

Northampton Borough Council

Northampton LGBT and Q People's Forum

Tuesday, 18 September 2012

Officers at the meeting

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Community Co-Chair of the Forum Barry Hansford introduced himself and everyone introduced themselves.

People at the meeting included representatives of Northampton Outlaws Rugby Football Club, Deafconnect, Lesbian Line, Steven from Northampton Pride and Matthew Toresen (FAN Northants and Northampton Volunteering Centre).

2. APOLOGIES

Ben King sent his apologies in advance of the meeting. However, he was able to attend for the first 20 minutes of today's meeting.

3. BEN KING

Ben King provided an update on his current activities and forthcoming plans.

Ben is involved in the Healthier Together review of local hospital provision. Ben urged people from LGBTQ communities to contribute to the review, as it will have a fundamental impact on the provision of local health services.

OPEN has £1,200 remaining in its account and consideration needs to be given what to do with this money. Ben would like ideas from LGBTQ organisations on how to spend the money, ideally, he would like local LGBTQ to benefit from the funds. Please contact Ben on b.king@hotmail.co.uk with ideas.

Ben outlined some of the work of trade union UNISON. He said that the union was working to recruit more members from LGBTQ communities, and that it did much for LGBTQ people such as organising specific events and taking part in Pride events across the country.

Ben spoke about the East Midlands LGBTQ Network. They meet quarterly at various places in the East Midlands region, which covers Northamptonshire, Lincolnshire, Derbyshire, Rutland, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire. The next meeting is in Nottingham at 1.30pm on 25 September. Further details are available from Ben.

Barry thanked Ben for the support he has provided to LGBTQ communities in the past.

4. MINUTES

Everyone agreed that the notes of the last meeting were accurate and fair.

5. OPPORTUNITY TO WORK WITH ARTIST GERALD PORTER

Artist Gerald Porter contacted Anna King at the beginning of the summer holiday, and expressed his willingness to work with members of Northampton's forums. His specialism is local history, and he asks whether anyone is interested in working on a project with him. Gerald will provide his time free of charge, and only asks for reimbursement of the costs of his material.

It was suggested that a three dimensional piece of artwork that relates to Northampton's shoemaking tradition could be produced. This could have a link with the "kinky boots" theme that has done so much to raise the recent profile of the town.

The next stage is to invite Gerald Porter to come to discuss proposals, and possibly carry out a project over two or three days.

6. HOUSING CONSULTATIONS: TENANCY STRATEGY, HOUSING ALLOCATIONS AND SHELTERED HOUSING REVIEW

Sheltered Housing Review: Changes are being proposed to sheltered housing services. There are currently three levels of support, with a low degree of flexibility. Only sheltered housing tenants can access support at present.

The proposals seek to expand the provision of the service to the wider community, with the aim of encouraging independence. A system of flexible support is proposed, support which reflects clients' changing circumstances. The service will be open to everyone.

The proposals recognise that the network of community rooms is currently under-utilised. Consideration will be given whether to open them up to wider community use, and developing their use in supporting people.

The twelve week consultation period ends on 24 September 2012. The consultation has included an on-line survey (over 1000 responses), various events and a presence at Forums such as this. In addition, there is a dedicated phone line.

Housing Allocations Review: Ian Swift, Housing Solution Manager outlined proposals for changes to the Housing Allocations Policy.

The current council housing waiting list contains nearly 10,000 people, with over 500 people in an emergency category. The numbers waiting for accommodation is increasing, and with the council only able to allocate around 1000 people per year, most people on the waiting list do not have any realistic chance of being housed by the local authority, particularly those on the lower priority bands. Currently, around 100 "affordable" units are being built each year, while the council receives 500 applications every month. Lettings are reducing due to the economic circumstances; there is relatively little movement in accommodation with an increased number of applications.

The Localism Act has given the council more flexibility in managing the housing waiting list. The proposals include removing Bands C and D, which in practice, are currently not being offered housing. A new system of priorities will be introduced, including people who do community and voluntary work and people leaving the armed services.

