

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

NORTHAMPTON DIVERSE COMMUNITIES EQUALITIES FORUM

Thursday, 14 July 2011

PRESENT:

Cllr Suresh Patel	Councillor Co-Chair (Chair)
John Rawlings	Community Co-Chair and Northamptonshire Quakers
Pindy Chahal	Sikh Community Centre and Youth Club
C. Mistry	Indian Hindu Welfare Organisation
Alaa Abouzanad	Northampton Association of Supplementary Schools
Anjona Roy	Northamptonshire Rights and Equalities Council and Dostiyo
Christiana Owusu-Akuffo	Divine Prayer Society
Sam Owusu-Akuffo	Divine Prayer Society
Lindsey Ambrose	NBC

1. WELCOMES AND INTRODUCTIONS

Cllr Suresh Patel was welcomed as the new Councillor Co-Chair for the Forum.

Everyone introduced themselves.

2. APOLOGIES

3. ROUND TABLE: WHAT CHALLENGES ARE LOCAL GROUPS FACING IN THESE TIMES OF AUSTERITY?

The Forum shared the experiences and challenges faced by various groups:

- **Northants Rights and Equalities Council (“NREC”)**

Anjona Roy said that this year had been OK but next year was a concern. The Government Equalities Office had been consulting on changing the system of grants funding to local organisations to one operated mostly by telephone in future, possibly centrally.

Anjona said discrimination is a personal thing: people need support and confidence with proceeding into often very long tribunal situations – perhaps up to 2 years.

Anjona felt it was good that Northamptonshire had an agency to which people could go for complainant aid.

A House of Commons debate had emphasised mediation and education as needs, but Anjona said this was not enough. She felt in these difficult times there was an increase in issues, such as pregnancy-related dismissal, not offering reasonable adjustments for disabled people and an increase in poor

practice. Anjona gave the example of a tribunal which had been given a fraudulent document and a judge had noticed this. There were more poor working practices in less regulated industries and especially within the logistics sector.

NREC had been trying to diversify its funding base and to reduce costs but the time frame for changes to funding organisations is very fast.

NREC was moving to Northampton College to further reduce costs.

Anjona said that at the county Voluntary and Community Sector conference a survey had found that 30% of voluntary sector organisations had been operating on reserves – so she did not think some organisations had much chance of a future.

- **Sikh Community Centre and Youth Club (“SCCYC”)**

Pindy Chahal updated about this organisation.

There were problems with parking in St George’s Street. Northants County Council had changed the arrangements, reducing what parking was available. Changes about what the primary school would allow were adding to the difficulties. What had been adequate now was making life difficult for the Sikh community.

There was not much residential property in St George’s Street but it does have the gurdwara, the youth club and a primary school which SCCYC use regularly, often at times other people are not there.

Now, on a Sunday there was often nowhere left for people to park. As the road is blocked off, people were having to drop people off if they chose to make the journey and then having to consider parking some distance away. In between the new parking zone that Northants County Council had introduced, Northants County Council had painted double yellow lines along much of the road. Reducing available parking at all times.

The primary school is hired for the Punjabi School. In the past, like teachers for the primary school itself, the teachers for this school had been allowed to park their cars on the site. This had helped them to bring in things they needed to use in lessons and to take them away at the end of the school time. But the school had now decided that the Punjabi School teachers were not allowed to park on the site, saying that it was for health and safety reasons. So although the car park was empty, teachers had to look to park somewhere else.

Parking restrictions in the area only allow for two hours parking now. People have had to start moving their cars frequently. This could be very inconvenient, for example for people involved in providing a religious service

in the gurdwara which may take a bit more time than this.

The Punjabi School class lasted for a bit more than two hours. It finished at 12.30pm. In the past, teachers had been able to pack up their things and make sure the children were met by parents and got away safely, then pack things into their cars. Now as well as the class finishing at 12.30pm, having painted double yellow lines in the road and with time-limited parking restrictions introduced, Northants County Council had started sending two parking wardens to St George's Street for 12.30pm on Sundays to give people tickets. There were usually no parking users other than the Sikh community in St George's Street at that time.

Pindy said there were other difficulties starting to happen about using the primary school. For example, the Punjabi School were not allowed to have the children play football any more. The school had also introduced a £35 per hour charge if the Punjabi School wanted to use anything other than the hired desk-based classrooms. So this meant for example, that they could not go on the playing field at the school.

Morcea Walker and Pindy were due to talk to the school about concerns about the rude behaviour of a caretaker in dealing with the Sikh community and about not being allowed to park on the school grounds any more.

