

Northampton Borough Council

Northampton LGBT and Q People's Forum

Tuesday, 12 July 2011

People at the meeting: Councillor David Palethorpe
Barry Hansford

Officers at the meeting Ian Swift
Bill Edwards
Thomas Hall
Lindsey Ambrose

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Leader of Northampton Borough Council, Cllr David Palethorpe, was welcomed as the new Councillor Co-Chair for the Forum by the Community Co-Chair, Barry Hansford, and other Forum members.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were given for the need to change the meeting date and the inconvenience that this had caused.

Apologies had been received from several individuals and groups. These included from Out Proud and Equal in Northamptonshire, Lesbian Line, SOLAR and Northamptonshire Police.

3. ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION: CHALLENGES FOR LOCAL GROUPS IN TIMES OF AUSTERITY.

It was noted that since the closure of Northamptonshire Lesbian Gay and Bisexual Alliance ("NLGBA") a few years ago, there had been no organisation developed sufficiently to provide a similar level or range of support for the LGBT community and people questioning their sexuality in Northampton and county.

There were a few small organisations which had developed to some extent and which had a variety of remits.

It was noted that some members of this Forum had in 2010 spoken to the Overview and Scrutiny group which had been developing approaches to funding and commissioning – and had highlighted the need to consider the LGBT community needs.

It was noted that since that time there had still been a lack of LGBT organisations applying for the Council's grants funding, despite promoting the funding through various communications networks, Forums including the LGBTQ people's forum, despite good numbers of viewings of information about applying for funding on this and other forums' Facebook pages, and despite the provision of training and help for organisations looking to apply for grants funding.

Concern was expressed about whether LGBT and people questioning their sexuality or gender in Northampton area might find it particularly difficult to communicate about their needs in light of the relative lack of support organisations compared to some other parts of the country. The lack of hate crimes reporting was noted as one possible reflection of this.

4. PLANNING FOR COMMUNITY' PRIDE ' ACTIVITIES IN 2012 (INCLUDING NORTHAMPTON CARNIVAL AND PINK PICNIC IN THE PARK)

Matthew Toresen attended to speak with members of the Forum.

Out Proud and Equal in Northamptonshire known as "OPEN" had been developing as a small organisation concerned particularly with things like influencing policy.

The group Matthew would like to establish would be separate to OPEN and about more fun stuff.

Matthew said he had experience of supporting this kind of activity elsewhere. He noted that as well as helping LGBT people to enjoy a social network, a group like this could be a helpful support for people coming out who did not know other LGBT people in the community.

Matthew said it would be important for the success of this group that it did things that the community wanted to do things for themselves. Some initial thoughts were that it might perhaps hold a picnic in the park (an activity which had been popular with the community in past years), might make links to Northampton Carnival and the Umbrella Fair.

It was suggested that the role of the LGBTQ People's Forum and the role of the Council might be to help remove barriers and to support the community to do things for themselves, perhaps by helping to communicate about the group and sharing stands at community events.

The group might meet at various locations e.g. local pubs, Northampton College, the Fire Service and the Council.

If anyone would like to contact Matthew to find out more they should contact him on tel/text: 07982250002 or email: matthewtoresen@hotmail.com

Agreed: Matthew's contact details and a short message about the proposed events group to be circulated by email and on the Forum's Facebook page immediately.

Agreed: Matthew was invited to share the Youth Forum's stand at the Riverside Festival and marquee at the Umbrella Fair in August to help promote the group.

Agreed: Barry and Matthew to liaise about possible work with Northampton College to help promote the events group.

Further to the meeting

The new social events group “FAN” has now become a constituted group, shared a stand with Northampton Youth Forum at the Umbrella Fair to promote itself, and is planning a Christmas Ball to be held in Northampton. It has a Facebook page open to all to join “FAN Northants”.

5. NBC 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. 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 and Pensioners Forum and 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 and 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. It would signpost to important related documents – but not try to duplicate them.

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, including LGBT people, should be taken into account day to day and in all planning, in considering how ways of working affect people etc.

The Council’s services are working to the Equalities Framework for Local Government as 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 – including in relation to LGBT people.

The Framework recognises three levels of performance:

- Developing
- Achieving – Northampton Borough Council reached this in late 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 including LGBT people in that population have fair access to their services and finding out from people
- to find out what impact their services and policies are having on people
- to improve how they are working
- 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.

Services may have many different objectives for aspects of their work and Equality Framework progress, which together, form an overall 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 which may give more detail about equalities at service level or in relation to the council’s workforce.

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.

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 process, 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 .

The initial feedback from the Forum was that the new document appeared to be both comprehensive and also a good length, not too much for people to have to read.

