

Northampton Borough Council

Northampton LGBT and Q People's Forum

Tuesday, 29 January 2013

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Everyone introduced themselves, including the Co-Chairs of the Forum Anna King and Barry Hansford.

Joe Biskupski from Northampton Borough Council was in attendance, and prepared the notes of this meeting.

2. APOLOGIES

Representatives of Lesbian Line, Stephen Bennett (Northampton Pride) and Matthew Toresen

3. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

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

4. MATTERS ARISING NOT ALREADY ON THE AGENDA

- Local artist Gerald Porter has approached Co-Chair Anna King; he would like to work with the local community and would like to outline his work at a meeting of LGBTQ Forum. He was unable to attend this meeting of LGBTQ Forum, but is hoping to attend a future meeting.
- Representatives of Lesbian Line were unable to attend this evening's meeting. Barry Hansford said that their events are publicised on their website: <http://www.lesbianline.co.uk>.

5. NORTHAMPTON PRIDE

Steven Bennett was unable to attend this meeting, and this item will be rescheduled for a future date.

6. HOUSING TENANT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Joe Biskupski outlined the Housing Tenant Engagement Strategy 2013-16. This draft document is currently being consulted upon by the Borough Council. It aims to set out the commitment of the Borough Council to tenant engagement as a key aspect of the housing service it provides. Joe explained that the Council has a long-established commitment to engaging with local communities and recognises its responsibilities in involving local residents in the issues that affect or interest them. Joe Biskupski explained that the strategy had been out to consultation for the past few weeks, and the deadline for responses is 31 January 2013.

Joe asked LGBTQ Forum to focus in particular on Section 13 Proposed Engagement Model for Scrutiny (pages 31 – 34).

Question: Where are the council's policies available?

Answer: Key Council policies are generally available on the Internet.

Question: What training is available to council tenants and officers to challenge homophobia and discrimination? It is really important that training is available on the issue of hate crime and that homophobic behaviour is challenged.

Answer: Joe report back at next meeting.

Question: Who is being consulted?

Answer: Joe said that all tenants and leaseholders are being consulted, as are stakeholders. There have been five public meetings across the borough, one in each of the management areas and in the Guildhall

Question: How have hate crimes been reported back?

Answer: In the past, the Hate Crimes Unit has reported back. However, they do not do this now.

Comment: It is unacceptable that there is no mention of sexuality. There is an opportunity for NBC to be bold and proactive regarding LGBTQ communities.

Comment: Many of the LGBTQ communities are hidden. Confidentiality is important.

Comment: There is a serious problem with discrimination within Black communities. In addition, Anonymity is important, especially in the rural parts of the county.

Comment: We need to guarantee people's safety; it is important that the process of reporting incidents is safe.

Comment: There is a lack of visibility of LGBTQ communities in the work of many local authorities across the county. Local authorities could invest in the provision of expertise in LGBTQ issues.

Comment: A clear recognition of LGBTQ issues needs to be made in the strategy; a specialist need to be engaged to ensure that this happens. This specialist needs to be aware of the issues within each community.

Anna King said that she will raise this issue before the report goes to the council's Cabinet.

Comment: It is good that this issue is being approach from a grassroots level. The strategy needs to start from basics.

7. PLANNING THE WORK OF LGBTQ FORUM FOR 2013

The Community Engagement Manager asked whether forum members were content with how the forums were being arranged or if they would feel it more helpful to have an annual work programme.

The forum members agreed that the idea of having a work programme may be beneficial as often there were sometimes too many topics covered in a single meeting, and a work programme would add focus to the discussion. However, they concurred that the meetings should continue to have a degree of flexibility to ensure that topical discussions would continue. It was also noted that with a framework in place the Community Engagement Manager would have more time to arrange for relevant speakers to attend forum meetings.

In answer to the question of who can attend meetings of the Forum, and whether attendance was only limited to those people who are representatives of organisations, Barry said that the LGBTQ Forum was not a closed meeting, and was open for everyone to attend. He added that it was important for the Forum to continue to develop a positive relationship with local authorities. In the past, Forum chairs had met with the Leader of Northampton Borough Council. It would be good for this to happen again in the future.

