

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

DISABLED PEOPLE'S FORUM

Tuesday, 23 February 2010

PRESENT:	Councillor Pam Varnserry (Co-Chair)	NBC
	Lindsey Ambrose	Community Engagement/Equalities Officer, NBC
	Barbara Barber	Individual
	Connie Mulliner	Individual
	Tom Welsh	Individual
	Martin DeRosario	Individual
	Beverley Mennell	Individual
	Sue Campling	Northampton General Hospital
	Madeline Boys	Individual
	Bridget Gibson	Northamptonshire Link
	Sandra Bell	Doddridge Centre
	Hasina Begum	Individual
	Shaun Steiner-Goldberg	Individual
	Patricia Patrick	Individual
	Noor Homayoun	Individual
	Chris Swinn	Individual
	Councillor Paul Varnserry	NBC

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received by Brian Stone, Chris Grethe, John Wood, Daniel and Suzanne Jwanczuk, Chris Woodhams, Larry Barber and Teddy McNabb.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 19th May 2009, 7th October 2009 and 10th November 2009 were approved.

4. MATTERS ARISING NOT ALREADY ON THE AGENDA

Wheelie Bin Collection

Councillor Pam Varnserry confirmed that she had contacted Environmental Services concerning M. Boys' Assisted Collection and M. Boys confirmed she had now received it.

Councillor Pam Varnserry confirmed that she had organised officers of the Environmental Services department to attend the last meeting but it was cancelled. She confirmed that they would be invited again in the future.

Railway Related Issues

T. Welsh confirmed that he had attended a meeting on 8th February 2010 with the

Ministers and a number of issues were raised.

B. Mennell advised that she had contacted MP Sally Keeble who had confirmed to her that she would make a great effort to attend the next meeting of the forum.

Age Concern

M. Boys advised that she was disappointed with the care for the people of Northampton as Age Concern was overfull and branches had been closed down. S. Bell agreed that the cutting of services was disgraceful and as social care was the responsibility of the County Council then these points should be raised to the Head of Social Services, Charlie McNally.

B. Mennell commented that Northamptonshire did not have a unitary authority and the two different bodies were responsible for different areas. Northampton Borough Council was responsible for repairs and maintenance but the County Council had more responsibilities, which was why their budget was more.

Disability Facility Grants

C. Swinn confirmed that the budget for disability facility grants was £1.8 million and there was a backlog. In 2007 there was a backlog and the population was aging and needed more aids and adaptations. Councillor Pam Varnsberry confirmed that this single issue needed to be reviewed more in depth.

5. CO-CHAIRS ELECTIONS: UPDATE

L. Ambrose confirmed that a letter was sent out with the agendas which explained that after the process of Co-Chair re-elections began it became apparent there was a need to urgently change the way the Forum worked. The changes that were needed to be made meant that it would not be fair to the candidates for Co-Chair or the voting members of the Forum to continue the process.

The candidates had been spoken to individually as a courtesy before the rest of the Forum was told and had been advised that the elections had to be put on hold so that the changes could be made and then the Forum could be involved with NBC in considering what community roles the revamped Forum would need taking account of the new equalities requirements which the council had been told by inspectors it should now look to achieve through forums and other work towards required standards.

6. NORTHAMPTON GENERAL HOSPITAL: UPDATE

S. Campling from Northampton General Hospital provided an update of the changes that the hospital had undertaken over the past year. She confirmed that she was now involved with project management and emergency planning. As from next month the Trust had developed a new role in Human Resources and patient services. A new person had been appointed for safeguarding vulnerable adults and training on safeguarding, equality and diversity was now mandatory for all staff. There were training days for disability awareness with guidance from Ability Northants and Northants Association for the Blind ("N.A.B."). From the Disability Awareness Day folders were produced and delivered to all wards in the hospital with information and contacts included. An equality impact assessment was completed on all policies and more staff were trained. She confirmed that they were also taking advice from other organisations for example; they used coloured beakers in the hospital to help people with visual impairments after liaising with John from NAB.

S. Campling confirmed that there had been a lot of disruption to EAU (Emergency Assessment Unit), A&E (Accident and Emergency) and patients this year as upgrades and alterations had been carried out to the building. The hospital staff were interested to receive patient feedback and each ward included a patient tracker device for people to answer before they went home. Feedback was given to the ward within seven days.

