

Northampton Borough Council

Northampton Diverse Communities Forum

Thursday, 24 January 2013

Minutes of meeting

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

Everyone introduced themselves. Ten people attended the meeting co-chairs Councillor Suresh Patel and John Rowlands. The minutes were taken by Joe Biskupski (Northampton Borough Council).

2. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

3. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes were agreed as a true record of the last meeting held on 24 March 2013. Matters arising were:

- Forum to contact OFSTED regarding pupil achievement.
- Page 3, item 5 – exclusion data needs to be followed up.

4. THE WORK OF THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER

Iain Britton, the Assistant Commissioner – Justice outlined the role and priorities of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC).

Iain explained that on 15 November 2012, Adam Simmonds was elected to be Northamptonshire's first PCC. This position takes over the role of the former Police Authority in leading policing and criminal justice in the county.

The work of the PCC includes:

- Holding the Chief Constable to account and scrutinising the police;
- Setting the strategy for policing in the county;
- Setting the budget for policing, and the police precept;
- Producing the five-year Police and Crime Plan for the county, with 3 – 5 year priorities.

The Commissioner is accountable to a police and crime panel, made up of councillors and independent members.

Police and crime commissioners are expected to connect and engage with communities and victims and to play a major role in shaping the policing services. They have a new role in commissioning services to tackle crime and disorder.

Iain outlined the main priorities of the PCC. These included:

- Putting victims at the heart of the system. A victims commissioner is to be established from March 2013 for 4 – 5 months;
- Commissioning several types of victim support activities from April 2014;

- Focusing on violent crime, including sexual offences, and ensuring that a reduction of these crimes is a high priority;
- Antisocial behaviour;
- Bringing together services for victims, antisocial behaviour, nuisance and criminality. In the future, the PCC will have a new role for local commissioning of victims services.
- An emphasis on drugs and the impact of drugs on local communities;
- Involving the voluntary and community sector in finding solutions to problems of crime;
- Engaging with the diverse communities of the county;
- Engaging with organisations that have a shared commitment to tackling crime.

Iain added that the Commissioner is keen to engage with communities across the county and how things could be done differently in the future.

Question: What does the team around the Commissioner do? How are appointments made?

Iain: The PCC developed from the old Police Authority (PA) and includes staff from the PA structure. Formally, Iain is an interim Assistant PCC, with his substantive post being with the police. The new Assistant Commissioner posts will be advertised and will be open, public appointments.

Question: How many posts are currently interim, and how many are permanent?

Iain: There are four ex-PA staff and 8 interim posts. Northamptonshire's will be the smallest PCC office in the country, but will be larger than the former PA. This is because the new role is bigger.

Question: It is a concern that the election of a PCC may lead to active political involvement in the work of the police, which would be regrettable. How is the new role going to link in with other agencies? How are the public going to know who and how to contact the PCC? How can the public complain about the police – this is done through the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) at present?

Iain: It is recognised that the issue of police politicisation is a public concern at present. It should be stressed that the Chief Constable is operationally independent. It is important not to perform the PCC role in a partisan manner. Furthermore, it is important that the PCC works in a way that adds value, and does not duplicate work elsewhere.

Complaints addressed to the Chief Constable are a matter for the PCC. Complaints against police officers fall within the remit of the Chief Constable, under the supervision of the PCC, who is responsible for setting standards. The PCC has a role which is not too different from other elected politicians, to pass on and monitor complaints.

The role of the IPCC is somewhat different. This is a non-departmental public body which is responsible for overseeing the system for handling complaints made against police forces.

Question: The Police Plan has been derived from the Adam Simmonds manifesto. At what stage will there be an Equality Impact Assessment? There is a concern about the "war on drugs" and the impact of "stop and search", particularly on young Black males. When Adam Simmonds was seeking election as PCC, he spoke about reducing disproportionate "stop and search". Now that he has been elected, will he continue with this view?

Furthermore, when seeking election, Adam Simmonds said that tackling human trafficking was a priority. Will this be a priority following his election?

So-called “victimless crimes” (such as hate crime, disability hate crime) need to be effectively tackled.

The PCC is accountable to the Police Complaints Panel, which is mostly comprised of councillors with a few additional members. A larger body would have had an equality champion.

Iain: As far as drugs policy is concerned, the aim is not a “war on drugs”. There is a focus on the supply side and a real intent to make things different, moving away from a hard-faced enforcement strategy model. The PCC is keen to engage about Equality Impact Assessments. It is essential that they are not merely box-ticking exercises, and need to be genuine and add value.

The Police Inspectorate will be looking at “stop and search”, the PCC is keen to allow the Inspectorate to do their work, and then follow up with any actions required. The police had assumed that “stop and search” is no longer an issue – however, this view is not shared by communities. The PCC is planning a formal review of “stop and search” within his first year in the post.

Comment: “Stop and search” is a major issue for communities; it impacts not only on Black communities, but also on Asian communities. It is not clear why it will take so long to do something about this.

Councillor Patel: The Forum would like Iain to pass on this issue to the PCC as an issue of concern of the Forum.

Comment: If “stop and search” is to end, it needs to end properly.

