

Northampton Borough Council

Northampton Disabled People's Forum

Tuesday, 21 January 2014

Present: Cllr. Larratt (Co-Chair), Martin De Rosario (Co-Chair), Cllr. Bottwood (Cabinet Member for Finance, NBC), Simon Burgess, Barbara Barber, Larry Barber, Christina Woodhams, Kim Fuller, Ann Timson, R. Shah, Rachel Frondigoun (NBC), Vicki Rockall (NBC), Alice Morgan (NBC*)
(* took minutes)

1. WELCOMES, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES

BB introduced SB to the rest of the forum. SB would like to attend the forum in the future.

Apologies received from Lyndsey Ambrose (St. Andrews), Angie Crashley (Enrych), Graeme Wilson (NLT)

3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

Minutes of last meeting were agreed as a true record.

Matters arising:

Response from National Rail regarding queries raised about the new train station was received and circulated at the forum meeting. **ACTION:** This will also be sent round to all on the invitee list for their information by AM. The forum agreed that the response from National Rail needed to be followed up. It was **agreed** that AM will invite Network Rail to next meeting to discuss further.

LB asked if we can also get an MP along to the meeting, and also send someone to the Rail User Group – it was suggested that we send a representative from this forum to the Rail User Group after the next meeting to represent our view.

4. DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT - RACHEL FRONDIGOUN, INTERIM DFG TEAM LEAD (NBC)

RF gave an overview of DFGs. This information can be found here:

http://northampton.gov.uk/info/200055/improvements_and_repairs/676/the_disabled_facilities_grant_dfg

RF advised that all statutory organisations have to invest money into DFGs. DFGs are for private sector occupants in Northampton Borough, and there is a section of

the Housing budget which is allocated to DFGs alone.

At present, RF was unable to give any details around what will happen with the changes with the ALMO. Currently, meetings are going on with all the key members of staff to make sure that going forward the policy of the ALMO reflects the policy of the Borough, ensuring it is a seamless process.

RF stressed that DFGs are structured by legislation, and coming in with an external perspective, Northampton is very generous in what adaptations are given for. NBC have to make sure that what is delivered reflects the long term need of individuals.

AT questioned whether this links to the Decent Homes Act. Specifically, some tenants are offered wet rooms and others are not. It was questioned whether there a different route for those who need a wet room. RF advised the forum to speak to an Officer in the Housing Department to discuss this. Decent Homes Standard comes under the Housing Department, whereas DFGs sit in Communities and Environment Department.

ACTION: Cllr. Larratt recommended that the forum invite an Officer from Housing along to a future meeting to talk about the DHA to discuss the issue that AT has raised.

RF will be writing a policy for DFGs in private sector housing and then this will be going to the relevant people within Northampton Borough Council for the appropriate consultation to be carried out.

Cllr. Larratt asked whether the way funding is received is changing. RF explained that at present, local authorities receive money direct from Government. In 2015/16, this money will be called the 'Better Care Fund', and this will be held by the Public Health Boards. They are leaving the legislative responsibility for providing adapted facilities to the local authority and will need to bid into the public health board for the funding. Potentially, this may provide an opportunity for more funding, and local authorities must be able to show in our outcomes that we are preventing hospital admissions and hitting health priorities. There is not any guidance at the moment, so wasn't able to comment any more than this.

Cllr. Larratt invited RF back to the Forum in the future, when it is felt most appropriate, to update the forum on the progress of the new policy.

5. BUDGET 2014/15 - CLLR. ALAN BOTTWOOD

Cllr. Bottwood explained to the forum the background problems in terms of funding gap for the budget. The biggest problem is the large difference in what NBC will be receiving as to what NBC need to provide services. If NBC carry on as they are, eventually there will be a gap of £10 million. However, NBC are confident that they will meet the 2014/15 gap of £3 million. This is based on a 0% Council Tax increase.

Cllr. Bottwood went through the Budget in a minute. Further information can be found here: <http://www.northampton.gov.uk/budget2014>

This was then opened up to the Forum for questions:

Park Rangers

LB asked whether PCSOs do these jobs instead. Cllr. Bottwood advised that Park Rangers can work below the police in a friendly manner, advising on dog mess and litter dropping, and further engage with the community using the park.

Bus Station Demolition

Cllr Bottwood advised that although it will cost a lot of money to demolish, if it is left there, it will cost NBC much more during the years it is there for security, and ongoing costs. Cllr. Bottwood also advised that NBC are still in negotiations as to whether the site is taken on by legal and general to extend the Grosvenor Centre. If a decision is not made, the administration will look to other options.

