



Cabinet Member Report for Community Engagement

Northampton Borough Council

Monday 14 December 2015

Councillor Community Fund

A total of 134 grant payments have been made from the Councillor Community Fund since April 2015. The total amount of funding awarded at the end of October is £43,682, providing support to a wide range of local voluntary organisations and local projects.

Partnership Support

Since the grant year beginning July 2015, 5 grant payments have been made, totalling £14,307.36 from the £50,000 pot. The Community Grants panel continue to meet on a quarterly basis to discuss and consider all applications. The next grant panel will be meeting in December to consider further small grants applications.

Planning for the launch of the 2016/17 Partnership Grants program has commenced. The process will be launched at the end of January 2016 at a CFAP grants information event being held in the Guildhall.

Community Centres

The Our Place project continues to progress. Meetings have been held with all community centres involved and their action plans have been refreshed. Various projects for the community centres are being supported by the Partnerships and Communities Team, such as the development of a bid to fund further youth work.

Events

There have been a number of significant events attracting thousands of people in the last few weeks starting with the sparkling Fireworks Display and Bonfire on the Racecourse (5th November) which attracted around 18,000 visitors; Remembrance Day (8th November); Christmas Light Switch-On and the opening of the German Market (19th November) which attracted people into the town centre.

The Council supported the Diwali Celebration of Light (7th November) in the town centre and the Santa Run (13th December) in Becketts Park.

Culture & Heritage

A major museum collections move took place in November and December. Collections based in the store at Fetter Street moved to mezzanine and basement areas in the Guildhall and a storage unit at Blackthorn. The move included the boot and shoe and costume collections, archaeology and social history as well as large boot and shoe machinery. Prior to the move, a team of 20 volunteers spent a number of weeks assessing and packing each artefact under the supervision of a member of curatorial staff.

The exhibition 'Whose Round Is It?' continued to appeal to visitors at Northampton Museum & Art Gallery and is open until 31 January 2016. Gift packs of the 150th 'Museum IPA' brewed by museum staff continue to sell well in the museum shop. The 102nd Northampton Town & County Art Society opened in late November – the exhibition features work from talented graduates and non-members alongside the best of Northamptonshire artists. The majority of the work is for sale and the museum receives 20% commission from any sales.

Looking forward, 'How Does your Garden Grow? The Art of the Garden' opens at the end of January – the exhibition includes work of Anthony Ashworth Jackson-Stops, Francis Ferdin, Maurice Cook and Lucien Pissarro.

£5,000 sponsorship has been agreed with Shoosmith Solicitors towards national marketing of the Shoosmith art exhibition scheduled for 2016.

The project 'Conflict & Community Northampton Remembers the First World War' held a Northampton Local History Symposium in October at the Royal & Derngate and Guildhall which attracted 76 people and included a high profile keynote speaker, Professor Lloyd Clark University of Buckinghamshire.

The fourth Christmas Craft Fair at Abington Park Museum took place in November and attracted 43 stallholders selling a wide range of crafts, food and drink. A Spring Food and Drink Fair is planned for early April 2016 which will expand stallholder areas into a marquee in the courtyard for hot food sellers.

During Quarter 3, both museums were hired out to the following: a paranormal organisation for three events; a local engineering company for a lunch; a local law firm for their Christmas party and a town centre wine merchant for a Christmas wine tasting event.

October saw volunteers offering over 560 hours of their time to various projects and events at the Museum (excluding WW1 project). In addition, the Virtual Shoe project funded by the Arts Council England commenced in April and 111 hours were completed by volunteers during October.

Customer Services

Customer Services has been awarded the Customer Excellence Accreditation. In a recent assessment, NBC's Customer Services were not only recognised as fully compliant in all areas but also received a 'Compliance +' rating, the highest score you can receive, in four areas: empowering staff; performance management; partnership working; supporting local communities.

The Assessor said: Northampton Borough Council is "a step above the rest and has a key commercial focus.....in a good way."

He spoke to customers who were very positive and complimentary about the service and was impressed by the focus we continue to put on providing good customer service in times of financial austerity.

In addition, a superb week was had celebrating National Customer Services everyday Heroes who go above and beyond to provide an excellent service. This included Managers and Councilors going back to the floor experiencing first-hand what it is like to be a Customer Information officer. Barclays Digital Eagles were working in the OSS all week promoting their training programme and providing support and upskilling members of the public in the use of technology and online services. The commitment from Barclaycard is ongoing and they have been using our facilities to run training sessions once a month.

Councillor Brandon Eldred
Cabinet Member for Community Engagement