

Community Report

Northampton Community Forums: March 2009 – October 2009

1. Introduction

This report updates and guides the council on the work of the Community Forums in the period March 2009 to early October 2009.

The Forums have been involved with various Northampton Borough Council services to help ensure that their services, ethos and operations are shaped by understanding the diverse nature and needs of people in Northampton.

The Forums have helped Council services to develop systems and means for providing access to services, have helped to develop policy and design services, showing genuine concern for equalities, helping services work in accordance with best practice and the law.

The Forums have worked to achieve effective engagement with people of a wide range of ages and abilities and from a wide range of cultural backgrounds.

2. Recommendations

- 1) more opportunities for volunteers to liaise with them, work on projects etc day to day to help work up design for services, policy etc through involving service users.
- 2) The chance to be involved in training staff in customer service, mystery shopping etc, being able to give feedback on how they've been dealt with as service users and enabling staff to understand more about their needs
- 3) support for the long-term development of the Disabled Go access guide
- 4) The Council have regard to the results in due course of the survey currently being undertaken by the LGB Community

3. Action on Recommendations of last report:

4. Forums Methods of Working

Forums work continues to happen in several ways e.g. initiated through Forums; initiated through NBC; in partnership with NBC services; in partnership with external services; Agenda-style meetings; events; projects; email information-sharing; web pages; during normal office hours, in the evenings and on weekends.

Forums continue to take part in NBC and other consultations through a mix of meetings, focus groups or mailings).

Some Forums work supports specific Local Area Agreement, Safer Stronger Northampton Partnership, and Children and Young People's Partnership priorities and objectives.

5. Supporting development of corporate equalities and diversity work at Northampton Borough Council

- (i) **supporting Single Equality Scheme development through community involvement and engagement**

The Northampton Youth Forum worked with the Forums Co-Ordinator to develop a simple survey derived from key points in the new Equality Framework (a standard for local authorities). The Forums Co-Ordinator acted as an officer contact within the corporate project

group for the development of the council's equality policy and planning.

With attendance co-ordinated by the Forums Co-Ordinator, the Northampton Youth Forum took the survey out to community events where they, members of the Pensioners Forum, local councillors and other volunteers encouraged members of the public from small children through to pensioners to complete the survey and share their perceptions of council services. They gave out free cinema tickets for youth to use to see summer holiday time films to young people, parents and grandparents who completed surveys. The young people themselves were able to count the time spent in this activity towards volunteering awards with Northants Voluntary Youth Action which should help them progress in education and employment. The survey was also put on line.

Sinead, one of the young volunteers offered this feedback:

"I helped out a bit in the Fishmarket and then on the Market Square. I enjoyed being able to talk to people about what we do on the youth forum and learnt about people and what they thought about the council and services etc."

Key themes emerged from the surveys which have particular relevance for Forums in considering perceptions of how the council's services are supporting people. These included:

- i. a lot of people felt more should be done for youth.
- ii. disabled people and older people were often cited as groups that need more.
- iii. gender needs did not emerge as a particular issue
- iv Forums were seen as one of the good things that the Council provides.
- v. people involved in Forums tended to say they were aware of more services than people who did not identify as belonging to any Forum or other community group.
- vi.. Quite a few people would like to receive a newsletter from the council.

The survey is to be taken into account along with other evidence to inform the Council's continuing commitment to improve services and in particular its Single Equality Scheme development.

The Youth Forum held a focus group involving parents, guardians and young people at the annual Parents Briefing meeting which takes place straight after the Youth Forum elections, before most of the young people present have become actively involved as members of the Forum.

Through the Forum networks, Focus groups were also arranged and held with young mums at the YWCA and with members of Pensioners Voice. The focus groups considered what people feel the Council does well, what it needs to improve and priorities for improvement. As with the surveys mentioned above, the findings will be taken into account along with other evidence to support in particular the development of a new Single Equality Scheme for the Council.

Issues needing specific immediate actions by council services were referred to appropriate officers for follow up.