Lindsey Ambrose and Cllr Patel had visited the SCCYC and seen the school in action and the parking issues recently when they gave prizes to Sikh community children and saw the first showing of an exhibition made with young people and older people from the Sikh community through work with this Forum, Northampton Youth Forum and the Money 4 Youth scheme.

It was suggested that the primary school and the county council be asked to produce Equality Impact Assessments which justified the current arrangements. If they could not justify them, then they could be asked to change them.

It was noted that the Bengali school had already moved out because of problems at the school. Being just across the road from the gurdwara and community centre, the primary school had been particularly convenient for the Sikh community to use. Parents might be in the gurdwara and then able to meet their children easily after school.

Action: Cllr Patel to speak to Tony Clarke and a highways engineer to arrange to visit St George's Street and get things improved.

Action: Cllr Patel to ask Northants County Council to review the parking arrangements in St George's Street with regard to equalities and the impact that current restrictions were having on the Sikh community.

- **Northamptonshire Association of Supplementary Schools**

Alaa gave an update on behalf of the schools.

He was not aware of any particular problems or challenges they faced. He said he would check and mention any at the next meeting of this Forum.

- **Indian Hindu Welfare Organisation**

The main challenge this organisation faced was the costs of hiring anywhere to meet. The costs of schools which Northants County Council had brought within the private finance initiative (“PFI”) arrangements and those of many other community venues had increased – possibly due to increasing running costs.

- **Quakers Society of Friends**

John Rawlings provided an update.

This group has a town centre property. They had chosen to keep prices low for 3 to 4 years. Their property is hired typically 3 to 4 days per week. Organisations hiring it include the mental health organisation Mind, mums and babies groups, religious groups and an autism support group. The Quakers group have found pressure increasing on them to hire out the building. It is now often at full capacity. They believe that this is because they are the cheapest place to hire in the town centre.

Northampton Borough Council no longer offered free use of its rooms. It was noted that the council had closed some of its offices and relocated hundreds of staff into the Guildhall. While they work in open plan offices to maximise use of space, this had been associated with increasing pressure on its meeting rooms in the Guildhall throughout its opening hours as one result of the changes. The Quakers group believed that some of the increased enquiries about hiring its rooms were a result of the reduction in free space at the council.

It was suggested that it might be helpful if people knew of more buildings which had rooms that could be hired. It was noted that there are some listings of rooms and community halls on the Disabled Go access guide available for anyone with internet access to use at www.northampton.gov.uk/disabledgo .

Action: Lindsey to find out if NBC has a list of all the venues in Northampton which could be hired.

Note further to the meeting:

Northampton Borough Council does not have information about all venues available to hire in Northampton. The following have been contacted and here’s what they said about room hire:

- **Northampton Borough Council** publishes a list of community centres:

www.northampton.gov.uk/communitycentres

- **Northampton Museum and Art Gallery** has a meeting room at its Guildhall Road site and other spaces which can be hired for corporate or community use. There are some discounts available for voluntary, educational and charitable organisations with a turnover of less than £20,000. The Museum is about to go through some building works which may limit access for a while. Information about “museum hire” is available at www.northampton.gov.uk/museums or tel: 01604 838111.

- **Northampton Volunteering Centre** no longer hires a meeting room for community use. They needed to convert it to office space. But they do provide a bulletin, usually fortnightly (depending on how much information they have to share), which includes about places to hire.

- **Relate, St Giles Street** offer rooms for hire, including in the evenings. Their contact number is 01604 634400.

- **The Doddridge Centre** has a range of rooms of different sizes available to hire. Their website says they may offer free use depending on availability and conditions. They have free car parking on site. Their website is www.doddridgecentre.org.uk or tel: 01604 586384 or email: sandrabell@doddridgecentre.org.uk

- **Citizens Advice Bureau, Mercers Row** offers rooms for hire. Their contact is tel: 01604 235080.

- **Northamptonshire Central Library in Abington Street** offers room hire. Tel: 01604 462040 email: centlib@northamptonshire.gov.uk

- **Disabled Go online guide for Northampton** lists various community rooms, halls which may be of use by the public and due to its nature it includes detailed disability access information as well as contact details. www.northampton.gov.uk/disabledgo

4. NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL EQUALITY STRATEGY CONSULTATION

Lindsey Ambrose, the Community Engagement and Equalities Officer, told members of the Forum about ongoing work to improve the Council’s performance in relation to equalities.

The single equality scheme was due to end in 2011 and new legal duties introduced through the Equality Act 2010 were a further prompt to create a new equality strategy which all council services would use to guide them and contractors about how to provide fair services.

The document now being consulted on was the draft equality strategy document. It had been developed working with inputs from the Northampton Disabled People's Forum and Northampton Pensioner Forum. The Northampton Youth Forum would be helping to consult people at community events during the summer.