Last year the hospital had 1300 appointments for face to face interpretations, sign language and they had spent an average of £10,000 per month on interpretation and translation. There was an easy read leaflet and first carers policy had been developed and a consultation was due to take place in March and April 2010. This was for formal or informal carers for other hospitals and nursing homes where people contributed to the care of their family or to have a break. The draft single equality and human rights scheme consultation commenced a week ago running until 16th April 2010 and further details were available on the website or on request from Sue Campling at the Hospital. They had a lot of patient involvement with groups such as SURF and reviewed how to involve patients more. Disabled Go was completing a survey at the hospital and a DisabledGo access guide for Northampton General Hospital specifically would be available on the DisabledGo website (www.disabledgo.com) in May or June 2010 and the hospital would commence an action plan for the next three years based on their findings.

T. Welsh commented that in his experience, there was a lack of understanding in hospitals in relation to autism and aspergers and had found that the conditions were not taken seriously.

S. Campling apologised for the bad experience he received but advised that there was a number of patients who came through the hospital and the staff would not be aware of all of the conditions. They were reviewing the way the hospital worked as one system did not fit all.

C. Swinn expressed his concerns of the bed blocking he had experienced three years ago when he was in hospital and they wanted him to be transferred to the hospital in Corby. He advised that in the end he discharged himself and had the treatment as a day patient.

S. Campling confirmed that there had been a lot of investment in reviewing blockages in the system as the hospital had been given targets which sometimes made patients feel that they were being pushed out too quickly. She advised there was now a discharge room to help people go through the system efficiently and safely.

B. Mennell advised that she was a retired nurse and had found that the profession had changed tremendously since she had first started. When she had been a patient at the hospital she found that the nurses worked well with what they had and for a small hospital it worked well for the large area it covered. The staff had to see a lot of patients and people had to accept that the nurses could not be with you all of the time.

C. Swinn advised that when he was in Australia they had day surgeries and practices which took some of the pressures off the hospitals, if one medical centre was busy then you would be transferred to the next one. S. Campling advised that the hospital did use the facilities at the Three Shires which they had to pay for.

Councillor Paul Varnsvery advised that when people are admitted to the hospital they are usually in a highly emotional state. Doctors and nurses were not emotionally involved and it was easy to mistake that they were uncaring but usually had to detach themselves to carry out the job that they did. Generally he had received a good experience at the hospital.

7. NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL EQUALITIES WORK AND THE EQUALITY FRAMEWORK

L. Ambrose advised that her role at Northampton Borough Council had changed becoming the Community Engagement and Equalities Officer, now responsible for corporate equalities as well as community engagement in relation to equalities at the council.

The Council had been recently inspected by “Peer Reviewers” who had confirmed that the Council had made progress in relation to equalities and diversity. They had given very positive feedback about the forums and confirmed that the Council was now an “Achieving” Council on the required standard called the Equality Framework and had achieved the former Equality Standard three level. As a result in December 2009 the Council had been told to review and revise how it works to achieve the Excellent level of the Equality Framework by 2013 at the latest. This required the Council to review and change a number of systems and ways of working. The higher level it must achieve will require the public to have more of a say in how to do things, scrutinise decisions and improve standards. The Forums need to become more efficient and effective, with their views feeding into performance measurement and influencing how the council works more. L. Ambrose noted that some years ago the forums had been connected into the Council’s Overview and Scrutiny system but when political structures had changed the Forums had lost this link. The new higher requirements presented a good opportunity to strengthen and modernise how the Forums work. The Equality Framework required more services to be involved and L. Ambrose advised she was working on restructuring equalities governance arrangements and strengthening corporate training on equalities and diversity within the Council as part of the changes.

L. Ambrose noted that the Council works to a good practice system known as Equality Impact Assessments – a process which prompts council officers and councillors to consider who they serve, the requirements of vulnerable and minority groups such as people with disabilities and the impacts of decisions and changes in policy on such groups. Where negative impacts on people are identified actions are considered to reduce the negative impact.

L. Ambrose advised that a Bill would be going through Parliament which would – if passed - strengthen equality duty for disabled people but that at the moment it is not clear whether and how the disability equality duties on local councils may change. The Bill was currently in the House of Lords and it should soon be clear whether and how the law may change. Once that happened NBC would further revise its Single Equality Scheme to take account of the law and the new requirements on the Council in relation to the Equality Framework and would look to undertake some consultation about the changes.

8. MODERNISING INVOLVEMENT OF DISABLED PEOPLE INCLUDING THE FORUM

Following on from her comments in Item 7 L. Ambrose advised that disabled people and others should be able to have more of a direct say in the development of Equality Impact Assessments with officers and in providing challenge and scrutiny to completed EIAs and action plans relating to them. The creation of some special types of meeting at which Disabled People’s Forum members can look at EIAs which the Forum has chosen to review would provide a new and stronger opportunity to talk with officers and help to improve the quality of their work for people in Northampton. The Forum members would be able to check about whether actions had been done and if so how effective they had

been.