There are proposals for tenancy checks before being allowed to join the register, and potential tenants may be excluded if they have caused damage to properties, or have been convicted of committing hate crimes, or for people who have arrears in their rent.

It is proposed that, in the event of a prospective tenant refusing three property offers, they will be excluded from the housing register for twelve months.

One of the effects of the potential changes will be to reduce the housing register from nearly 10,000 to around 4,500. Part of this will be achieved by concentrating on the highest priority bands.

The extensive consultation has included: speaking at forums, fifty drop-in sessions, 30 sessions within the community and focus groups. The consultation ends on 23 October.

Q: Will people who are victims of hate crime be treated as an emergency?

A: A specific hate crime officer has been recruited to provide specialist advice to victims of hate crime.

Q: Will the housing service maintain its “champion” status?

A: The service has several accreditations, including by the Albert Kennedy Trust. Furthermore, a recent submission has been made to Stonewall.

Q: Is there any scheme for exchanging housing nationally?

A: The best way for someone in Band C is through mutual exchange. There is an internet service called HomeSwapper (<http://www.homeswapper.co.uk/>) which facilitates such exchanges.

Tenancy Strategy: Gary Parsons, the council’s housing Strategy and Performance Manager, outlined plans to develop the council’s tenancy strategy. Local Authorities need to develop their tenancy strategies by mid-January 2013. The strategy needs to cover how to offer tenancies, and for how long. Currently, following a twelve-month introductory tenancy, tenancies are offered for life.

It is proposed to introduce new five-year fixed term tenancies, as well as a lifetime tenancy (for elderly people and people who are disabled). There will be criteria for renewal for five-year tenancies once they have expired. In certain instances, tenants will not be eligible for an extension to their tenancies, for example where there is under-occupation of the property, where adaptations to properties are no longer required, or where changes to financial circumstances mean that tenants can afford the privately-rented sector.

If a tenant moves to a new address, this will be seen as a new tenancy.

The sixteen-week consultation ends on 23 October, 2012. The proposals will be considered by the council’s cabinet in December.

Comment: The proposed changes will remove security for council tenants. Many tenants currently have a stake in their home and take pride in it. If the tenancy is limited, they will not invest in their properties. There are many disincentives for people to improve their lives.

Response: The proposed changes will only affect new tenancies. All local authorities are facing similar challenges.

Q: Will the bandings be made clear?

A: Yes, the same threshold will be used.

7.COUNCIL TAX REFORM CONSULTATION:

Laura Bessell, the council's Benefit Team Leader, outlined Council Tax Benefit reform.

The government has decided to abolish the national Council Tax Benefit scheme, and to replace this with local schemes devised by local authorities.

A consultation exercise on the proposed local scheme is closing on 22 October.

Q: Will there be discounts for single people in the proposed local scheme?

A: Discounts are not currently envisaged, but may be included in future. There will be a burden on the rental economy as landlords will be required to pay full council tax. Other exemptions may also be removed. Legislation is due in November.

Comment: An Equality Impact Assessment is required to consider the impact of the proposals on the LGBT communities.

8.PLANS FOR WORLD AIDS DAY ACTIVITY - SAT 1 DEC 10AM TO 1PM AT NORTHAMPTON GUILDHALL

The Mayor has confirmed his attendance, as have the Youth Forum. Space has been booked in the Guildhall Courtyard and the Court Room.

The Forum discussed ideas for commemorating the day. These included:

- Floodlighting the Guildhall or other public buildings in red;
- Involving the Big Red Bus;
- Projecting messages to lost relatives / friends on buildings or pavements.

Matthew Toresen has agreed to contact SOLAR about their involvement in the event.

9.COMMUNITY INFORMATION EXCHANGE

Lindsey Ambrose: On behalf of the Forum, Barry Hansford would like to formally record thanks to Lindsey Ambrose for her excellent work in supporting the LGBTQ Forum.