Abington Street

The forum held different views around this budget proposal. Some members agreed that opening it up to cars etc. would hopefully make the street more vibrant. Also, will be better access, especially for disabled people. BB thought that there was no need for opening this up. LB asked whether it was possible to open it up only for Buses and Taxis to ensure it does not get too congested. AT agreed that Abington Street should accommodate Buses, with bus stops on both sides of the road, as it is a long way for disabled people to be able to access the top of the street and the businesses there.

Cllr Larratt highlighted that NBC does not deal with bus routes and that the bus companies would have to be consulted with this.

Cllr. Larratt hoped that this will replace a lot of the Disabled Parking that has been taken up with the new bus interchange. Also, it was highlighted that this would provide better access to Library.

RS asked whether there would be a loss of existing car parking spaces. Cllr Bottwood advised that there would not be any loss, only gain, and more drop off points/ short stay. This proposal is still on the drawing board but the aim is to increase business into the town.

Other

AT asked what happens to the money put aside for the Decent Homes Standard in the budget that isn't spent. Cllr. Bottwood advised that this money is ring fenced. However, the local authority wouldn't be allowed to build up the money, it would

have to spend it in the timescale set out.

Cllr. Bottwood is happy to attend the forum again in the future if any further clarification or explanation is required.

6. TAKING THE FORUM FORWARD

Part of AM & VR role is to support forums. The aim is to get a bit of consistency across the forums in terms of standard. Some are very well represented and action focused, and VR and AM are trying to support all of the forums to bring them up to same level. One point is to increase the numbers of those attending, including service providers as well as service users as these organisations actually affect the services the forums use as a group.

RS suggested that VR and AM make a requirement for organisations to attend our forums as part of the conditions in receiving any grants. VR agreed, and advised that this has been built into the process already for the grants process.

CODE OF CONDUCT

A copy of the Code of Conduct was circulated to attendees.

LB felt that all members should sign up to this, and any new attendees should sign when joining a forum meeting.

RS suggested that access to information should be part of the agreement. External organisations who are doing a presentation need to provide hand outs which are accessible to all etc. For instance, these could be sent to RS, and any others who require the document in another format, electronically so that it can be accessed before the meeting. Cllr Larratt agreed, but felt that this would already be encompassed in the Code of Conduct under the compliance to the NBC equal opportunities guidelines. **Action:** this will be taken on board, and AM will make sure that hand-outs are requested before the meeting in Word format to be emailed to Mr Shah and other members who may need documents in alternative formats.

ACTION PLANS

Action Planning was introduced. This would be a blank template for the forum to complete in order to develop actions that the forum can work towards. Together the forum could plan and deliver an action for the purpose of achieving the aims of the forum. A lot of event planning at the moment has been done outside of the forum; although these are NBC events, it would be great to do planning and consultation within the forum, as all the key people to involve would be here.

EVENTS CALENDAR

A draft copy of this was circulated.

7. COMMUNITY INFORMATION EXCHANGE

AM asked for any further suggestions for Dean Eales at Disabled Go for their visits:

- RS suggested buses should be inspected. Cllr Larratt also suggested the new Bus Interchange and the train station.

AT told the forum about the University of Northampton's Vice Chancellor visit to the NFRA. The University have their own bus company, and it may be a good idea to invite them along to a future meeting to discuss bus accessibility.

AM circulated Graeme Wilson's flyer from NLT about Disabled Football. This will also be posted on the Facebook page.

8. ITEMS FOR NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS

List from a previous forum was read out by Cllr. Larratt, and all items were agreed by the forum for future discussion. This included:

- Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB)– to explain the effects of the current economic climate on their service demand and provision.
- Northamptonshire County Council – pot hole and footpath maintenance across the town.
- Northampton Borough Council – discussion on access issues in the cultural mile and town centre.
- Northampton General Hospital – current funding within Accident and Emergency and its effect on access to the service
- Northampton General Hospital – the use of agency staff and training issues when dealing with people with disabilities
- Nene Commissioning Group – future service provision
- Taxi Operators – procedures when dealing with disability passengers and wheelchair users
- St Johns Ambulance – River cruiser service

For the March meeting, the forum agreed to invite Network Rail to discuss their feedback, and somebody to speak about the Decent Homes Standard.

For the May meeting, the forum would like to invite Stagecoach and the Uno Bus service. Cllr. Larratt also suggested inviting the Town Centre manager to discuss how the buses are going to work. Areas to focus on are disabled access, routes and charges etc.

9. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be on March 25th - 5.30pm (Guildhall)

The forum was happy to make forum meetings bi-monthly. It was agreed that the next forum on 19th February should be cancelled and put back to March in order to fit into bi-monthly pattern.

Future meetings will be circulated once set for the year.

The meeting concluded at 7:00 pm