Further to the meeting

Work has been done to progress some of the areas mentioned in the draft equality strategy document:

- 1) The first workforce monitoring report has been published on the NBC equality

web pages at www.northampton.gov.uk/equality . It is on the page in that section called "Equality Monitoring: Workforce and Overview about why we monitor". It includes detailed objectives at the end of the report. The draft document "Our Approach to Equalities" will be updated to take account of this and make it easy for readers to find out about this report if they are interested in the workforce.

2) The council's services have been working to compile the annual corporate report to Stonewall about how what they do compares to the 25 questions in its Workplace Equality Index 2012 survey. A survey has also been sent to all email users at the council for LGB staff to complete about their experiences of working for the council: their answers go straight to Stonewall.

6. WORLD AIDS DAY- PLANNING FOR DEC 2011

The Forum discussed what had happened in past years and began to discuss how World AIDS Day might be recognised in December 2011. It was noted that SOLAR (the HIV/AIDS organisation) wanted to organise activities for this day again and would be happy to work with the Forum to do so.

Agreed: the Forum would work with SOLAR and other community organisations to recognise World AIDS Day on 1 December 2011 including a ceremony in the Guildhall courtyard.

Various ideas were suggested. Ian Swift said his Housing Solutions team had purchased T-shirts for World AIDS Day and light bulbs to light up the Guildhall.

It was also noted that last year a business in town had held a 'red drinks' theme night in support of World AIDS Day.

Actions:

- **Ian to ask if staff could wear T-shirts for World AIDS Day in the One Stop Shop**
- **Ian to ask appropriate managers if the Guildhall could be lit up in red for World AIDS Day**
- **Ian to speak to Royal and Derngate Theatres to see if they would do something for World AIDS Day**
- **Barry to ask if people at Northampton College could wear T-Shirts for World AIDS Day**
- **Barry to ask Bernie Kiff at BBC Radio Northampton if he and the BBC would do something for World AIDS Day**
- **All to ask people in respective networks to wear something red for World AIDS Day**
- **Cllr Palethorpe to ask the Saints if they would do something for World AIDS Day**

- **Cllr Palethorpe to speak to David Mackintosh to see if Northants County Council would do something for World AIDS Day**
- **Lindsey to ask Northampton Town Football Club if they would theme a match around World AIDS Day and whether they could provide space in the match programme to highlight World AIDS Day, the issues and local services that might help anyone with concerns.**
- **Lindsey to ask Northants County Cricket Club if they would do something for World AIDS Day**
- **Lindsey to email the Police to see if they would do something for World AIDS Day and if they would be able to join in the ceremony in the Guildhall courtyard.**

7. COMMUNITY INFORMATION EXCHANGE

Hate Crime Update

Bill Edwards, Neighbourhoods, Licensing and Support Team Leader, and the officer leading on Hate Crimes reporting policy at Northampton Borough Council provided an update. Then the Forum discussed hate crime reporting and how to improve it.

The new policy was passed by Cabinet in October 2010. It fitted with a countywide way of working. It includes LGB and Transgender equality groups. In March 2011 the online reporting form went live. Training had been provided to staff in other organisations across the county. Bill had been visiting departments to give basic training. He had been to management meetings to ensure managers and team leaders understand the new policy and implementing it.

The effectiveness of Hate Crime reporting at Northampton Borough Council was due to be looked at and reflected on, with a view to identifying ways to improve it, by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panel in autumn 2011.

In recent months there had been under-reporting across the county, including at Northampton College, and the reasons for this were not known. There had been under-reporting of hate crimes within the council despite the training and the new policy. Across the country, the only places where reporting of homophobic and transgender hate crime had been good in recent times had been Manchester, London and other places with large visible LGBT communities.

In discussion it was suggested that one reason for under-reporting might be a fear of being targeted more as a consequence of speaking up, or if the hate crime reporting policy and process was perceived to be simply one of "political correctness".

It was noted that at Wellingborough Prison anonymous reporting had given confidence in the system. There, there reports were made on paper and went to the Equality and Diversity Officer. Reporting had improved as confidence that reports would be responded to seriously had increased. It was suggested that public sector organisations might be seen by the public as not serious about LGBT equality and could do with changing systems to improve the confidence of staff and service users.

At Northampton College one thing which had helped to encourage people to report concerns was that some staff have chosen to wear rainbow ribbons to show their individual support for LGBT equality. This has helped to identify them as 'safe people' to talk to, regardless of their own sexuality, gender assignment etc.

It was suggested that sometimes there has been some fear that if people do report concerns nothing will happen as a result of making the report. It was noted that in some organisations, such as Wellingborough Prison, a "you said, we did" response to anonymised reporting had helped to show that things would happen as a result of people reporting incidents.

It was suggested that distributing guidance, perhaps in booklet form, about homophobic language and how to deal with it, might help staff and others feel more confident about how to deal with it.

