

Northampton Borough Council - Northampton Pensioners' Forum

Thursday, 13 November 2014

Present: Cllr Brian Oldham (NBC, Councillor Co-Chair), Roger Rumsey (Community Co-Chair), Madeline Boys (Pensioners Voice), Mike Hill (Pensioners Voice), Jacqueline Forrest-Smith (Pensioners Voice), Doreen Minney, Veronica Male (Tollers), D. J. Hewitt, D. Nelson, F. Nelsom, Gill Shadbolt (Care and Repair), Tony Mallard (NFRA & ERA), John Rawlings (Northampton Quakers), Brian Nichols, Ann Timson, Cllr Mary Markham (NBC) Vicki Rockall (NBC), Alice Morgan (NBC)*

*Took minutes

1. WELCOMES, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES

Apologies received from Mary Dyer-Atkins

2. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

Minutes agreed as a true record

Matters arising

Spencer Bridge Road – RR followed up with Cllr Hallam regarding B&M store bushes and bushes on Spencer Bridge. RR was advised that the winter maintenance team do the bush cutting work. Weston Favell is due to be done in January, and Spencer Bridge is due early in the New Year also. Cllr Oldham advised that the B&M hedge is being cut back this week.

ACTION: Cllr Oldham to follow up the issues with Spencer Bridge bushes with Cllr. Hallam

Regarding actions from the last meeting, AM will forward the response from the Environmental Health team regarding the number of levies for riding bicycles on pathways, and who levies these fines, and also about whether there is a bylaw for Street Drinking once received along with the minutes. AM did feedback to the forum about the stumps of trees around the town discussed at the last meeting – *“The crowns were removed from the trees until the required permissions to remove the trunks were in place. Most or all of the trunks should now have been removed. These were all highways trees, so it is up to NCC to decide on whether they will replace a tree that has been removed.”*

3. CLLR MARY MARKHAM - NORTHAMPTON PARTNERSHIP HOMES UPDATE

The transfer date for the housing stock going to Northampton Partnership homes is 5th January, and everything is on target for this transfer date. The agreement between NBC and NPH will be signed this afternoon (13/11/14). NBC now needs to look at other avenues within its housing remit, such as homelessness services and private sector homes, etc.

Questions

Where is sheltered housing going?

Cllr Markham advised that sheltered housing is going to be part of Northampton Partnership Homes. NBC are looking at sheltered housing, and have employed a Project Officer who is working on this, undertaking a review of sheltered housing, the properties, the general need and how we make these more suitable. There will also be some work looking at how the two users of sheltered housing – both older people and vulnerable adults – are split in order to ensure needs are being met effectively.

How are tenants represented?

Cllr Markham advised that there is a tenant's panel, six service improvement panels, and four tenants sitting on the board of NPH, which ensure that there is greater involvement and greater say for tenants. Also, the results of surveying tenants have formed the working documents for NPH.

Will Councillors still be able to help with Housing issues?

Cllr Markham advised that the stock is owned by NBC but NPH are paid to manage the stock by NBC. Councillors will still be able to support tenants, and the contact centre will still be able to provide help and advice.

Tupee transfers and redundancies

On the topic of tupee transfers, Cllr Markham advised that the staff transfer was never an exercise to reduce staff. The only area where Cllr Markham could not be certain whether the work force is undergoing change is the Wellbeing Team, due to changes in the funding for the team – a bid has been submitted to NCC for this. All NBC staff have just gone through negotiation and changes to their terms and conditions – this has effected all staff. Northampton Partnership Homes will be in charge of their employees.

Private sector housing

Cllr Markham advised that Private Sector Housing is staying within NBC and will stay as it is. This is a big area that has been left behind; NBC can now devote time to the service area, focusing on HMOs and private landlords etc.

Terms of the agreement

This is a partnership between NBC and NPH – both bodies want this to work, and NBC will enable and assist where ever possible. Any changes in the future will have to go through another options appraisal.

Northampton Partnership Homes would not have the right to sell the properties, as they manage the properties while NBC still own the properties. If in the future new

builds are built, NBC will have the choice of whether these homes remain owned by NBC or whether they are gifted to NPH. NPH will have the opportunity to borrow much more money than the local authority has been able to, and there will therefore be the opportunity for more improvements and developments to be made.

The decision for building new builds in the future will be made by NBC. A decision has been made that NPH will focus on getting all housing stock up to the Northampton Standard for the first 10 years, and therefore will not focus on building new properties in the first 10 years. However, NBC has been successful in receiving a grant for 100 new council homes in Dallington. There is already a retrospective plan for building homes in Dallington, and all money can then be used on building the homes themselves, rather than the road infrastructure etc. which is already covered by the existing building plans.