Training would be available for people who wanted to be involved on Equality Impact Assessments so people would be fully informed when they came to meet with the officers.

There was also a possibility of having task groups with officers from the relevant service area so they could be challenged on policies and decisions rather like has worked well when Overview and Scrutiny have done projects through so-called Task and Finish groups.

The Forum had asked in the past to have 'events', days involving lots of services and people who don't normally come to Forum meetings. L Ambrose said that it may be that the Council would look to adopt good practice from other local authorities by having events as 'Involvement Days' planned by community volunteers and council officers, with stands, discussions with services and also for disabled people to say what they feel their priorities are generally – not just about council priorities. Their priorities and ideas could then help to inform council equalities and service planning and issues relating to other local organisations could be passed on to them.

The Forum might also like to continue activities such as Disabled Go Steering Group and the Mayor's Tea for Unsung Heroes on or around International Day for People with Disabilities.

Rather than simply impose a complete new structure on the Forums, L Ambrose was looking to meet with volunteers from each Forum to look with the community both at the things it was identified the council needed to achieve for the equality requirements and at the structures e.g. co-chairs, open steering group meetings which the Forums would use to work in future.

B. Mennell expressed that this was a huge leap forward for the Council although she had a concern that people would give voluntary help and the officers invited would fail to show up. L. Ambrose advised that she had taken a workshop and spoken with Heads of Service and managers who were keen to engage with the forums and aware that they need to make changes to improve how they serve vulnerable and minority groups as part of the new requirements on the Council relating to equalities.

C. Swinn expressed a concern that the Council should consider Arnstein's Ladder of Participation and work towards the higher levels of meaningful involvement so that the community would get to have a say about things. If people would contribute then he wanted to see clear records and ideally not long reports but clear action points and outcomes. He also wanted the reports easier to read and more simplified not always long wordy documents.

C. Swinn also raised some concerns about the need for the Council to consult more effectively and to ensure it gave feedback and paid attention to what people said.

L. Ambrose confirmed that a new post had recently been created of Corporate Policy and Consultation Manager to help address this kind of need. L Ambrose advised that the Council now had a Consultation tool kit developed and she understood that part of the new officer's role was to ensure people used it. In response to some concerns that the Council had relied on email to advertise the participation opportunities for the recent Budget Consultation L Ambrose and Cllr Paul Varnsberry confirmed that meetings had been widely advertised for consultations in newspapers, tv and radio and would review communications to make them more accessible.

In response to a concern that Forums volunteers should be clear what they volunteered for, L Ambrose advised that she intended to have role descriptions so people understood what it was they volunteered for and what they could expect out of it. These would also help to reach out via volunteering organisations to encourage people not already involved in Forums activities to get involved in what interested them and any 'rewards', reimbursements etc that they could get for being involved. L Ambrose welcomed interest from the Forum in suggesting possible non-cash rewards such as free internet access at local libraries and said she would be interested in furthering this discussion at a meeting with interested volunteers from the Forum to look specifically at the new working arrangements.

C. Swinn commented that people should be empowered and they needed data, knowledge and information so training was important. He considered that in some focus groups he had taken part in in the past he had felt there was no outcome so he felt that people's opinions were not taken into account. He felt that evidence had to be weighed and a decision made.

B. Mennell confirmed that this was an exciting opportunity for people to participate and she had also been involved in the tenants participation and it was a way forward to engage and involve people.

9. INFORMATION EXCHANGE

Ability Northants

S. Bell advised that Ability Northants would close on 31st March 2010 and a bid for centre independent living went to outside organisations and work was being subcontracted out. She urged if there were any complaints then people had to be verbal about them.

Doddridge Open Learning Centre

S. Bell confirmed that the Doddridge Centre was a good venue to hold meetings and posters could be put up in the centre to advertise activities going on. They also had different learning courses which were free. For more information please contact 01604 586384.

C. Swinn advised that computers were leased or rented out in Milton Keynes for people who could not afford them. Councillor Paul Varnserry confirmed that this was a good concept and would liaise with Councillor Brian Markham.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was none.

11. ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

L. Ambrose confirmed that the general elections would be running soon and could affect the date of the next meeting.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting is Tuesday 27th April 2010.

The meeting concluded at 19.52