

Northampton Diverse Communities Equalities Forum

Thursday, 23 January 2014 at 6:30 pm

Present: Cllr. Malpas (Co-Chair), John Rawlings (Co-Chair*), Cllr Bottwood (Cabinet Member for Finance, NBC), Cllr. Stone (NBC), Ann Timson (Spring Boroughs Residents Association), A. Yusuf (Five Star Group), Abade Ahmed (Somali Community), Alaa Abouzanad (NASS), Pauline Woodhouse (BME SRP), Godwin Katiru (ROHR Zimbabwe), Rachel Packman (Police), Nick Stevens (Police), Anjona Roy (Northamptonshire Rights and Equality Council), Jennifer Campbell (Inspiration FM Community Radio), Rutendo Nyatsine (Zimwomen Association), Anne Wankiiri (Zimwomen Association), Vicki Rockall (NBC), Alice Morgan (NBC**)

(*chaired the meeting)

(** took minutes)

1. Welcomes, Introductions and Apologies

Apologies received by Cllr. Capstick, Morcea Walker and Tendai Ndongwe (NHFT).

2. Minutes and Matters Arising Not Already On the Agenda

Due to a delay in getting the minutes to the meeting, these were not confirmed. Both sets of minutes will be circulated at the next meeting for discussion.

3. NBC Budget 2014/15 - Cllr. Alan Bottwood

Budget

Cllr. Bottwood went through the budget in a minute for the forum. Further details of this can be found here: <http://www.northampton.gov.uk/budget2014>

Questions were opened up to the forum.

GENERAL

JC asked where the money is coming from for the whole budget. Cllr Bottwood advised that this comes from council tax, business rates and funding from central govt. This budget is based on a 0% council tax increase.

AR said that it is difficult to find the Community Impact Assessments for these proposals due to the way the budget has been published.

(NB: Impact assessments have been included with individual budget options to allow for a more informed understanding of the proposals. A general statement and our approach is also advertised on our website alongside budget information: <http://www.northampton.gov.uk/info/200110/council-budgets-and-spending/1940/budget-2014-15/3>)

BUSINESS INCENTIVE SCHEME

AA asked whether the businesses in town are going to be charged for the business incentive scheme. Also, AA highlighted that private let is too expensive, which does not help to fill empty shops. Finally, it was questioned whether business rates have to still be paid even if the space is empty.

Cllr. Bottwood stated that this is going to be a co-project with local businesses, e.g. BID. Also, NBC can only help with a subsidy, working with the landlord and business to find a solution. Finally, Cllr. Malpas believed that rates would still need to be paid but was unsure. This information can be made available for the next forum if required.

ABINGTON STREET

PW raised the scepticism of people that she had spoken to about the opening up of Abington Street. PW asked if this is just because University of Northampton is moving to a central location and therefore just better access for the students. Cllr. Bottwood highlighted to the forum that the opening up of Abington Street was part of the Conservative Party Manifesto when elected into the local authority. This proposal therefore is not because of the relocation of the University of Northampton.

CULTURAL QUARTER

AR felt that the Cultural Quarter is a very slim part of town for such a significant amount of money to be spent on it. It is important to ensure that, in the development of the Cultural Quarter, it is as diverse as possible. We need to see equality targeting and positive action.

PARK RANGERS

JC asked whether the proposed increase in Park Rangers was a result of public consultation. If so, how many responses were received from the consultation and how effective was this? Cllr. Bottwood believed that this would have gone to consultation previously. It was raised how there is always a problem with consultation, in terms of the number of responses received.

(NB: Consultation was undertaken in line with the published consultation programme, of which this meeting is part: <http://www.northampton.gov.uk/downloads/file/6893/draft-budget-consultation-programme-2014-15-pdf>)

All the people of Northampton are engaged via a wider range of methods which include a representative Residents' Panel and the various other groups and networks. Information is published in the local media, including social media, and circulated to relevant organisations)

PW also raised concerns over Park Rangers. The main parks do have lots of good visible work going on. However, smaller parks, such as Eastfield, Bellinge etc. do not have park ranger presence, and park rangers are therefore not in the areas that are most in need. Will there be a noticeable difference in these areas where they need it? Cllr. Malpas said that he holds surgeries in these areas, and he understands that neighbourhood wardens

and park rangers have a huge area and are too stretched, therefore leading to NBC needing more park rangers. Many Cllrs have been receiving this feedback from their residents.

Cllr. Bottwood explained that part of job description of park rangers is going to schools and other groups, engaging with communities and finding ways to help the environment. It is agreed that Park Rangers need to be more visible. Looking at job descriptions, as well as proposing the two new posts, will increase presence.

JC asked where the public will be able to find information as to where park rangers will be. Cllr Malpas suggested that as an **ACTION**, we invite Environmental Services to the next forum meeting to clarify this. Perhaps there could be a rota on the website.