(ii) Developing and delivering equalities training

The Northampton Youth Forum worked with the Forums Co-Ordinator to develop their own training materials on equality and diversity, challenging stereotyping and prejudice etc for their residential training weekend. These were mostly based around the Hear By Right best practice principles. One exercise was based on equalities and diversity training given by the Forums Co-Ordinator working with the Anne Frank Trust UK for council managers and other staff groups as part of the Anne Frank Festival.

Young people on the Youth Forum delivered the training to new members at the residential weekend, with the support of officers with expertise in equalities, diversity, youth work and education. At their meeting in September, the Youth Forum decided that this approach, in contrast to the traditional pattern of using standard materials delivered by adults, had led to the most effective weekend they've had and they want to continue to use this approach in future years. The Youth Forum shared these materials with the assessors for the Equality and Diversity Peer Challenge.

(iii) Involvement in the Equality and Diversity Peer Review in September 2009 and confirmation that the Council has achieved Level 3 of the Equality Standard

Several members of Forums took part in Focus Groups with assessors. Written evidence and the Disabled Go online guide were also considered. This contributed, along with evidence and focus groups in relation to other council services, in the findings by the Peer Reviewers that Northampton Borough Council has achieved Level 3 of the Equality Standard.

In giving feedback to the Council, the Reviewers particularly noted the importance of the Forums, the role of the Councillor Co-Chairs as 'champions' for particular service users and communities, the Disabled Go guide and the "fantastic" and "very special" work of the Northampton Youth Forum.

6. Supporting Improvement of Council Performance through Achievement of Charter Mark for Youth Involvement

This is done on a service by service basis, enabling services to really look at how they can and might involve young people in ensuring they provide accessible, inclusive, effective services. Within the period of this report, two more service areas have achieved the Charter Mark at the Bronze Level, with support and advice from the Forums Co-Ordinator, drawing on the work done by the Youth Forum to help them in formulating ideas for how to best address their own service and user needs to better meet their responsibilities regarding equalities, diversity and the duty to involve and engage people in the community:

- (i) Neighbourhood Management achieved this in May 2009
- (ii) Housing Services achieved this in relation to improving services to deal with youth homelessness in October 2009

This work has also contributed to support the Council's commitment to active youth participation and service involvement in the work of the countywide Children and Young People's Partnership Board. The Housing work led by Phil Holmes and the Northampton Youth Homelessness Forum created through this, is due to receive a special award at a Children and Young People's Partnership Celebration Event on 27 November 2009.

7. Achievement of the Every Child Matters Outcomes: Money 4 Youth

- (i) Since March 2009, some significant capital projects have been completed:
 - i. The full impact of the wheelchair accessible path and floodlighting installed at multi-use games areas in Eastfield and Spencer will only really be seen from this autumn onwards as these will make most impact in the autumn and winter months.
 - ii. The pond-dipping platform installed in Eastfield has been used by local children.

- iii. The climbing equipment chosen by young people in Kingsthorpe area has been installed.
- (ii) Monitoring of participation for the first period of 2009 took place at the end of September. In the period since end of March 2009 over 3,000 young people were involved in Money 4 Youth funded activities. This is an increase on previous years. Several projects indicated that they were being cautious in giving figures so that these figures do not include groups outside of the monitored age range (being children and people over 25yrs of age), participation using playground equipment day to day which is not counted and those who may have gone along to enjoy events in which young people were participating in Money 4 Youth funded activities.
- (iii) Money 4 Youth has continued to receive many more ideas than can be turned into funded projects. The Forums Co-Ordinator receives many additional enquiries seeking funding and infrastructure development information for youth and other activities and signposts to help available via statutory, voluntary and community sector organisations.
- (iv) Projects taking place in this period thanks to Money 4 Youth have included:
 - i. **Disabled Teenage Women's Football** – leading to a college course for one participant and a team being formed which is starting to play in regional tournaments from October 2009
 - ii. **Help for Young Mums** – YWCA provided sessions to help skill up young mums and address teenage pregnancies
 - iii. **Graffiti activities in Eastfield** – making links to wider community activity
 - iv. **Project to address knife crime issues** – led by Royal & Derngate working with youth with first-hand experience and other youngsters
 - v. **Mixed ability performance and sports projects** to help break down barriers, challenge stereotypes and build confidence through disabled and non-disabled young people working together
 - vi. **Sport 4 Youth physical activities and consultation to help get more young people involved in physical activity**
 - vii. **Support for young people to take part in Northampton Carnival**
 - viii. **Support for a range of heritage activities**
 - ix. **Film and Web projects with Inspiration FM multicultural radio**
 - x. **Arts and crafts activities in various locations, bringing together young people from different faith and cultural backgrounds**