Comment: If a member of the public is subject to “stop and search”, he or she is allowed to ask the police officer’s number. In one case, the police officer was rude. If teachers are expected to conduct themselves in a certain manner, there is no reason why the police cannot do so.

Comment: Information has been asked for in the past from the police. However, this has often been unintelligible and delivered by police officers who were not informed.

Question: What does the PCC consider to be the priorities of Northampton’s communities? Is there a section in the Police Plan that reflects the diversity of Northampton’s communities?

Comment: It is important that the PCC engages with young people.

Iain: IB said that he hoped that the Police Plan will reflect the PCC’s commitment to diversity. The PCC recognises issues of diversity, and has been engaging with Northampton’s communities. He wants to talk with, listen to and engage with local people.

Question: Does IB plan to attend a future meeting of this Forum?

Iain: IB confirmed that he would very much wish to attend a future meeting of the Forum to provide an update on the work of the PCC.

5. HOUSING TENANT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY (Joe Biskupski)

Joe Biskupski outlined the Housing Tenant Engagement Strategy 2013-16. This draft document is currently being consulted upon by the Borough Council. It aims to set out the commitment of the Borough Council to tenant engagement as a key aspect of the housing service it provides. Joe

explained that the Council has a long-established commitment to engaging with local communities and recognises its responsibilities in involving local residents in the issues that affect or interest them. Joe Biskupski explained that the strategy had been out to consultation for the past few weeks, and the deadline for responses is 31 January 2013.

Joe asked Diverse Communities Equalities Forum to focus in particular on Section 13 Proposed Engagement Model for Scrutiny (pages 31 – 34).

Comment: There is a particular need for the Council to engage with people with disabilities.

Comment: Action is needed to capture the voices of younger tenants

Comment: Paragraph 2 on page 13 is unfortunate. This reflects a fixed, relatively intransigent approach to people who are vocal and have strong views. This does not mean that people have nothing to say.

6. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY – UPDATE (Joe Biskupski)

Joe Biskupski and Morcea Walker outlined the plans for Northampton's commemoration of Holocaust Memorial Day on 28 January 2013. Two events are being held, a morning event in the Courtyard at Northampton Guildhall, and an evening event in the Great Hall at the Guildhall. Two schools will be involved, Vernon Terrace Primary School and Abbeyfield Secondary School. Members of the Youth Forum will also be involved.

7. PLANNING THE WORK OF THE FORUM FOR 2013/14 (Joe Biskupski)

Joe Biskupski asked whether forum members were content with how the forums were being arranged or if they would feel it more helpful to have an annual work programme.

The Forum agreed that having a work programme may be beneficial as this may help the Forum to make a greater impact. However, they concurred that the meetings should continue to have a degree of flexibility to ensure that topical discussions would continue. It was also noted that with a framework of themed meetings in place the Community Engagement Manager would have more time to arrange for relevant speakers to attend forum meetings.

Comment: Health is an important matter and would benefit from further consideration at a themed meeting.

Comment: Would like to see this Forum as a body which makes more of a difference, and not just an opportunity for people to say that they've attended a meeting. People will attend Forum meetings if they feel that they are relevant.

Comment: It is important to engage with councillors, and to ensure that any actions agreed by councillors are followed up.

Comment: This Forum should work with other agencies.

Comment: There is a need to provide Census data to help identify the main groups. Problems need to be solved at grassroots levels to improve people's lives. Need to empower people at grassroots level to improve their lives.

Comment: In the past, people would attend Forum meetings to understand how the council works. With the internet and increased transparency, things have now changed, as there are many other sources of information and means of influencing agendas.

Comment: Work needs to be done with young people; the Forum needs to include a mixture of older and younger members.

AGREED: That the next meeting of this Forum be primarily devoted to agreeing a programme of themed meetings.

8. COMMUNITY INFORMATION EXCHANGE

Zimwomen: Zimwomen are organising a multicultural fashion show on 5 April at 6pm to raise money for the Mayor's charity.

Zimwomen: Africa Day celebrations are being held on 25 May 2013.

Association of Northamptonshire Supplementary Schools Annual Dinner: a fundraising concert for the ANSS is being held at Cripps Theatre, Northampton School for Boys on 10 March.

Muslim Communities: Muslim communities see the need for a purpose-built mosque. Existing mosques are not large enough to cope with the numbers of people.

FAN: An exhibition of work by lesbian and gay artists is taking place at the Jesus Centre in Northampton.

Holocaust Memorial Day: a HMD lecture is being held at Northampton Synagogue on 10 February. Free admission is by ticket only.

NREC: A seminar on the duty to publish equality objectives is being held at the Doddridge Centre on 28 February at 1pm. Further details are available from Anjona Roy.

LINK: LINK is being set up as a public enterprise company and is encouraging people from BME groups to take part in its work.

NBC Partnership Fund Grant: Joe reported that the deadline for NBC Partnership Fund grants for the voluntary and community sector passed on 21 January. It is anticipated that outcomes will be announced in March 2013.

9. AGENDA ITEMS FOR NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS

- Planning the work of the Diverse Communities Equalities Forum for 2013/14.

10. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting of the Diverse Communities Equalities Forum will take place in the Guildhall on Thursday 14 March 2013 at 18.30 in the Holding Room, Guildhall.