JR said that a key problem in parks is with security. It was questioned whether the Police still patrol parks. RP advised that there are local officers and PCSOs in every area. These would liaise with rangers.

VR agreed with the forum that there has been an issue in getting the message out about our rangers and wardens. There has clearly been a gap when VR and AM were not in post. Wardens should be meeting with groups, and building these partnerships is part of VR and AM role. **ACTION** - VR will take the issues raised back to the Environmental Team.

Staff Terms and Conditions

AR raised problems around the proposed changes to staff terms and conditions, as this may result in NBC not attracting the best staff to deliver excellent services.

Other

JC asked who put the Budget on the agenda. JR advised that this was the decision of Co-chairs and Officers. If there is a cancellation for another guest (RE: Police talk on Stop Search) there is nothing else we can do. VR advised that the Budget was requested for the agenda by the Leadership.

Other issues, such as specific policies regarding NBC and NCC museum link, and specific car parks (i.e. by Quaker meeting house), were raised but could not be answered by Cllr. Bottwood as this is not part of his portfolio – it was asked that the forum invite along the appropriate Cabinet members for these specific issues in the future.

JC was concerned that the public do not understand how the council works or what the cabinet is. Cllr. Bottwood agreed that people do not know how the process works, and suggested that we could have someone to attend the forums to explain this. On this issue, PW has had a negative experience when trying to arrange a trip for people from NBA to NBC to explain the processes in local government, showing different areas and how decisions are made. PW believed that people, young and old, are trying to understand system, but it needs to be opened up. PW said that representatives can keep coming to these meetings and talking to the same people, however there is a huge

amount of people out there who do not understand the system. Cllr. Malpas said that he would take this negative experience back to Cllr. Mackintosh to ensure it is followed up.

4. Consultation - Management and Regulation of Private Sector Housing (Including HIMO's) - Cllr. Joy Capstick

As Cllr. Capstick had to send her apologies, Cllr. Stone explained the background to this consultation. This involves the problems around the fact that most of private sector housing is unregulated. Houses with multiple occupations (HMOs) are regulated, but the rest are not. The question is whether this is ok, and whether NBC should be targeting some parts of the sector or all.

The Core questions have been published with the agenda; all are welcome to submit a response to these questions, and welcome to come to the future Overview and Scrutiny meetings to listen or contribute.

Due to the short amount of time at the meeting, Cllr. Stone recommended that the forum focus on the first question – there are lots of streets in Northampton where you can tell people do not own their houses and there is clear neglect of some properties. Perhaps dwellings are not inhabited by people who are putting back into their community. Is this true? Do some private lets reflect badly on your community?

AR raised issues with the way the question is phrased. AR was concerned that discrimination is rising in private sector, especially as a Bill is coming in whereby private sector landlords do not have to renew a contract unless a stamp is on the tenant's passport. Furthermore, AR was disappointed that the focus of the questions are on property rather than the community. There is a community cohesion issue here which needs to be addressed, especially around heightening inequalities. AR suggested that it would be helpful to have a greater focus on the people, especially relating to issues around advice if you have issues with your landlord.

Some members of the forum agreed that the questions were inappropriate. Cllr. Stone fully accepted this, and agreed that she would want the Scrutiny panel to focus on what the people are experiencing, to get a better idea of what is happening.

AR agreed that she would email Cllr. Stone after the meeting regarding the questions of the consultation. AR also agreed she would be happy to write a response on behalf of the forum. If anybody else would like to feedback also, please email AR.

It was agreed that as time was short, attendees could take these questions away and send answers back to AM or VR. Cllr stone said that the panel want to hear from as many different groups as possible, including tenants, landlords, letting agents, families, women. NBC need to also know where these properties are.

5. Taking the Forum forward

(A) Forum name

Attendees will think about this and bring ideas back to the next meeting

(B) Code of Conduct

Going forward, part of VR and AM's role is to develop the forums. They are aiming for consistency across forums, and are therefore introducing a Code of Conduct. This is to act as a reminder of the expected behaviour in a public meeting, and also as a tool for the Chair if needed. If anyone has any issues with this, please email VR directly to discuss.

(C) Action Plans

Action plans and an Events Calendar (copies of which was also circulated) were also discussed. The purpose of this is to have more action focused meetings. The forum agreed that action planning would be a good idea, and that there was a big appetite to develop the forum. A large part of the next meeting would be dedicated to developing some action plans and ideas for the forum for the next year.

(D) Events Calendar (See above)

6. Items for Discussion at the Next Meeting

- Police – Stop and Search talk
- Planning the activity and action plans of the forum for 2014

7. Date Of Next Meeting

Thursday, 13th March 18:30-20:30, The Holding Room, The Guildhall.

The meeting concluded at 8:40pm