

Northampton Borough Council - Northampton Pensioners' Forum

Thursday, 24 July 2014

Present: Cllr. Oldham (Chair), Jacqueline Forrest-Smith (JF, Individual), John Rawlings (JR, Quakers), Christiana Owusu-Akuffo (CO, Pensioners Voice), Tony Mallard (TM, NFRA & Eastfield Residents Association), Toby Birch (TB, Community Spaces Northampton), Ann Timson (AT, Pensioners Voice), Cllr. Markham (NBC, Cabinet member for Housing), Suzanne McBride (SM, NBC), Darren Berwick (DB, NBC), Vicki Rockall (VR, NBC), Alice Morgan (AM, NBC)*

*Took minutes

1. WELCOMES, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES

Apologies received from Roger Rumsey (Community Co-chair).

2. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

Minutes were agreed as a true record – any matters arising will be dealt with under other agenda items.

3. NORTHAMPTON PARTNERSHIP HOMES - CLLR. MARY MARKHAM AND SUZANNE MCBRIDE

Cllr. Markham and SB gave an overview of the progress so far of setting up the ALMO 'Northampton Partnership Homes'. The interim Managing Director of Northampton Partnership Homes is Gerald Davis, and soon this position will be put out for recruitment.

TM told the forum that he sits on the board for the ALMO. One concern he felt was whether the ALMO would lose its independence in the future, and if the ALMO was taken in house. Cllr. Markham advised that it is written into the agreement that this could not happen without a whole stock options appraisal.

AT asked who will deal with funding for new builds, and who would apply for this. Cllr. Markham advised that during the options review, members, employees and tenants all made a decision across the board that they would stick to the Northampton Standard for homes. In order to do this in 10 years, any money for new builds would need to be sacrificed. During the final 5 years of Northampton Partnership Homes (NPH), there will be opportunities to then fund new builds. However, NBC administration has applied for funding for 100 new homes - if we are not successful with this bid, the building of the 100 new homes will still go ahead as it is understood how important an issue this is.

AT asked whether Repairs services are going to be 'in house' or contracted out. Cllr. Markham advised that currently staff members are tupeing across to NPH, and Repairs services will remain 'in house'. If this changes, this will be a decision of NPH.

AT asked about rent collection and inspections. Concerns were raised that homes

could get run down, and would not be discovered until things get drastically wrong. When NPH are managing the properties, it was asked whether there will be yearly visits/inspections. Cllr. Markham advised that the authority has looked into this, and it all comes down to resources. The first step to tackle this issue has been to change the allocation policy; anyone who has left any properties in the past in an unfit state, will not be reallocated. This policy will transfer across to NPH, but they may choose to change this, and have more inspections etc. DB advised that there are tenancy audits and targeted inspections that take place for those who haven't accessed repair services 2-3 years or where it has been identified that fraud may take place i.e. 1 bedroom flats etc. Also, since March this year NBC have operated flexible tenancies, whereby there is a 12 month introductory period, which then runs for 5 years. There are regulations for this and no later than 6 months before the period expires, the property must be checked. NBC has decided to instead check 12 months before end of tenancy, which allows officers access to check the state of the property.

Cllr. Markham advised that through tenants/residents meetings, officers encourage people to come forward with concerns over neighbours houses, or concerns over fraudulent activity, which has been successful. NBC have a duty of care and will investigate all cases flagged to them.

DH felt that there are issues with this however, as there is a risk that the person who reports could become a victim. The forum discussed the difficulties with this. However, DB stressed that when things do start to go wrong, it is important that issues are nipped in bud.

SM spoke to the forum about Private Sector Housing, the other side of Northampton Partnership Homes. NBC have brought in selected licensing – mandatory licensing for 3 storey buildings – and is proactively working around shared houses going forward. As well as enforcement when things go wrong, Housing are also getting better at prevention work, talking to landlords about how they manage their tenancies. Cllr. Markham said that private sector housing is a great need due to the waiting lists of social housing. NBC have seen great progress in last 18 months with the National Landlords Association. It has been introduced that landlords have 16 weeks to get license in place for the properties they let which are HMOs, which will cost £325 per property. This is not a measure to punish bad landlords and to penalise, but to instead regulate the business. The local authority is also looking to go to a 1-5 rating system. This will determine properties that will rent and those that won't.