8. Achievement of the Every Child Matters Outcomes: Activity Grants 4 Youth

- (i) this one-off small grants scheme was provided in partnership with Northants County Council. It responded to GOEM wishes to see more support for youth activities being organised during school holiday periods and on weekends. The Forum networks were among those used to publicise the scheme. The Northampton Youth Forum supported Northants County Council in decision-making about which projects should be considered further by Northants County Council with a view to being turned into real projects. NCC then met organisations, drew up contracts and instructed which payments should be made.
- (ii) Projects funded included:
 - i. **free summer holiday schemes open to all** including run by Northampton Bangladeshi Association, the Sikh Community Youth Club and Duston Parish Council. These recognised some specific

- needs for women and girls and provided separate gender sessions accordingly.
- ii. **a project led by the Somali Women and Girls Association**
- iii. **youth volunteering involvement in the Umbrella Festival**
- iv. **a range of workshop activities at the Fishmarket** (e.g. carnival arts, bike customisation, stand up comedy, music)
- v. **summer sports activities and street football.**

One of the projects was run by Sports Development at NBC. They used this opportunity to encourage non-participating youth to try out new activities and worked to an exit strategy that hopes to see most participants choosing to continue to be involved in some form of physical activity and positive engagement in the community. They engaged about 200 young people. Steve Johnson from Sports Development Team provided the following feedback on two particularly popular types of activity:

" Laser Quest: (90 people signed up with 78 people turning up) - more on the waiting list
Places were limited to 30 per session. Take up of the activities was really good with all 3 sessions being fully booked. Attendances at the sessions were really good with a near 100% attendance at all three sessions.

Kayaking: (48 people signed up with 46 people turning up) with approx 30 on waiting list
Places were limited to 24 per session. Again take up of the activities was really good with both session being fully booked. Attendances were really good with a near 100% attendance at these sessions."

Already since the summer Sports Development team have received 26 feedback forms with nearly 100% of people returning forms rating the activities either 4 or 5 out of 5. All who returned forms would like to take part in more or similar activities. The team also had contact from parents thanking ourselves and some good verbal comments from young people along the lines of enjoying activities, trying new things and filling their spare time with worthwhile activities.

Steve adds: "Especially with the kayaking it was good to see young people engaging with others who they hadn't met previously and the team work and cohesion that took place through the session Several young people expressed an interest with instructors at the Nene Water Centre to continue and do more kayaking sessions. . . which is a real positive outcome!!"

9. Helping to Develop increased Access to Council and other Local Services: Disabled Go Access Guide

(i) **the online access guide** with Disabled Go was launched on 31 March 2009. Leaflets went out to organisations across the town and county. The Tourist Information has found the information leaflets to be helpful and welcomed by visitors, so has taken a steady supply for their use. Council services have been encouraged to promote the website and a link to it has been placed on the Northampton Borough Council homepage. The Council's Communications Unit has been asked to encourage regular use of the Disabled Go logo and website details in poster and leaflet designs to help encourage participation and involvement in activities and remove barriers to doing so.

(ii) **paper-based access guide:** Funding has been secured for the second part of 2009-10 financial year and a plan put in place to have people with disabilities, older people and youth work to produce a short paper version of the access guide, which should hopefully be ready by April 2010. During the summer volunteers began to collect ideas on what to include.

10. Encouraging and Supporting Access for All to Participate in Culture and Heritage

(i) **Jewish Heritage Trail leaflet:** young people worked with local archaeologist John Small and academic Marcus Roberts from the national organisation Jtrails, to respond to interest in the local Jewish heritage noted during the Anne Frank Festival. They helped put together a new leaflet and Jewish Heritage Trail, with the information presented in ways intended to be accessible to young people and families as well as to people with more academic interests. Young people's quotes were included, for example Callum Green wrote:

““Taking the tour my eyes were opened to the wealth of history in Northampton, that I never could have seen was possible before”

The leaflet was launched at the Heritage Open Days at the Guildhall. It proved to be very popular. The first guided walk of the trail with Jtrails drew in record numbers (over 100 people) for any such walk in the UK and unusually did include some young people.