In response to feedback from council staff, councillors and people in the community, and drawing on best practice elsewhere, the new document would be much shorter than the single equality scheme. Called "Our Approach to Equalities" the new document should be easier to read. It should help everyone to understand how the council worked – in relation to things like procuring services, training staff, talking to and consulting with people, considering the impacts of its policies and practices on people it served and its workforce.

The Council wants services to be embedding and integrating equalities into all their work – not treating it as an "add on" or separate thing. The needs of everyone in the community should be taken into account day to day and in all planning in considering how ways of working affect people etc. All services at the council use service planning templates which guides them to consider equalities, hate crime and accessibility when they are planning their work for the coming year.

The Council's services are working to the Equality Framework for Local Government. This is a standard which can help them and other people to understand how well they are doing to continually improve how fair and accessible their services are. The Framework recognises three levels of performance:

- Developing
- Achieving – Northampton Borough Council reached this late in 2009
- Excellent.

The Council's ambition is to have reached the Excellent level by 2013. This requires services:

- To consider the population they aim to serve
- To check that people in that population have fair access to their services
- To find out what impact their services and policies are having on people
- To check that people and partners outside the Council understand that it is committed to equalities and is improving in relation to equalities
- To ensure councillors and council workforce are properly trained and knowledgeable about equalities.

While services may have many different objectives for aspects of their work and Equality Framework progress which together form an overall detailed plan of action, a summary is provided at the end of the "Our Approach to Equalities " document.

In addition to the "Our Approach to Equalities" document, services will be publishing other information about their specific services: an annually updated report about the workforce and equalities, equality impact assessments, strategies for particular areas of service, for example. The Council also publishes information about its performance online.

The Council needs to agree some priority corporate equality objectives and publish

them by April 2012. These should take into account things people in the community tell the Council they feel it needs to work on and other information about people's needs. So the first part of the Equality Strategy Consultation is happening until 30 September, going out to community events and with documents available to comment on electronically too. It includes asking people about what the Council needs to improve. There is a short survey which some people may prefer to do and a longer survey for people who would like to comment on the drafting of the "Our Approach to Equalities" document.

The Council will then use the feedback received and further feedback through its annual Corporate Plan and council budget-setting consultation, to identify the equality objectives it will set. It will then publish these by April 2012.

The "Our Approach to Equalities" document will be approved by Cabinet and updated annually.

Documents to take part in the consultation are available at:
www.northampton.gov.uk/ourapproachtoequalities.

Further to the meeting

Online versions of the survey forms were added to the web pages. Surveys were conducted at community events such as the Umbrella Fair and Riverside Festival, links were added to the Facebook pages for each of the Northampton Forums and to the main consultation web pages for Northampton Borough Council.

The mentioned first annual report on Northampton Borough Council workforce equality monitoring, with objectives, was published and can be found in the NBC equality web pages at www.northampton.gov.uk/equality .

5. DIVERSE COMMUNITIES EVENT PLANNING FOR OCTOBER 2011

People at the meeting discussed whether there should be a forum event. In the past some Forums had held events from time to time.

People felt that these days there are lots of great events that happen in Northampton and bring people from different communities together. Those events often are not organised with support from Northampton Borough Council. They are organised by small community organisations. They might take place on land owned by Northampton Borough Council.

If anything, those events could be helped by the Forum and Northampton Borough Council if it were possible for some more support to be given to those groups. For example, many big events require "pre-events" to help with fundraising and event-planning. This would be better than the Forum creating its own event for people to attend.

It was noted that the Northampton Borough Council's Events team was now smaller than in the past.

Action: Lindsey and Cllr Patel to make enquiries within Northampton Borough

Council to see what might be possible.

Action: Forum members to consider what particular things they would ideally like help with and to share this back to the Forum, to help work out more about how support might be provided e.g. in terms of venue, guidance, information, contacts.

6. WORLD AIDS DAY PLANNING (1ST DECEMBER 2011)

Lindsey outlined what had happened at the Guildhall in past years and the initial steps being taken for December 2011. These included

- looking into lighting up the Guildhall in red for the day
- asking staff in various organisations to wear red to show their support
- radio interviews
- asking the football, cricket and rugby clubs if they could do activities to show support
- inviting local groups and individuals to take part in a ceremony in the Guildhall courtyard to talk about the work they do, experiences and to show support. The media would be invited to help raise awareness of the event too.

Participating organisations and services in previous years had included SOLAR, Northampton Borough Council, OPEN, Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service, Northamptonshire Police, Northampton Youth Forum, Northampton Disabled People's Forum, Northampton Town Football Club, faith groups, Northamptonshire County Council, UNISON and GMB.