A forum member asked who would be responsible for the debt if NPH was to have a problem. Cllr Markham advised that, as above, there will be a close working relationship between the bodies, and if NPH ran into problems, there would be consultations between the organisations and NBC would be looking to work with them.

Other issues

Cllr Markham gave an overview of the 'empty homes' programme set up by the homes and communities agency. NBC submitted a bid for some funding from this programme to bring empty homes back into use. NBC have talked to a lot of home owners, advertised the scheme etc. Where people will negotiate with the Council, an agreement will be entered into – NBC will cover the cost of bringing the property up to standard, and which will become the property of NBC for an agreed amount of years. Once the cost of repairing and improving the property has been returned through use by Council tenants, the property will be returned to the original owner. It has been difficult to get people to engage with this scheme. NBC are currently looking at old business properties and converting these into flats, and as a result of being proactive with this, is confident that their targets will be met by March.

A forum member asked about the St. Edmunds hospital site, and whether there would be any possibility of converting the property into pensioners' flats. Cllr Markham advised that this site has had difficulties as it is a listed building. NBC have been in consultation with the owners of the site, and now seems to be moving in the right direction. Details of this are not in the public domain currently, but there will be an update soon.

4. ACTION PLAN UPDATE

WW1 Memorials project

Expressions of interest needed. Forum members discussed the project idea, and made the following suggestions;

DH suggested the project includes the process of interviewing people, in order to get their histories and archive these in order to share with future generations. Also, look at widening out the project to cover both WW1 and WW2 in parallel.

JR suggested that the forum look at how the project can help socially isolated and lonely people, through sharing stories etc. VR suggested hosting a series of coffee mornings.

Other suggestions included

- Contribution of women, personal stories etc.
- Speak to the British Legion – what they are doing.
- Combine project with end of WW2 anniversary
- Cllr Mennell stories to share. Will pass information on to TM to share.

ACTION: AM to formulate a plan of what we are going to do for the anniversary next year. Will liaise with Museum.

5. COMMUNITY NEWS EXCHANGE

AT is supporting an elderly couple who needed repairs to kitchen. NBC were contacted about the repairs, who sent Lovell's to the property to advise on the repairs needed. Lovell's advised that a whole new kitchen was needed, which would take 18 days to be fitted. The individuals did not want a whole new kitchen, and only want the repair to be done. They have now been put in touch with Care and Repair instead, which is payment by the hour. AT asked why Westbridge are not doing these repairs. GS (Care and Repair) advised care and repair are trying to work with NBC in issues like this. Many tenants have been coming directly to Care and Repair and paying instead due to waiting lists. Have met with Westbridge a number of times recently and are trying to work with NBC for a solution. Cllr Oldham advised AT to contact Cllr Markham about this issue directly.

AT raised a health and safety issue in Spring Boroughs. The lights keep going out on 4th and 5th floor of a block of flats. AT has been in touch with the Council and has been advised that this problem is due to water getting into the system; however this has been going on for years and has still not been resolved. Cllr Oldham advised AT to bring this to the attention of Cllr Markham.

JFS asked for advice about an area of land next to some flats near where she lives. This land is Council property and is very overgrown. JFS has made NBC officers aware of the issue at the local Community Room drop in, and still nothing has been done. Cllr Oldham advised that the best person to speak to is Cllr Mike Hallam.

ACTION: JFS to pass details to RR to follow up.

DJH requested that Cllr Hallam is invited to a future meeting with regards to what is in the contract with Amey, how the contracts are drawn up and how they are checked etc.

MH asked who is responsible for keeping road signs clear. Cllr Oldham advised that this is an NCC issue.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

GS – energy efficiency funding from Care and Repair. Care and Repair can provide you with energy-saving solutions, and can do home visits to advise on appropriate energy saving devices. More information can be found here: <http://www.care-and-repair.org.uk/Page.aspx?page=12> or contact Care and Repair on 01604 782250.

7. ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS OR FORUM ACTIVITIES

- Cllr Hallam – Enterprise/Amey contract
- Cllr Bottwood – NBC Budget Consultation
- Cllr Sargeant – Overview and Scrutiny Panel – Poverty in the Town

8. DATE AND VENUES OF FUTURE FORUM MEETINGS

Thursday 15th January 1:30-4pm, Jeffrey Room

Thursday 12th March, 2-4pm, Jeffrey Room

The meeting concluded at 16:00