Marcus Roberts of Jtrails who led the walk feedback:

“Jon Small counted 115-120 participants on the first ever Jewish walking tour of Northampton. To put this into context this is the most successful ever Jewish walking tour I have conducted in 20 years. At my launch of the Lincoln Trail last year we had 60 participants which we thought exceptional. I believe that the production of a very professionally produced map-leaflet designed to have a wide appeal, with the input of the Youth Forum, and all the other efforts of NBC, helped create this success and that the money invested in this effort has been very well spent which lays foundations for further tours and Jewish tourism in Northampton.

The group also included a family and some younger people, which is unusual as most tour groups are normally comprised of the over 50 age group and one young couple we very enthusiastic and stated that they were very pleased with the such a tour as it gave them an opportunity to get to know the heritage of Northampton as they wanted to appreciate the place they lived in.”

The leaflet and trail can be used to support school curriculum and community activities.

- (i) Around 500 copies of the leaflet have been provided to Northampton Synagogue to support a special event there for young people and others in the first national Inter Faith Week in November 2009.
- (ii) Copies of the leaflet are due to be at the National Holocaust Memorial Day conference activities for students, school children and the wider community at University of Northampton in January 2010.
- (iii) Copies of the leaflet have also been distributed to Jewish networks around the country

It is hoped that the new Tourist Office as well as local museums will hold copies of the leaflet.

(ii) Youth and Older People volunteering and taking a lead for Heritage Weekend

Northampton has been taking part in the national programme of Heritage Open Days for around 15 years. This year, young people inspired by those who first had a go at tour guiding last year, worked with other people involved in Forums, introduced youth-friendly publicity, supported the Council's services to provide more disability-friendly publicity and AA signs, sponsored vintage bus tours, undertook filming feedback activities and provided a range of exhibitions and activities at the Guildhall. Some feedback from the young volunteers:

Daisy wrote:

"Along with having a go at Morris dancing, my main contribution at the heritage weekend was collecting the feedback from the visitors (either getting them to fill out questionnaires or chatting to other young people on a heritage bus). The heritage buses were immense! After questioning a small boy on what he had enjoyed about the day and how he thought it could be improved, getting the reply "The buses are good but rockets are best" the remainder of the trip was spent singing the "wheels on the bus" with the slightly smaller youths. But the most intriguing part of the day had to be actually finding out the background of the guildhall itself, and seeing that people from all over the country (and some even further) had come in to appreciate it; it gave me real sense of belonging and made me feel proud and appreciative of a part of Northampton I never knew much about.

Sinead wrote:

"I did a few tours and helped get feedback from people through questionnaires. I also had a go at Morris dancing. I liked the opportunity to learn all the stuff about the history and also taking people round the building."

Catherine said:

"I had a great time. It was tiring but very enjoyable. I think more young people should do this too."

There were around 31 venues participating in Heritage Open Days activities this year in Northampton. The Guildhall was just one of these and had about 1200 visitors over Saturday (10am – 5pm) and Sunday (1pm – 5pm) from Northampton, elsewhere in the UK and some from overseas e.g. Marburg in Germany. John Wynne in Conservation is still collating the overall picture of feedback for the town. Already it is clear though that the Guildhall itself received a very large number of compliments, several of which specifically highlighted appreciation of the volunteers' contributions.

Examples of feedback:

"Very good. We are blessed to have so much heritage in our town - it would be good to hold this event more often... ALL School children in this town should be encouraged to attend. Well Done."

"the two girls did excellently! :-)"

"I am in a wheelchair - I found it easy to get around the short tour although I was unable to go down to the dungeons. The 2 Youth Forum volunteers did very well!"

"I would like to commend Daisy for being so attentive and helpful to us"

"Thoroughly enjoyable visit, learning a great deal about the town I live in"

"learnt a great deal about the history of Northampton for FREE and long may these days continue!"

