



**South Northamptonshire VCS Forum
1st October 2009 at Greens Norton Community Centre**

Thirteen people attended the meeting. See appendix 1.

Welcome and Introductions

Phil Drage (Chairman) welcomed everyone to the forum. He reminded those present of the dual purpose of the meeting:

- i) to help groups at 'grassroots' level by putting them in touch with one another, to share ideas and good practice
- ii) as a consultation body.

and introduced David Price, Director of Community Engagement and Corporate Services.

Brief feedback on Transport discussion from forum meeting on 30 June

Mel Bignell read through the email response from David Allen. Lead Officer Transport Policy SNC.

**Community Engagement Strategy;
David Price, Director of Community Engagement and Corporate Services SNC**

David thanked the chair for inviting him to the forum and added that he welcomed the opportunity to provide an overview of his role and responsibilities at S.N.C. and how this may link into the voluntary and community sector. David explained that Corporate Services included Human Resources, IT, Legal dept, Election Services and Finance (revenue and benefits). Community Engagement dealt with Customer Services and Communication.

Phil Drage asked how the public could engage with S.N.C, i.e. where is the first port of call? David explained there are three directorates which serve the public:-

1. Service delivery - waste control, building control and planning. Currently looking to improve planning processes and waste collection.
2. Customer Service - looking at a new customer service communication system.
3. Policy – e.g. the regional spatial strategy which relates to how the district council moves forward with regard to growth.

David also mentioned a recent public survey conducted on the council's behalf by an external consultancy with the aim of understanding what the public felt the council should and should not focus on. The survey results relate to 250 people who were interviewed in their homes. Areas of focus included job creation, road safety, street cleaning, welfare and debt advice, car parking charges, homelessness and stray dogs. Areas for review included SNC's, 'Review' magazine and theatre/arts activities.

John Veveris, Community Law commented that he was pleased that one area of focus included the continuation of debt advice. Sarah Hayle then enquired who would be assessing people for benefits. David commented that there are self-help websites regarding local authority benefits but these can be a double edged sword. Sarah commented that it is important that people are not deterred from seeking relevant benefits they may be entitled to and that it would be helpful if SNC's website provided benefits information. David replied that capacity issues at the council meant that there is less time available for website upkeep and maintenance however, David seeking to address this issue through a business case proposal.

A general discussion followed with several general comments being made

One commentator referred to SNC's Community Engagement Strategy document, which had been presented at the last forum. The commentator questioned the process, stating it appeared to be the wrong way round, as the document had been drafted from the 'centre' and without external consultation with the public first.

Jenny Carter asked if there was any update with regard the publication of this document. David replied that due to other pressures this document had not yet been published and this was a great disappointment.

Two general comments were made regarding the review of planning applications by relevant parish councils. Two examples were given where local parish councils had objected to planning applications on the basis of village views and yet both had been granted on appeal. Neither parish council received any explanation as to why the appeals were upheld, which has given each parish council a feeling of isolation. David Price requested further details be sent to him so that he could take these matters back to Steven Shuttleworth, Director of Service Delivery and feedback at the next forum meeting.

ACTION: David Price to relay planning application information to Steven Shuttleworth, on receipt of details from relevant parish council representatives present.

What do we want from our Forum? Paul Battye, Network Forum Development Worker

The attendees worked through a series of pre-determined questions, which Paul Battye advised would be discussed at the next forum development group meeting. Paul gave an overview of the forum development group and added that new members were welcome to join.

"Community Voice" - Information Exchange and discussions

Jenny Carter: snvb

Jenny mentioned that she had brought along several copies of snvb's Annual Review 08/09 brochure if anyone required a copy.

Jenny added that a reporter from the Brackley and Towcester Advertiser would be offering a drop in service at both Volunteer Centre's (Towcester Tues 1pm – 2pm and Brackley Fri. 1pm – 2pm) with the primary aim of encouraging more publicity for voluntary groups and the activities or services they offer.

Paul Battye: Northamptonshire Countywide Forum

Paul stated that a Countywide Forum shadow steering group had been formed with the first meeting on Monday 5th October. Paul added that the County wide forum was the 'Voice' for the sector.

Sarah Hayle asked how many other forums there were across the county and who the contacts were. Paul replied that the Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIO's) for the Voluntary and Community Sector would have the relevant details. Jenny Carter offered to send contact information to Sarah.

ACTION: Jenny Carter, snvb to send LIO contact details for other countywide forums to Sarah Hayle.

John Veveris and Sarah Hayle: Community Law Service

John stated that he provides a free, confidential and impartial debt advice service on alternate Monday's and Thursday's at Towcester and Brackley Volunteer Centre's respectively. Sarah added that their benefit/debt advice work is funded by SNC and currently this is out for tender. Any tender must be received by 2nd October and is for benefit/debt advice for the next eighteen months. The outcome of the tender will be known by the end of October.

A.O.B.

Phil Drage, Chair, concluded the meeting by advising those present that there was an electronic forum which he encouraged all to view www.snvb.org.uk/forum. Phil also endorsed Paul Battye's earlier comment and said that if any member could offer some time to support the development group they would be warmly welcomed.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 16.15 pm.

Dates of future meetings

TBC