Northampton Pride event: Steven outlined his vision for a Northampton Pride event. He is keen to hold a major event, and would like to set up a committee to take this forward.

Q: Would the deaf community be involved in the planning and implementation of Northampton Pride?

A: Yes, the event needs to be inclusive.

Comment: Would it be possible to extend an existing event, rather than start a new event from scratch? Experience from other Pride events show that they started reasonably modestly, and grew into significant events over time.

Comment: Perhaps the Umbrella Fair can be extended to create a Pride event?

Comment: The FAN strategy involved a slow build-up; this recognised the challenges in engaging with the LGBTQ community. Support needs to be built up

over time, it takes many years to develop a well-supported and successful Pride event, and it may be more appropriate to build this on an existing event such as the Umbrella Fair.

Comment: if the Pride event does go ahead, FAN will support it.

Comment: An Umbrella Fair Pride committee is needed. Based on existing activities and existing events, this would mean lower initial costs. Links could be made with other LGBTQ groups.

Steven: Would like to establish a committee to move this forward.

Matthew: Northampton Volunteering Centre works with voluntary and community organisations to help develop their governance. NVC can offer advice to a Pride committee.

Northampton Outlaws RFC: Promoted as “Northampton’s Gay Friendly Rugby Club”, the club has twenty regular attendees. The club needs to develop, with a permanent venue and issues such as insurance need to be organised. At the moment, the club trains at Abington Park on Sunday afternoons. It is currently in the process of affiliating with the Rugby Football Union.

The club is inclusive – open to all. Currently 70% of its members are from the LGBT communities.

Comment: The club could apply for a range of local funding, including Northampton County Council’s Councillor Empowerment Fund, the Borough Council’s Councillor Community Fund, and the Borough Council’s Partnership Fund.

Q: If girls / women want to play rugby, who can they contact?

A: They can contact Richard at Outlaws on outlawsrc@hotmail.co.uk. Further information can be found on the club’s website: www.outlawsrc.co.uk. Participants should be 18 years or older.

Booqfest Northampton: The Booqfest book festival took place in Northampton on 14 – 16 September. Overall, the event was a success. Whilst some events were under-supported, the support for others exceeding expectations. 65 people were present at the event launch. It is planned to run a similar event next year.

Tickled Pink Comedy Night: Organised by FAN, this event will take place at the Charles Bradlaugh on 19 October. If over 100 people attend, FAN will not be charged for venue hire. Access is by ticket only, priced at £5 on-line or £7 at the door.

LGBT Group for Deaf People: Lee from Deafconnect would like to set up a new group to work with deaf LGBT people; there is currently nothing in Northampton for LGBT people who are deaf.

Comment: The group could have a Facebook presence. Matthew said that he could help the group develop their Facebook presence.

Comment: Links could be made with similar groups elsewhere, for example with a similar group in Manchester.

Lesbian Line: The group is now based at the Women’s Aid offices on Hazelwood Road. They are planning a disco fundraiser on 24th November 2012 at Lings Forum, Weston Favell. Tickets are now on sale.

Q: How do the lesbian deaf community contact Lesbian Line?

A: Through Northampton Lesbian Line’s website: <http://www.lesbianline.co.uk/>

Quashing convictions for consensual gay sex with someone over 16: Convictions for consensual gay sex with someone over 16 (when it was illegal) will be quashed from 1st October. The Home Office will, from 1 October, begin the process of correcting an anomaly in the criminal records system. The move will

benefit thousands of men who were prosecuted for gay sex with someone over 16 during decades when the practice was against the law. Currently, they must disclose the information as part of the programme of Criminal Records Bureau checks if they apply to work or volunteer for charities and other organisations. Getting such a conviction expunged currently requires a lengthy process involving a personal application to a local chief constable

10.ITEMS FOR NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS

Update on World Aids Day activities

11.DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS.

The next meet of LGBTQ Forum is scheduled for Tuesday 13 November at 6.30pm in the Holding Room, Guildhall.