The Chief Executive formally gave his appreciation for the work of the volunteers and supporting council services in making an "Achievement Award" for the Heritage Open Days at the Guildhall in National Customer Service Week.

Receiving the award, young volunteer, Hayley Hall said that taking part in leading guided tours at the Guildhall and being confident in sharing her knowledge of the history of the town had made her feel proud of Northampton and being part of its community.

(iii) Money 4 Youth support for Shoe Town Festival

The Northampton Youth Forum responded to young people's wishes to be able to take part in carnival style procession activities, building on their enjoyment of taking part in the Venezia activities last year. This was done by linking to and funding activities as part of Northampton's Shoe Town and Carbon Footprint Festival activities, helping to promote children and youth involvement.

During the school summer holidays, children from as young as about 2 years old through to teens, parents and other adults through to elderly shoppers stopped and took part in painting and customising shoes for a participatory art sculpture the "Shoe of Shoes" over a several week period. Around 100 young people, including many from Wootton and East Hunsbury area, took part in free workshops making costumes and themed sculptures, then processed through the town centre during the school holidays.

The Shoe of Shoes sculpture even made an appearance at the World Leathercraft Conference!

(iv) Supporting Diwali Activities including Youth Forum deciding to fund intercultural workshops making lanterns for the Diwali procession on 10th October via Money 4 Youth. The event on 10th October in the Market Square saw what the organisers and some visitors said were the largest crowds so far. Over 100 young people, from different cultural backgrounds, took part in making and parading lanterns in the procession. People from all ages and again from a range of cultural backgrounds crowded to watch and join in the procession through the town centre.

Feedback from young people and others in the procession included:

"this is the biggest and best yet"

"this just gets better every year"

"this is wonderful"

"I feel proud of Northampton for doing this each year"

The dhol drums and minibus purchased in previous years via Money 4 Youth were in the procession. The minibus on this occasion enabled older people with disabilities who could not have walked in the procession to be involved too.

(v) Supporting Northampton Carnival and the Anne Frank Awards Scheme

The Youth Forum once again ran their local awards scheme in partnership with the Anne Frank Trust UK and the Northampton Carnival. They identified people in Northampton's community who demonstrate values of social justice, determination, courage etc and with the help of representatives from the Anne Frank Trust UK and a local councillor, presented the awards on the stage at the Carnival in front of a crowd of thousands of people.

Winners of the awards included:

- i. **Noor Homayoun** – for his work in getting the council and forums to subscribe to Disabled Go and develop the online access guide for Northampton
- ii. **Bill Allen** – for his courage not only in the war but for sharing about his experience with young people
- iii. **Boys Brigade members from Duston** – for their work to help elderly people and others in the local community
- iv. **Lucy Lisowiec** – for her work to help young people in the Castle and Spring Boroughs area of Northampton
- v. **Brian Elgar (posthumous award)** – for his work to help young people and others in the Upton area of Northampton
- vi. **Jo Dowson and Kate Bellamy** – for their inspiring work with vulnerable and homeless people in Northampton
- vii. **Wendy Gross** – for her work to help people with disabilities across Northampton and county
- viii. **Young Inspired People** – for their work to help get youth positively involved in radio and other activities in Northampton

Some members of the Northampton Youth Forum joined the Carnival judges and one young volunteer stepped in to dress up in carnival costume and help a troupe that was short of people so that it could take part in the event.

The Carnival event also demonstrated that some investments made into Northampton for the benefit of the community via Money 4 Youth, continue to be used for that purpose, for example:

- i. the mobile skate park bought for the YMCA along with skateboards, skates and bikes, was at Delapre Abbey Park site; and
- ii. the steel pans bought for the junior wing of the carnival were played in the procession.

The local level awards scheme has been recognised as a valuable way of promoting community cohesion and challenging perceptions of youth in local areas by the Anne Frank Trust UK. They have now begun helping other local authorities to develop similar schemes and consulted with the Youth Forum about ideas to help develop this further.

The Anne Frank Trust UK also recognised the work of the Northampton Youth Forum, making a VIP invitation which enabled a member of the Youth Forum to go to a special ceremony and awards event at the Houses of Parliament.

