

Northampton Borough Council

Northampton Pensioners' Forum

Thursday, 1 November 2012

Officers at the meeting

1. WELCOMES AND INTRODUCTIONS

The co-chair Roger Rumsey welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Present were Councillor Brian Oldham – the co-chair of the Forum, John Rawlings, Mary Dyer Atkins, Brian Nichols, Dave Hewitt, Tony Mallard, A Sharp

Councillor Danielle Stone

Officers:- Joe Biskupski, Keith Mitchell

The Co-chair welcomed Councillor Danielle Stone to the meeting. Councillor Stone was attending with regard to the Scrutiny Review on the Retail Experience. He also welcomed Joe Biskupski in his new role.

The Co - Chair also advised the Forum that Lindsey Ambrose had contacted him and was looking for volunteers to sit on a consultation board at the hospital. Anyone interested should contact Roger Rumsey.

2. APOLOGIES FROM PEOPLE WHO CAN'T MAKE IT TO THE MEETING

Apologies were received from Mike Hill and Liz Percival.

3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

Subject to an amendment changing correcting one of those present to Mary Dyer Atkins the minutes of the meeting held on 13 September 2012 were approved.

Matters Arising

Tenancy Strategy Consultation

Tony Mallard reported that he had recently been part of creating a tenants forum which will be having regular consultation meetings until July and will keep the forum informed of any updates.

Agenda Items for Future Meetings

It was agreed that the item on consumer awareness should be considered at the next meeting of the forum.

4. SCRUTINY REVIEW (RETAIL EXPERIENCE) CONSULTATION

Councillor Danielle Stone addressed the Forum. She explained that she was part of

a Scrutiny Review that was looking at the Town Centre Retail Experience.

The original suggestion for the review had come from a member of the public and the review was keen to gather views from as many public views as possible. She stated that the recession had affected many places, but that it was important to ensure that Northampton was doing everything possible to improve things. She then asked Forum members where they shopped and what they would like to see in the Town Centre of the future.

Respondent 1- Felt that the town centre deteriorated when the insurance agents and solicitors moved out of town into retail parks, taking away the workers who had used the town centre in the lunchtimes/ after work. He bought clothes in town and did grocery shopping in a nearby supermarket. He felt that there would be little chance of grocery shops returning into the town centre unless they were smaller specialist retailers such as those on St Giles Street. He did use the market and felt that the traders should form a cooperative and run the market for themselves.

Respondent 2- Felt that the number of empty shops dragged the town centre area down. Uses the local supermarket and sometimes shopped for groceries on line as it meant that she did not have to carry it. Shops for clothes in the town centre as she likes to see and feel items. Uses shops such as Wilko and pound shop. Also likes to look in charity shops for bric a brac and household items. Would like to see a reasonably priced antiques/collectibles shop in the Town Centre.

Respondent 3- Uses the town centre for a variety of services as well as shopping. He uses the local supermarkets, charity shops, buys clothes at Marks and Spencers and uses Wilkos and the pound shop and the market. He also uses the local barber, local coffee shop and the library. He felt that the market used to be more vibrant when the shops that surround it were more attractive and used to hold regular music events. He would like to see fewer betting shops and low value eating places.

Respondent 4- Was a taxi driver for many years and felt that the feedback that he had received was that the areas around town were well served with local shopping parades but that the town centre had lost key shops. He felt that car parking changes had been detrimental to the town. A Freedom of Information request had shown that figures from parking meters had indicated that annual income had reduced by £89,000 over the last three years. This implied that the numbers of people using the town centre were down.

Respondent 5 – He came into town several times a week. He felt that the approaches to the town centre, e.g. along the Kettering Road were a disgrace with boarded up shops, graffiti etc. He considered that the market no longer offered variety and felt that it was a shame that the Sunday art markets had been stopped .He arranged coach trips to Melton Mowbray which has a lot of individual shops and market arcades, and a street and farmers market.

