

## **Northampton Borough Council - Northampton Disabled People's Forum**

**Tuesday, 23 September 2014**

Present: Cllr Larratt (Chair), Martin De Rosario (Community co-chair), Eira Bassett (Individual), Barbara Barber (Individual), Larry Barber (Individual), Norman Adams (Individual), Cllr Mennell (NBC), Suzanne McBride (NBC), Vicki Rockall (NBC), Alice Morgan (NBC)\*

\*took minutes

### **1. WELCOMES, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES**

Peter Apologies received by Keith Goodwin (Northampton Door to Door Service), Graham Wilson (Northamptonshire Sport), Peter Mains (Northampton Polio Fellowship), Carl Weininger (Northampton Polio Fellowship) and Simon Burgess (Independent).

Cllr Larratt gave his apologies for having to leave the meeting early, due to another meeting. MDR chaired the meeting in his absence.

### **2. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**

Minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a true record

### **3. DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS - NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Suzanne McBride gave an overview of DFG's and the applications received. The service has seen lots of Disabled Facilities Grants enquiries, an average of 27 new enquiries every month and other enquiries on top of this. This financial year, from April 1<sup>st</sup> up to 17<sup>th</sup> September, there has been a high volume of enquiries - over 409 enquiries. It must be remembered that this work isn't always spread evenly through the year, as this is dependent on the enquiries made.

There are two parts to DFG's – firstly for private sector housing, and secondly for council tenants. One team makes the adaptations to enable individuals to stay in their own home, although there are two separate pots for private/council housing. From January, the service for Council tenants will be part of Northamptonshire Partnership Homes (ALMO). For Council houses going through the process of the Decent Homes Standard, it may be that a surveyor will discover that an adaptation is needed in someone's home, and as a result hopefully everyone's needs will be met.

NA suggested that spending in the first quarter this year was substantially down compared to last year, and shared concerns that next year's budget may be reduced if the spend this year is under budget. SM explained that the actual spend in the first quarter of last year was unusually high, and this year has been unusually low. In spring, the waiting lists for assessments were getting past the 8 week target. There is a target of 8 weeks for enquiry to assessment, and from there the team decide on next steps and what work is to be done – if the work required is complicated and requires planning permission, this can take a longer for the work to

be completed. As a result of the backlog, an additional OT was brought in to do the additional assessments, and there were a large number of inspections during the summer months. NBC has one qualified OT. Occupational Therapy is not a responsibility of NBC, but NBC are paying for this service to ensure needs are met.

On the topic of waiting times, RS felt that the promised waiting times need to be more realistic and clear. SM asked that if anyone has experienced longer waiting times than the target, or have not had the experience expected, please let us know.

SM explained that this year there is a larger budget than last year and this may not all be spent looking at the assessments and applications coming in by the end of the second quarter. The amount spent is all dependent on what is required. SM explained to the forum that there will be national changes to DFGs, and NBC will be working with NCC in a more partnership approach.

An issue was raised regarding the availability of DFG forms. Although these are not on display racks, SM explained that when the public come into the one stop shop, they are expected to see a customer services advisor who will be able to help and provide a form. VR said that issues with the availability of forms are to do with the corporate policy and should be directed to the Head of Customer and Cultural services Marion Goodman. **ACTION: AM to pass comments on.**

NB discussed the change in benefits and introduction of means testing for adaptations to be made to the home. This is part of the national changes through the welfare reform. NB felt that the scrutiny committee that looked at the effects of the welfare reform did not touch upon DFGs. SM advised that the Council are looking at giving people better advice in circumstances where they do not qualify through the means testing – there are other sources of help that individuals can be sign posted to, such as help for ex-forces/widows of forces, equity release, and other charities.

#### **4. ACCESSIBLE BRITAIN CHALLENGE**

The Accessible Britain Challenge representatives were not present. This item will be put back to a later meeting.

#### **5. ACTION PLAN UPDATE**

VR commented that once we have heard from the Accessible Britain challenge, it may be that the forum would like to develop an action plan from this.

#### **COMMUNITY INFORMATION EXCHANGE**

#### **7. ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING**

Disabled Go

#### **8. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

It was discussed that it may be better for meetings to be changed to day time in order to see if attendance improves. It was agreed that the date and time of the next meeting will be circulated once agreed with Cllr Larratt.

The meeting concluded at 6:45 pm