It was noted that Northampton Borough Council is looking to develop staff diversity groups as a means to help encourage staff to buy-in to implementing LGBT equality in the workplace.

It was suggested that with cuts in public services leading to fewer people having to do more work, there is a potential tension between a bureaucratic approach to hate crime reporting and taking action to address concerns. It was felt that in some areas, staff may deal with issues appropriately for the service user, but the gap might be in completing the paperwork to separately record a matter as a hate crime. It was suggested that looking forward to a potentially smaller council in future years, a simple and easy system for reporting incidents might be considered. Even if it did not capture the same amounts of profiling data as the new system sought to record, it might remove barriers to people reporting – so could potentially be more effective.

It was noted that the Northamptonshire Police Hate Crimes Unit had been restructured and Sgt Paul Colhoun was no longer working for it. The Unit had sent a request to the Forum asking about whether it would be helpful for Police officers to attend any of its future meetings and activities. The Forum discussed the request and agreed to ask the Police to provide an officer to give updates three or four times a year and to liaise with the Forum any other times that homophobic or transgender hate crime was a concern and the Forum might usefully know about issues and/or help to pass on information to the wider community.

Further to the meeting

Northampton Youth Forum raised concerns about homophobic bullying in schools. They put together surveys to find out views of other young people about bullying

and other issues. They surveyed 114 people at the Umbrella Fair in August 2011. They found a significant amount of concern about bullying and that many people do not feel homophobic bullying is treated as seriously as other types of bullying. They felt young people often do not realise that homophobic bullying may be hate crime. They decided to work with other local groups and services to promote hate crime awareness and reporting and campaign against bullying. The results of their survey are available on Northampton Borough Council's "recent consultations" page at www.northampton.gov.uk/consultations.

Housing Solutions: Update

Ian Swift, the Housing Solutions Manager, attended to provide an update.

The Housing Solutions team recently gained Albert Kennedy Trust accreditation in respect of their work on LGBT equality. In the assessment they met all 7 pillars of the assessment.

The team had developed more links with the community through organising the work of people in the team. Now they each worked 1 day of their 5 day week for voluntary organisations concerned with equalities and had 1 day per quarter of the year for "volunteering". Ian said that this had a business benefit because it built up good relations with the community, enhanced the customer experience and promoted equality. It was noted that this is separate to a council project in its early stages which was looking at how council staff could, in their own time, volunteer to help the community for example by helping to set up stands, with litter-picking etc at community events.

Lesbian Couple in Northampton awarded £200K for suffering bullying and harassment by neighbour

It was noted that a lesbian couple had endured four years of bullying, harassment and damage to their home, from their neighbour in Northampton. They had now been awarded over £200,000 compensation for their ordeal (including for harassment, nuisance and repairs), as well as compensation for personal injuries one of the couple had suffered which had made it impossible for her to work since April 2005. According to reports in the press, the neighbour's sole motivation had been to profit by building his extension, regardless whether the couple objected to it or not.

Equalities Conflicts: Stonewall and the Equality and Human Rights Commission

It was noted that the tensions emerging in recent case law around sexuality equality and equality in relation to race, religion and belief, had seen a further development. Currently the case about the registrar Lillian Ladele and Islington Council established the position that people employed by the council should serve all customers, regardless of the employee's personal religious beliefs.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission had made a statement announcing applications to intervene in the European Court of cases of claimed discrimination against Christians in the workplace including the case of the Lillian Ladele. It was arguing that employees might seek 'reasonable adjustments' from their employers to accommodate their personal beliefs.

The LGB equality campaigning group Stonewall had just issued a statement of concern that the EHRC was defending the claimed right of any public servant to turn away any user of a public service and noting that gay taxpayers contribute about £40 billion per annum to the cost of Britain's public services so should not be deprived access to them.

Further to the meeting

Since the meeting the EHRC commissioner Angela Mason made a statement saying that it would not now be seeking 'reasonable adjustments' for workers who refuse to serve LGB people. Stonewall has welcomed this.

8. ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Agreed items for next meeting:

- **SOLAR to attend to speak about HIV Transmission and stigma**
- **Update on creating a community LGBT events group: FAN**
- **World AIDS Day – Planning for December 2011**
- **Holocaust Memorial Day – Planning for January 2012**

9. DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meetings of this Forum:

- 20 September 6.30pm at Northampton Guildhall
- 24 January 6.30pm at Northampton Guildhall
- 13 March 6.30pm at Northampton Guildhall
- 22 May 6.30pm at Northampton Guildhall

Other activities in which Forum involved and open to all include:

- 1 December World AIDS Day
- 27 January Holocaust Memorial Day
- 17 May International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia

The meeting concluded at Time Not Specified