It was agreed that the work of the Forum needs to be supported by effective and widespread promotion. This should include media such as Twitter, Facebook, the local press and radio, as well as the Borough Council's website.

The meeting considered the notion of "community" and accepted that this may be problematic to define. It was accepted that the notion of LGBTQ communities extends beyond Northampton's boundaries and that engaging with others in the LGBTQ communities often means travel of some distance.

The meeting considered whether there was a budget for the Forums, which could be used to invite guest speakers. Joe confirmed that there is resource to support forums, for example, his time and the provision of meeting rooms, but no specific budget.

LGBTQ Forum would like to see more inter-Forum events, as well as closer working with both Borough Council and the County Council in organising conferences. An example mentioned was a possible conference on "Celebrating Difference".

The following topics were suggested:

Hate Crime – There was formerly an officer from the Hate Crime Unit attending meetings of the Forum with a report on the previous twelve months' incidents. A closer relationship needs to be developed between the Forum and the Hate Crime Unit, and an officer from the Unit should be invited to a future meeting of the Forum to report on Hate incidents.

Comment: it is not easy to report Hate Crime to the police. This is particularly problematic for the deaf community. The Forum needs to devise a way of monitoring what is happening. At times, organisations such as the police or local authorities appear reluctant to categorise a crime as a hate crime.

Education and youth – This was seen as an important topic to consider, particularly the issue of addressing homophobia in schools. It was not clear to what extent schools report Hate Crime; each school has its own sex education policy and has a duty to promote diversity. However, this may not extend to raising the issue of homophobia.

AGREED:

- a. That a planning session is carried out at the next meeting of the Forum. The aim of this would be to develop a framework of themed meetings during the course of 2013/14. Members of the Forum will suggest topics to be covered during the course of the year.
- b. That an officer from the Hate Crime Unit is invited to a future meeting of the Forum to report on hate crime incidents.

8. COMMUNITY INFORMATION EXCHANGE

Barry: There is an active LGBT group at Northampton College, although it is relatively small in numbers. Work is being done with one of the College governors. The group is looking to organise a College Pride walk. A LGBT month has been organised, with the involvement of the whole college.

The chair of the student union is travelling to Auschwitz and will be sharing his learning when he returns.

Lee: A deaf LGBT group has been started in January. The group aims to break down barriers within the community. Quite a few people attended, with lots of discussion. Lee was disappointed about funding – many funders said that there is not enough evidence for a need for such a group.

Michelle: FAN provides social activities for the LGBTQ community in Northampton. The group is planning an exhibition to be staged at the Jesus Army building in the town. The group's website is regularly updated with event information (<http://www.fannorthants.com>). FAN is keen to develop links with other groups.

9. ITEMS FOR NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS

- Northampton Pride
- Planning the work of Northampton LGBTQ Forum for 2013/14.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Barry reported that the Council is proposing to demolish the public toilets in Upper Mounts car park (opposite the Police Station) and by the River Nene car park/picnic area, off Bedford Road (opposite the White Water Centre) and has asked that this Forum be consulted.

It was noted that both sets of toilets had been closed for some time and that there were no plans to re-open them. There were toilets available for activity groups around the White Water Centre and public toilets were due to be constructed at the skate park later this year. The new bus interchange would also contain public toilets.

Comment: This could be a problem for people with medical problems, such is incontinence.

Comment: A few years ago, there was a consultation exercise about closing toilets on Midsummer Meadows. There was a furore as these toilets were used for cottaging. However, this activity is illegal and should not be used as a consideration when closing toilets.

Comment: Why doesn't the council put in pay-toilets?

Comment: The toilets are currently closed, so their demolition is not an issue.

Comment: This matter should be considered by Disabled People's Forum. Joe will raise this issue with the chairs of Disabled People's Forum.

11. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS – to be confirmed