Respondent 6 – Did not shop if possible. Used allotment to grow your own and felt that these and community gardens should be promoted. He uses Wilkos and the

library. Does not feel that should be encouraging people to consume resources and get into debt. He used to come into town to pay the council tax but now does that over the phone so there is no need. He considered that the role of Northampton as a market town has changed and that losing the cattle market had reduced the numbers of people coming into the town.

Respondent 7- He felt that the rise of the supermarkets had led to the deterioration of the town centre by providing a wide range of goods out of the town centre. St Giles Street is the only attractive street because of the mix of independent shops. There are no longer any fruit and veg shops outside of the supermarkets and no butchers or fishmongers in the town centre. Does shop out of town at John Lewis at Milton Keynes.

Respondent 8 – He uses Marks and Spencer's, town centre coffee shops and supermarkets. Also uses local mini supermarket which he considers is a very important informal local meeting point. Uses the market and emphasised that rents had recently been reduced for market traders to try and help them.

Councillor Stone commented that going shopping is not just about buying goods but can be a vital human contact providing some level of companionship and also potentially a network of people who may be able to flag when someone is not following their usual routine that there might be a problem.

Some members felt that the change in retail habits was at least in part a generational change and that younger working people did not have the time to shop in a variety of places but used the supermarkets as they were able to get everything that they wanted in one place.

It was also commented that at its height the market may have been very successful, but that it only used to operate two days a week and most of the traders went to other towns on the days that Northampton did not hold a market.

Councillor Stone thanked the forum members for their feedback and will report the views back to the scrutiny review.

5. COMMUNITY NEWS EXCHANGE

The Co Chair introduced Keith Mitchell who attended to give the Forum an update on the progress of the Community Governance Review.

Community Governance Review

Following on from the initial E petitions that requested reviews of local area arrangement the General Purposes Committee agreed that 12 proposals should go forward to the second stage for detailed consultation.

The second stage will take the form of a local advisory poll which will be held on the same day, but for legal reasons, cannot be held in the same place as the elections for the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Among the 12 proposals are proposals for 7 new parish councils with the remainder be proposals for boundary changes and for the currently combined Parish of Wootton and East Hunsbury to be split into two.

It was emphasised that the poll is advisory only and that the final decision as to whether these new Parish Councils are created will be made by Council in December.

All residents in the areas concerned have been sent a letter advising them of the details of the poll. There will not be postal votes for the poll and there was some concern over this as it was felt that it was denying people a chance to vote if they were not able to attend the polling station. Proxy votes may be appointed.

First elections for new parish councils would be held in May 2013.

Northants 50 + Network

The Co-Chair informed the group that the Northants 50+network wanted a member to join their board. Meetings were held the 2nd Monday in the month in the afternoon. Anyone interested should contact Roger Rumsey.

Bus Pass Renewal

Approximately 50,000 bus passes issued by the County Council will all expire at the same time- May 2013. However there is a facility to renew them before that date based on a timetable determined by alphabet of surname, although that does not appear to have been publicised. This service used to be delivered by the Borough Council and has now the responsibility of the County Council. It was felt that there would be some potential confusion. Officers undertook to look at the renewal process and see if the Communications team could help in publicising the changes.

Tenancy Strategy Consultation

Consultation on the proposed changes to the tenancy strategy has now closed.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None

7. SUGGESTIONS FOR ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS OR FORUM ACTIVITIES

Changes to Council Tax/ Housing Benefit

Major changes to the Welfare Benefit system are due to be implemented April 29013, which will have a significant impact on many Northampton residents. Members asked that there be an item after the changes have been made looking at their impact.

Unpaid Council Tax – How the Council Tax system operates and what enforcement action etc. is taken.

Health Issues- Recent publicity re the “Liverpool Care Path”- where medication is withdrawn and patients sedated until death. Hospitals have been reported as receiving money for using this care path. The NHS should be asked to attend and questioned as to whether this is used locally. Members of the Forum who were part of Health watch will raise this item there.

8. DATE AND VENUES OF FUTURE FORUM MEETINGS

The next meeting of the forum was confirmed as 2pm on 13 December 2012.

The meeting concluded at 4:10 pm