools said that they did not have hate incidents. One school objected to their name and address being given and being written to.

Schools must publish equalities objectives on their websites – these would be the focus of school improvement discussions.

The Forum had a number of questions and comments, as follows:

Qu. For schools that have anti-bullying accreditation, has the reporting improved?

Jo Wood: Yes, there is better reporting among these schools. Within Northampton, there is only one school with this accreditation.

Comment: the secondary schools may ask what the outcome is of submitting a return. Some schools are already doing things in this area, but they don't actually submit a return.

Comment: the issue of resources is important here. Previously, there was a whole team doing this work. With resources being reduced, there is now there is only one person doing this work.

Comment: this is worrying. This relates to children, but what about the parents? How should they respond to this? What can we do as a Forum?

Comment: there is a need to encourage good practice. Need to consider whether schools are aware of the context and the value of this work, and need to ensure that appropriate efforts are made to counter racist language.

Comment: there is a general duty among schools to eliminate racism.

Jo Wood: it is important that schools evidence that they are reporting.

Comment: Ofsted is the body that ensures that the school deals with pupil behaviour? The Forum should contact Ofsted

AR: NREC writes to schools to remind them of their statutory requirements. These minutes of this Forum should be sent to Ofsted to inform them of our concerns.

Comment: schools would need to produce significant evidence. If schools are doing excellent work in the area of anti-racism, it is important that they share it.

Councillor Patel thanked Jo Wood for attending this evening's meeting.

5. ACHIEVEMENT OF PUPILS – AN UPDATE (in response to forum concerns – June 2012) (Kate Emmett)

Jenny – would like to know how children within the county are achieving.

NCC collects data which can provide trends of attainment. There is good news for Black children; the data shows good performance during the previous year. However, the performance of Black British children remains a concern. The remaining Black groupings are doing well. Black Caribbean children are the highest performing among Foundation Year (Reception Year) pupils. Their attainment has been improving over the past few years. Whilst overall, at National and County level, 64% of pupils achieve a "good level of attainment", 72% of Black Caribbean, 68% of Dual Heritage Caribbean and 67% of Dual Heritage African. 58% of Somali children achieve a "good level of achievement".

Comment: The Black Caribbean category could include Black British.

Comment: MW said that she has met university students who had been involved in the Black Achievement Programme in Northampton.

Comment: Deone McKenzie working for Hewlett Packard would like to put together a conference for high achieving black children.

KE: Need to keep a close look at "Other Black". There could be a variety of reasons for a dip in attainment in this grouping this year. Whilst Black children achieve above average at end of the primary stage, a concern remains about the achievement of children within the "Other Black" category.

There is a rising trajectory in the achievement of all Black children. The question remains, however, why are Black British children lower achieving than other Black groups.

AR: NREC invested money into Pilkington Report and is concerned that data is not being more widely communicated.

AR: NREC has attempted to engage with Northamptonshire County Council on pupil performance. However, AR believes that there has been a lack of effective communication on the part of the County Council.

KE: Schools hold data and this is communicated with parents. If parents have concerns about how their children are being educated, they should contact the head teacher. The school should provide attainment data. It is hard for NCC to engage with schools that have moved away from NCC control. With the shift away from NCC, parents should engage with the school.

AR: This is an excellent route; however, parents need support to do that.

JR: Attends a wide range of community events and sees that that many people are integrated. Need to consider when do we stop calling people "black"? It is important to consider where people come from and why they came to the United Kingdom. For example, East African Asians came from middle class backgrounds, and could integrate more easily. However other migrant groups have often come to the UK to work in manual occupations, and this will have had a bearing on their achievement at school. Accurate data can help in understanding, but statistics need to be treated carefully.

KE: It is important to consider how people define themselves. If a child is under-achieving, it is important that the school deals with this.

JR: Concerned that the good work that is done in primary schools can be undone at secondary schools. It is vital to learn from performance data at 11 and at 16 years of age.

AR: examining exclusions rates is also important in helping us better understand the problem of attainment.

KE: If young people do not take GCSEs, they are not counted in the statistics.

Jenny: There is a lack of understanding by teachers, who sometimes misinterpret how children respond.

KE: to email exclusion data, providing a comparison among groups. Until a few years ago, the drop of attainment has been higher among Black children at GCSE level. 51% of Black British children gain A* - C at GCSE level, whilst the corresponding figure for White British is 56%, and the national average is 55%.

KE: KE is happy to discuss what the Forum can do to further support pupil attainment.

KE: There are many websites for parents showing attainment figures.

6. HOUSING ALLOCATIONS CONSULTATION, SHELTERED HOUSING REVIEW AND TENANCY STRATEGY CONSULTATION (Ian Swift, Northampton Borough Council)

Following Ian Swift's attendance at the last meeting, the Forum requested an opportunity for further consideration and feedback on the housing consultations currently being undertaken.

For the Sheltered Housing Review a range of methods of consultation were used, including a paper questionnaire, fifty drop-in sessions (including two in the Market Square); meetings (including with faith and BME groups) and focus groups (500 customers). The 22% response rate is considered good.