Lindsey asked if any members of this forum would like to be involved in 2011.

Anjona said that Northamptonshire Rights and Equalities Council would be interested in supporting activities in 2011.

Action: if anyone would like to be involved in recognising World AIDS Day 2011 either as part of activities at the Guildhall or having their own event featured on a Northampton Borough Council web page listing events happening for World AIDS Day, please contact Lindsey Ambrose tel/text: 0779 53 33 687 or email: lambrose@northampton.gov.uk

7. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY PLANNING (27TH JANUARY 2012)

In past years a number of community groups and organisations organising activities in Northampton and the county throughout the period January to end of March. These might relate to past atrocities and genocides, or relate to current issues and current help available to people suffering discrimination, hate crime and bullying for example.

As a show of support these activities have been featured in Northampton Borough

Council web pages, the Holocaust Memorial Day in Northampton Facebook page and sometimes in other publicity materials and press releases.

There would be a ceremony in the courtyard of the Guildhall on 27 January 2012. This would be timed so as not to clash with other similar ceremonies, if possible, recognising that some people might want to be at more than one of them.

There might be an event and other activities too.

Action: if anyone is interested in organising activities or events or joining in with activities at Northampton Guildhall please contact Lindsey Ambrose tel/text: 0779 53 33 687 or email: lambrose@northampton.gov.uk.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Interest in a visit to reminisce by members of Dostiyo

Northampton Borough Council was in the process of selling the property at 26 Cloutsham Street. Anjona asked whether it might be possible for herself and ladies from Dostiyo to arrange a visit to reminisce about their time at the property.

Action: Lindsey to make enquiries and get back to Anjona about this.

Further to the meeting

Lindsey discovered that the person dealing with this for the Council was Adrian Daniell. He agreed that a visit would be possible and asked that Anjona make contact with him. Lindsey passed on the contact details to Anjona to follow up if she and the ladies would like to do so. Due to the sales process the time available to visit was limited.

NREC seeking support for the “Hundred Club”

Northamptonshire Rights and Equalities Council was looking for people to give £10 a month for the “Hundred Club” and get a free place at a dinner which would be £35 otherwise. Lord Laws would be attending the dinner. He was involved in the case of a religious councillor who did not want to deal with lesbian gay or bisexual people.

Other

Pindy Chahal said she wanted to note that she had enjoyed this meeting.

9. ITEMS AND ACTIVITIES FOR FUTURE FORUM MEETINGS

People said that the items they would like to discuss at the meeting on 29 September if possible would be:

- **An update about grants funding and commissioning by Northampton Borough Council:** the Council has in recent months been discussing about possible changes in the future. People would like an update.
- **An update about hate crime:** there have been concerns about lack of reporting generally, a new policy and training introduced at Northampton Borough Council for its staff, and there have been some changes in staffing

at the Police Hate Crimes Unit. People would like an update.

Further to the meeting:

- Joe Biskupski, the Community Engagement Manager at Northampton Borough Council accepted the invitation and confirmed he would attend to speak on the grants funding and commissioning item.
- Bill Edwards, the Neighbourhoods, Licensing and Support Team Leader at Northampton Borough Council confirmed he would attend to speak on the hate crime item
- Inspector Pauline Sturman of Northants Police has been invited to speak on the hate crime item.
- Northampton Youth Forum decided to make promoting hate crime awareness, reporting and support from existing services a priority in their work for the coming year or so. They were invited to provide an update for the hate crime item.

People said that for future meetings items they would like to discuss included:

- **An update about Northampton LINK** (a non-profit organisation based at 15 St Giles Street Northampton www.northamptonshire-link.org.uk which is responsible for gathering people's opinions about health services, prioritising issues, putting together work plans to investigate specific things, taking issues back to the NHS and social care, and linking people to service managers and commissioners to have their say in developing and commissioning services). In particular people would like to find out how this organisation is working to help people from ethnic minorities.
- **Youth funding provision by Northamptonshire County Council and others in Northampton area**

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS:

The dates for the next meetings of this Forum are:

- 29 September 2011
- 24 November 2011
- 19 January 2011
- 15 March 2011
- 17 April 2011
- 6 June 2011
- 18 July 2011

All these meetings are due to be held at Northampton Guildhall, St Giles Square, Northampton NN1 1DE starting at 6.30pm and finishing by 8.30pm.

For people with internet access, news and opportunities can be shared at any time on the Northampton Diverse Communities Forum page on Facebook

(www.northampton.gov.uk/dcf). News can also be shared by email between meetings.

The meeting concluded at Time Not Specified

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