Cllr Markham advised that tenants will be able to contact NPH. All tenants' day to day enquiries will go to NPH, but tenants, as citizens of Northampton Borough, will still ring NBC about council tax etc.

DH asked about tupe transfers and the possibility of redundancy once transferred over. Cllr. Markham advised that the local authority has had to look at finances, adjustments to terms and conditions of staff and redundancies. These changes to terms and conditions would have happened even without the transfer to NPH.

4. CALL CARE - LOUISE MUSSON

LM spoke to the forum about Call Care - a monitoring service which provides an instant response service for vulnerable people, who may need peace of mind while living independently. Further details around the Call care package can be found here: <http://www.northampton.gov.uk/callcare>, or please phone 01604 230227 for more information.

Cllr. Oldham asked whether a Call Care user should call the Police directly on 999 in an emergency or use the Life Line instead. LM advised that if a person is capable of phoning police/ambulance yourself, do so as they can get more information from you directly.

Cllr. Oldham asked whether the pull cord is going to be phased out and replaced with the bracelet and necklace in the lifeline scheme for sheltered housing. LM advised that currently, in many schemes, pullcords have been replaced for hard wired systems. However, LM could not comment on sheltered housing plans as this is separate from her service.

DH asked how the service will move forward to work smarter, with new technologies. LM advised that Call Care attend conferences around telecare equipment and are aware of new technology. However LM also believes that new technologies still need to be backed up by human input and support. For instance, some technology is fantastic, such as the smoke alarms connected to call care, especially when people are hard of hearing. Also, the fire brigade are always supportive when called out, whether it is an emergency or a false alarm.

AT asked where the voice box is located when installed. LM said that this is often installed in the hallway. The location can prove a problem across the customer base if the individual has a fall a distance from the voice box. For the Call Care service, a no voice contact call is a highest priority call.

AT asked about the financial future of sheltered housing, and whether this will link in with the ALMO. Cllr. Oldham said that he understood that it will be. LM could not comment due to not being part of the Sheltered Housing Team.

ACTION: AM to ask for a response to this for the next meeting.

LM explained that as Call Care isn't a statutory service, as a result the service does not get funding. The installation cost for the equipment is £60 and there is a weekly cost of £4.60, which includes equipment, monitoring and maintenance.

5. UPDATE ON FORUM PRIORITIES, ACTIONS AND DECISIONS FROM THE LAST MEETING

- Intergenerational project

VR told the forum that the war memorials in Dallington, Woodhill, Wooton, Great Houghton and Weston Favell have got through to the second round of applications for the War Memorials Trust. By the next meeting we should have an answer whether funding is granted.

DH advised that around the town, heritage groups have already researched every name on memorial. Need to find out what other people are doing, avoid duplication.

- Community Co-chair elections

Cllr. Oldham advised that an election for community co-chair will be held in May. We will be asking for nominations to be put forward by anyone who may want to be co-chair in January. These nominations will be put forward at March's meeting, and an election will be held in May.

JR asked whether there will be a period of office. Cllr Oldham advised that the Co-chair from community will be annually elected/re-elected as some may want to have a go at being a co-chair. It was **AGREED** that the terms of office for the community co-chair need to be written into the terms of reference.

6. COMMUNITY NEWS EXCHANGE

AT - Decent homes standard, have had a meeting with Housing Service at NBC. People have been investigating and updates have been enforced.

AM - Silver Sunday, have been contacted to ask whether the Pensioners Forum would like to arrange something for the day. Silver Sunday is an annual day of free and fun activities for older people, and will take place on October 5th. Attendees showed interest in this, to be discussed.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS OR FORUM ACTIVITIES

- Northampton General Hospital
- Simon Favell (NBC) – Wellbeing tender

9. DATE AND VENUE OF THE NEXT FORUM MEETING

Thursday 18th September, the Jeffrey Room.

The meeting concluded at 4:00 pm