11. Supporting the Council in its Customer Service Improvement Journey

(i) Helping to Improve Customer Service through effective engagement and involvement with Council services

Two of the three staff winners at the 2009 Northampton Borough Council awards for customer

service referred to support from the Forums Co-Ordinator as helping them to deliver the effective changes and activities in service provision which led to their awards.

In one case this referred to engaging with Forums – in particular the Disabled People's Forum, Pensioners Forum and Diverse Communities Forum - to take ideas, make contacts and develop accessible information to help spread the word about changes to payments to the council. Also, the support provided via the Forums for the NBC officers involved to do radio interviews including on the Inspirations Show which particularly aims to reach Afro-Caribbean communities via BBC Radio Northampton.

(ii) Contributing community contacts to new homeless information booklet for single people and families in Northampton being produced by Housing services.

The Forums networks were invited to provide contacts for groups especially faith, diverse community and lesbian gay and bisexual support groups for this forthcoming new publication. Several organisations responded to this invitation.

(iii) Video Kiosk Use and the Council's Community Engagement Strategy

A few years ago the Youth Forum bought a video kiosk via Money 4 Youth and asked the Council to use it to help engage with and get views from young people, children and other people who'd prefer not to put comments in writing. They felt that this would help to ensure these views are heard and taken into account when the council tries to meet service user needs.

The Council responded and included encouraging use of the video kiosk in its Community Engagement Strategy planning. The video kiosk has been used in relation some museum exhibitions and activities. More recently staff in other areas have been learning how to use it in other service areas. This summer it has been out at Lings Forum Leisure Centre. There are now plans to use it in other places too.

12. Work with Overview and Scrutiny:

(i) Identifying and Helping to Address Gaps in Youth Provision

This autumn sees the culmination of work with the Overview and Scrutiny function of the Council with Northampton Youth Forum on a project to look at youth provision, helping to identify and address gaps in provision of services.

The project has involved working with County Council and community sector organisations as well as council services, to build a picture of existing provision and to determine recommendations to improve both provision and young people's access to provision.

Councillors have met with Youth Forum members at various stages of the project to keep young people actively involved and influential to the work being done.

The final report is due to be presented to the Council soon.

(ii) helping to identify gaps in provision for carers, disabled people and pensioners: taking part in the appreciative enquiry into concessionary bus fares

Pensioners and Disabled People's Forums had previously raised concerns about the lack of provision for carers and travel for both disabled people and pensioners prior to 9.30am under

the concessionary fares scheme. The issues were taken up by Overview and Scrutiny. In autumn 2008 Pensioners and Disabled People's Forums took part in consultation which sought to look at whether the concessionary bus fares scheme is operating fairly in Northampton and whether any changes should be made.

In autumn 2009 these two Forums have had meetings which received an update on the draft equality impact assessment and findings.

They welcomed a recommendation to issue passes which allow for companion travel.

The Forums have been invited to give further feedback and views to inform the work.

There remains some concern about the impacts on disabled people who need to get to work before 9.30am and the difficulties for local organisations to hold meetings and activities for older people on account of the 9.30am time meaning some people can't get into town using their bus passes until some time after 10am. The Disabled People's Forum has noted that there is a recommendation option that the Council gives further consideration to making at least some concessionary fares travel available before 9.30am.

13. Working with Services to help older people access and be involved in services

(i) International Day for Older People Event

An event took place in September. This included several external and some NBC services. It was a drop-in style format attended by around 200 older people. It had been hoped to make links to an activity on the Market Square to help raise awareness on the day but the event there was cancelled at the last minute. Outcomes of the event included:

- graffiti consultation sheets taken away for use by Police and Fire Services; and for presenting to relevant officers and councillor(s) at the next Pensioners Forum meeting discussions on waste and recycling
- Karen Hayes from Northampton Citizens Advice Bureau said that the event had been very helpful to her as it enabled her to get enough interest to be able to use some grant funding to organise a free training day in Northampton. The purpose of the day will be to skill up people from groups and services so that they can recognise and help older people they work with to access appropriate help with tax and other financial issues.
- the Historical Association said they got a very good response and are keen to take part again next year

(ii) Meeting with NBC Services in National Customer Service Week

Older people involved with Forums projects and particularly the Pensioners Forum have expressed interest in working more closely with council services day to day, volunteering their time, life experience and knowledge of older people, to help the council services become more effective in how they serve older people and meet their needs. There has been some interest on building on the successes seen when young people have done this in relation to youth involvement e.g. with the Charter Mark for Youth Involvement.

