

Northampton Borough Council

Northampton Pensioners' Forum

Thursday, 12 December 2013

Present: Roger Rumsey (Co-Chair), Councillor Brian Oldham (Co-Chair), Jean Anderton, Mary Dyer-Atkins, Mike Hill, Tony Mallard, Brian Nichols, Christiana Owuss-Akuffo, Norman Sharp and Ann Timson.

Sonia Bray (Northamptonshire Healthwatch), Tony Simmons (Stagecoach Northampton Operations Manager), Alice Morgan (Community Development Officer) and Vicki Rockall (Partnerships and Community Manager).

1. WELCOMES AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Sandra Frampton, Harry Tuttle, Hazel Tuttle and Jacqueline Forrest-Smith.

3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2013 were agreed as a true record.

It was noted that the Council had agreed the transfer of its housing stock to a new Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) on 9 December 2013 and that a presentation on the subject would be made to the next meeting (6 February 2014). Councillor Oldham commented that the transfer had been supported by all groups involved and there had been support from all political parties.

It was noted that the consultation on the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme had now been completed and a presentation would be made to the Forum's next meeting.

A member stated that the comment about more robust control being required of Council contractors did not fully convey the problems tenants had faced during the works carried out by contractors. She stated that she had raised the problems with the Cabinet Member for Housing who had said she would look into them. The Interim Head of Landlord Services, Richard Birchett, had given his details at the last meeting, as set out below, and asked tenants to contact him if they had any concerns regarding contractors: rbirchett@northampton.gov.uk, 01604 838955.

DISCUSSIONS

HEALTHWATCH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE: SONIA BRAY

This item was added after the agenda had been published.

Sonia Bray stated that Healthwatch England was the new independent consumer champion for health and social care in England, with Healthwatch Northamptonshire

being the county organisation. Healthwatch Northamptonshire would collect views and opinions on health and social care services from users, carers and the general public, challenge decision-making processes and make constructive criticisms and could make Enter and View visits to health and social care facilities which had at least one publicly funded user. Further information on the organisation is available at: www.healthwatchnorthamptonshire.co.uk.

Volunteers were invited to engage with Healthwatch Northamptonshire and to contribute views and evidence which could be used to build up a picture of the health and social care services provided in the county. There were also opportunities to become involved in one of the Healthwatch working groups and as an Enter and View volunteer.

Sonia Bray asked if members had any issues which they wished to raise regarding health and social care issues. The following items were raised:

- Problems with waiting times for appointments
- Delays in obtaining health and social care services;
- More joined up working between health and social care services;
- Better support of patients after discharge from hospital;
- Unnecessary visits to A and E services, resulting in very long waits;
- More information, including leaflets, for patients entering hospital;

Sonia Bray said action was being taken regarding more joined up working, and referred to a new initiative for supporting frail and elderly patients in their own homes, to prevent unnecessary hospital admissions, and after discharge from hospital.

Members asked if a member of the Social Care Working Group could be asked to sit on the Forum as this would be helpful.

NORTHAMPTON BUS INTERCHANGE: TONY SIMMONS (STAGECOACH NORTHAMPTON OPERATIONS MANAGER)

Tony Simmons, Stagecoach Northampton Operations Manager, attended the meeting to answer questions about the new North Gate Bus Station. He stated that the bus station would have 14 bays, and 8 bays on the Drapery, unlike the 28 in the Greyfriars bus station. This would reduce bus wait over times to five minutes and some minor timetable adjustments would be required, which were currently being tested. Bus services would be prioritised, with the heaviest used services in the areas with most waiting room for passengers. Some services would need to share bays and different services to the same areas would use the same bay or ones near together wherever possible. There would be a maximum of six services per hour from any bay. The bus station would be used by all bus operators with services into Northampton but would remain the responsibility of the Borough Council. The site would be handed over to Stagecoach in January 2014 to make internal arrangements and to train staff, to open for services in early March 2014.

Mr Simmons stated that this was not the ideal site to build a bus station but was the best of the available sites within the town centre which the Council considered.

A Forum member expressed concern at the number of vehicle and pedestrian movement which would take place around the bus station and issues which might be caused in terms of the length of buses. He asked to meet Mr Simmons outside the meeting to discuss these issues. It was noted that the highway authority and police had not expressed concern over these issues and management, supervisors and bus drivers had been consulted on the proposals. A mock up of the proposals had also been tested at Sixfields.

Some comments were made about the size and clarity of the map contained in the agenda. A Forum member also referred to the plans of the bus station, which had been approved by the Council's Planning Committee in July 2013.

Timetables for services would be made available once finalised and would be distributed. Information on "where to board your bus" would be set up in the Drapery. .

In answer to questions Mr Simmons stated that:

- There had been some issues with the heating matrix on some buses causing them to be too cold. Heating on buses were switched on by engineers and involved a judgment call regarding likely temperatures. New buses were being checked as they arrived. Any on-going issues should be reported to Mr Simmons.
- Speed and acceleration patterns of buses were monitored on an on-going basis using GPS technology and any allegation of poos driving standards were fully investigated. GPS data is also used being used checked as part of the route time trials. CCTV is fitted to the majority of Stagecoach's bus fleet and will be provided on all the 46 new vehicles arriving.
- In bus stations, for safety reasons, drivers were not allowed to open the doors to admit passengers once reverse gear had been engaged. At bus stops once the driver had started moving off procedures it was a judgment call for drivers to make if it was safe to abort the departure and allow additional passengers to board the vehicle.

It was **agreed** that Mr Simmons be asked to provide bus timetables to the next meeting of the Forum, on 6 February 2014.

5. COMMUNITY NEWS EXCHANGE

Members of the Forum provided information and updates, as summarised below:

- A Forum member had received a telephone call using her name and to an unlisted directory from one of the contractors working for the Council. As she had not agreed that these details should be released she had raised this issue with the Cabinet Member for Housing and with the main contractor, both of whom said they would look into the matter.
- Number plates were being stolen from cars and owners should be wary if this.
- A Forum member had received a parking ticket at the hospital having parked

in an area without warning notices when the disabled parking bays were all full.

- Councillor Oldham confirmed, in answer to a question, that Enterprise were now operating under the Amey name.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

A Forum member expressed concern that the House of Fraser was closing in the Grosvenor Centre and the shop would be split into two units. He stated that shoppers in wheelchairs relied on the lift in House of Fraser for access between the two floors of the Centre. It was noted that there was lift access between the floors in Boots.

A Forum member stated that there had been an issue recently regarding his son's garage. He had contacted the Interim Head of Landlord Services, Richard Birchett, who had quickly resolved the issue.

7. SUGGESTIONS FOR ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS OR FORUM ACTIVITIES

The Forum was asked if they wished to hold an extra meeting on 16 January 2014 to comment on the Council's proposed budget, which would be considered by Cabinet on 18 December 2013 and full Council on 24 February 2014 or wait until the next meeting of the Forum on 6 February 2014.

Alice Morgan said she would send out invitations regarding the days when the other Forums would be receiving presentations on the budget and also for the public meeting on the budget.

It was **agreed** that a special meeting of the Forum be held on 16 January 2014 to comment on the Council's proposed budget.

8. DATE AND VENUES OF FUTURE FORUM MEETINGS

The Chair wished everyone a happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

The next meeting of the Forum would be held on 6 February 2014.

The meeting concluded at 4:04 pm