For the Housing Allocations Review, consultation methods included: an online survey, focus groups, fifty drop in sessions, two Saturday morning events at Northampton's Market Square and attendance at Northampton's Forums. With fewer than 200 responses, the response to the online survey has been considered relatively low. Radical changes are being proposed in the review, with additional priorities for certain groups and removal of Bands C and D. This is estimated to reduce the register from 11,000 to about 6,000.

Comment: There is a danger that prioritising tenants on the basis of income could have the effect of creating housing "ghettos". There is a sense of admiration for the work of the Borough Council's housing staff in difficult circumstances. Sorry to see people who have gone in to career in housing, there is a sense of bitter disappointment over what is happening in to public housing.

IS: There is recognition that if the focus of consultation is disproportionately on the internet, many people will be excluded from this.

AR: Keen to see results. Some of the things she has heard about perceptions about who gets housing has been drawn from the experience of people who use the One Stop Shop. People who attend the One Stop Shop are often disproportionately those from migrant communities. They often have difficulties in communicating, and are more likely to visit in person to speak with the council.

Question: Does IS know whether people have been understanding the proposals outlined in the consultations?

IS: IS believes that people do understand the issues.

Jenny: Presented a scenario of a young couple aged 20 – 25 years, who are both working. What is the prospect of their being housed?

IS: Realistically, there is no chance of being housed by this authority. There is an increasing shortage of housing. In this scenario, there are no specific reasons for rehousing. Housing is driven by need; this couple would not be in a priority category.

7. COMMUNITY INFORMATION EXCHANGE

Community Governance Review: Joe Biskupski outlined the review of Community Governance being carried out by Northampton Borough Council at present. Joe explained that the following has been undertaken / is being planned:

- a. As a result of petitions, the following proposals have been agreed for consultation:
 - Proposed new parish councils for the following areas: Parklands Ward, Rectory Farm, Sunnyside and Obelisk Wards, West Hunsbury Ward, Westone Ward, St James Ward, Hunsbury Meadow.
 - Minor boundary changes to the following: Wootton & East Hunsbury Parish Council, Wootton & East Hunsbury / Collingtree Parish Councils, Hardingstone / Great Houghton Parish Councils.
 - Boundary expansion of Upton Parish Council;
 - A split of Wootton and East Hunsbury Parish into two separate parishes.

- b. Stage 2 Consultation consists of two parts: consultation surveys and Local Advisory Polls / targeted consultation. The following have been undertaken:
- Detailed Consultation Surveys started 3 September and end 19 October (7 weeks). This was advertised in media, community groups, residents' associations, community forums, etc. The consultation document including short survey was available from the Guildhall's One Stop Shop, community centres etc. The survey was available in hardcopy or online;
 - Public drop-in sessions were held at Guildhall on 11 and 13 September;
 - In addition, proposal campaigners have circulated detailed proposals and held briefings locally;
 - Stage 2B Local Advisory Polls take place on 15 November for those residents affected by significant proposals;
 - Targeted consultation is being carried out for minor boundary changes – letters are being sent by 15 October to each registered elector in these areas seeking their views on proposal.
- c. Report of the survey results, the Local Advisory Poll results and targeted consultation are to be considered by Community Governance Review Steering Group on 22 November, and final Council consideration and approval of proposals is scheduled for 3 December 2012.
- d. Where new / changed parishes are to be established, new parish precepts for 2013/14 are likely to be set by the Borough Council and communities in December 2012 / January 2013. New / changed parishes are likely to be set up on 1 April 2013, and new parish councillor elections are likely to take place in May 2013.

Welfare Reforms: Laura Bessell, the council's Benefit Team Leader, outlined Council Tax Benefit reform. The government has decided to abolish the national Council Tax Benefit scheme, and to replace this with local schemes devised by local authorities.

A consultation exercise on the proposed local scheme is closing on 22 October.

An Equality Impact Assessment is required to consider the impact of the proposals on communities. An impact assessment can be found on the website. A full impact assessment will be undertaken when the consultation has closed.

Q: Where are we publicising the consultation?

A: The consultation covers the borough, and has been being publicised locally through 2 radio broadcasts, media announcements, consideration at forums, and discussions with external stakeholders.

Comment: there is a concern that people won't be getting what they need.

A: Laura said that people will get different things to what they received previously.

Q: Is the council allowed to increase council tax?

A: During the current year, there is capping. At this stage, it is not clear under the Local Government Finance Act whether council tax can be increased.

Q: Must the council introduce a local scheme?

A: A local scheme is compulsory.

Comment: there is concern about a lack of understanding by people. Why would people respond to questionnaires that they do not understand?

Comment: there is over-consultation among people who are most affected by changes. They have other priorities and may not respond to consultation, even though it may be important.

8. AGENDA ITEMS FOR NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS

Next meeting: Scrutiny Review (Retail Experience) Consultation

Future meetings: Education and hate crime reporting, Northampton – Alvera Friendship Group, Northampton Borough Council budget consultation (January 2013).

9. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting of the Diverse Communities Equalities Forum will take place in the Holding Room at the Guildhall at 22 November 2012.