The Forum has considered external accreditation such as the DWP toolkit for local authorities. However, they formed the view that this toolkit was too high level, generalised and complex. They are interested in helping to answer day to day issues, give feedback on officers' ideas,

and help with projects in specific services. They would like to be able to do this proactively, not just when problems arise.

As a start, the Forum set up a meeting with council services in National Customer Service Week to have coffee, cake and a chat and see what would happen. Participating NBC services included: Revenues and Benefits, Customer Services, Planning and Regeneration, Leisure Centres, Public Protection, Finance Department (Exchequer). By the end of the meeting some simple ideas had been identified which could help to manage and improve customer perceptions and experience of service. Some ideas and proposals by officers had been confirmed as positive moves.

Pensioners left the meeting saying that they felt the council is improving. Some services have, as hoped, said that they would like to have further informal meetings for their service area with older people to work on ideas and improvements together as they found it a useful experience.

14. Work with the Northampton Borough Council Mayoralty

The Punjabi Community's Vaisakhi event was the first to welcome a young person as 'Youth Mayor for a Day' as a VIP guest along with the Mayor of Northampton.

Philip Ridley, from Northampton School for Boys, said he really enjoyed the event, the food and good music.

The day was a chance for him to enjoy a special occasion and learn more about both the role of the Mayor and the Punjabi community. Phil's VIP day out included travelling with the Mayor in the special chauffeur-driven car.

It is hoped that other young people may take up this kind of opportunity in the future too.

15. Helping Young People to Develop Skills and Confidence

As a Local Performance Indicator measure, supporting the need to demonstrate effective involvement and engagement, the Forums Co-Ordinator has introduced a self-perception questionnaire for Youth Forum members to complete which helps to give an idea over a period of time of their levels of confidence for activities such as giving views to other young people or adults, making decisions and Chairing meetings. The survey also looks to find out whether the young people feel able and willing to use their experience on Youth Forum to make changes in their lives e.g. to get involved in other community activities and leadership, to encourage other young people to participate positively in the community.

The first round of surveys has been done. It will take about a year before results for the current Youth Forum cohort can be seen across a full Youth Forum cycle. So far the results indicate that young people's confidence levels to perform skilled activities for participating in and leading some activities in local democracy are moved to strong levels (from either over-confidence or lacking confidence) as a result of taking part in the Youth Forum residential training weekend and other activities during the summer holidays at the start of the Forum cycle.

The Youth Forum is the only Forum with a closed, elected membership and therefore is the only Forum for which this type of survey can be reasonably undertaken.

16. Identifying and Helping to Address Gaps in Provision for the Lesbian Gay and Bisexual Community

(i) Helping Lesbian Line

It was confirmed during the period covered by this report that the Lesbian Line had been offered a room space for meetings as a result of publicising their needs in the LGB Forum newsletter. Later during the period of this report, the group advised that they had succeeded in obtaining some funding via some of the help suggested when they attended Forum meetings. They have advised their current room space is better than what they had before – including kitchen facilities and in a good location, leading to new members joining and more attendance at their meetings.

(ii) International Day Against Homophobia

A small ceremony was held in the Guildhall courtyard. Due to the date for this falling within elections purdah it was not possible to have the usual input from local councillors that otherwise would have happened. However, local organisations did participate, including the Hate Crimes Unit and newspaper coverage including an interview quote from a member of the Northampton Youth Forum raised awareness of the day and the issues it sought to highlight.

(iii) Raising awareness of local infrastructure organisation and support

The LGB People's Forum has continued to try to respond to approaches from both services and LGB community about gaps in provision. It has tried to do this through raising awareness of existing funding and infrastructure support available to any existing groups. Feedback has been that groups have had some success in accessing funds and community space as a result.

(iv) Raising concern about lack of LGB youth provision with Overview and Scrutiny

The gap in LGB youth provision in Northampton has been raised and incorporated in the work being done by Overview and Scrutiny on gaps in youth provision.

(v) Seeking further community views about gaps and priorities

The Forum has recently decided to undertake a survey in the community to try to get a better understanding of perceptions of priorities, gaps and barriers faced by LGB people beyond those attending the meetings. The results of the survey are due to be shared on a no names basis via the Forum.

17. Topics and Issues Covered at Forum meetings in the period March to early October 2009 included:

(i) Disabled People's Forum

Accessibility of Choice-Based Lettings and the Gateway System for Housing
Concessionary bus fares
Ensuring improved accessibility of disabled toilet ground floor of Guildhall
Updating on increased investment and progress re Disabled Facility Grants
Highlighting Carers Week activities
Raising awareness of home visits and other options available to help access services further to payment and housing office changes
Following progress in relation to relocation of Shopmobility

(ii) Diverse Communities Forum

Introducing the role of BME Primary Mental Health Practitioner at CAMHS
Hate Crimes Updates
Updating on community activities involving diverse community groups
Promoting Activity Grants 4 Youth Scheme
Northampton Inter Faith Forum Countywide Directory of Faith Contacts
Concerns about Northants County Council Equalities and Diversity impacts in education
Promoting the new Jewish Heritage Trail Leaflet for Northampton
Promoting Website for Engagement Works in Northampton "NEW"
World AIDS Day Planning

(iii) Lesbian Gay and Bisexual People's Forum

Seeking to dispel LGB fears: Northants County Council re NLGBA
Concerns about Northants County Council Equality Scheme
Concerns about Northants County Council Funding and LGB support
Noting help for Lesbian Line as result of Forum newsletter coverage and funding suggestions
Hate Crimes updates
Raising awareness of how to stay safe online and local help available
Raising awareness of sources of help for voluntary sector support
World AIDS Day Planning
Help sought by local health services for instant HIV testing opportunities
Help sought by Hate Crimes Unit to encourage reporting of incidents

(iv) Pensioners Forum

Concessionary bus fares
Volunteer car driver and befriending schemes
Help in case of emergencies at home: Care and Repair and Fire Safety
Raising awareness of the Choice Based Lettings scheme
Promoting intergenerational volunteering opportunities re Heritage Weekend
Considering ways of developing closer working with NBC services
Updating on Changes to Northampton's Market Square
Promoting Disabled Go Access Guide and opportunity to be involved in future intergenerational development of paper-based version during 2009-10
Promoting Third Sector Services and Activities for Older People
Promoting community activities e.g. Bands in the Park, Duston Show
Remembering John Gardner and asking NBC for a permanent memorial

(v) Youth Forum

Review of summer activities
Work with Overview and Scrutiny to identify and address gaps in youth provision including agreeing to share Youth Forum research results
Drawing up Youth Forum role descriptions (using good practice in job description and person specification as a guide)
Agreeing internal recruitment/selection process for Peer Mentor role
Free swimming for under 16s in Northampton
Sport 4 Youth updates (sub-group of Youth Forum with open membership which seeks to increase participation in physical activity by non-participating and low-participating groups)
Youth Forum annual elections planning
Working with Forums Co-Ordinator to design equalities and diversity training and other training for Youth Forum residential weekend
Youth Mayor for a Day Scheme

(v) Youth Forum contd

Helping the Anne Frank Trust UK with their business development plans

International Day Against Homophobia

Activity Grants 4 Youth Scheme

What Youth Forum members feel they got out of being on Youth Forum

How getting involved in Holocaust Memorial Day activities helped some other young people

18. People consulted in the preparation of this report

Forum Co-Chairs were consulted about the content of this report. In addition, the following specifically gave views and comments for this report.

Sinead Loftus – Northampton Youth Forum

Hayley Hall – Northampton Youth Forum

Catherine Walmsley- Northampton Youth Forum

Marcus Roberts – Jtrails (Jewish Heritage Organisation)

Morcea Walker – Northampton Youth Forum

Roger Rumsey – Pensioners Forum

Cllr Pam Varnserry – Disabled People's Forum

19. Conclusion

The Forums have contributed significantly to equalities and diversity and customer service policy and practice development which should help benefit the wider community served by Northampton Borough Council.