

Eastbourne Seniors Forum - Report on the First Annual General Meeting.

The Mayor of Eastbourne, Councillor Greg Szanto opened the First Annual General Meeting of Eastbourne Seniors Forum.

Councillor Szanto gave a thoughtful and inspiring opening address, reminding us that it was early days for the Seniors Forum but we had already had a measure of success and with more dedication and hard work we would be able to achieve our aims in the future.



ESF Chairman, Steve Thornett with the Mayor of Eastbourne, Greg Szanto

The Officers then gave their reports on the Forum's first year to the meeting. These reports will be recorded in the minutes and will be available for the AGM in 2010.



ESF Treasurer, Carole Penney



ESF Secretary, Kay Warner

The Open Meeting followed the AGM. The Speaker was The Leader of The Council, Councillor David Tutt and he gave an interesting update on the Structure of the Eastbourne Borough Council.



Leader of Eastbourne Borough Council Cllr. David Tutt

Councillor Tutt wished to emphasise that the Council wanted to work with older people to help to change Eastbourne for the better in the future.

Councillor Tutt explained that the Council faced many difficult challenges. In addition to council tax collected from residents, Councils receive funding grants from Central Government. These grants have been reducing year by year in the South East and in the current financial year the grant in East Sussex was down to half a percent. This is causing severe difficulties both from a financial and a service level perspective.

To address this, the Council is restructuring to provide a more up-to-date organisation.

Focus: Customer relations will improve, a can do attitude will prevail; there will be clear vision and accountability. Councillor Tutt explained that in the past petitioners may not have received an answer to their questions but that is to change. Staff will get back to them with an answer. If they do not, Councillor Tutt will be available to ensure that this is rectified.

Buildings: The Council is to review the way it uses property. For example, 68 Grove Road is rented on a long-term lease that is about to expire. This is a large commercial building in a prime position and therefore expensive to rent. The Council will not be renewing the lease; instead pursuing a more agile form of working. Staff spending little time at a desk will share workstations. This will save money without cutting front line services.

Structure: Under the reorganisation, the director and assistant director posts will go, along with heads of service. A new Chief Executive has already been appointed and there will be a Deputy Chief Executive. These will be the only two directors and they will be responsible for strategy. The Deputy Chief Executive will also be responsible for the services that provide the day to day running of the Council – carrying out a review looking at best value on both price and quality. This may result in internal services being provided in a variety of ways: in-house, outsourced, via. partnership arrangements or bought in from private companies.

There will also be 3 Heads of Service for those departments providing services to rate-payers; housing/community, environment/planning and tourism. There will also be Heads of Service for internally facing services, those departments needed to run the Council; Finance, Human Resources, Democracy (including elections and engagement with the community) and Infrastructure (Information Technology and Property).

Councillor Tutt also highlighted some issues of importance.

Pavements: He explained that Eastbourne is a two-tier authority – Eastbourne Borough Council and East Sussex County Council. Trading Standards comes under East Sussex County Council but Eastbourne Borough Council provides Environmental Health. East Sussex County Council provides the Highways Agency, dealing with roads and pavements. However, there is an Agency agreement whereby the County Council provides money to the Borough Council for pavements. Councillor Tutt said that this is never enough and on occasion the Borough Council has had to use money from other allocations for the benefit of residents. Health Statistics show that there have been 180 hip fractures in residents over the age of 65 in a twelve-month period and the cause of these has been badly maintained pavements. Councillor Tutt suggested that Eastbourne Seniors Forum could work with the Borough Council to apply pressure on the County Council to improve this.

Crime: Eastbourne Borough Council has a good record in working in partnership with other organisations, particularly in the area of crime. Neighbourhood panels have been very successful in identifying crime hotspots and reporting incidents. This has resulted in success in reducing antisocial, violent and car crime. Councillor Tutt urged Seniors Forum members to work with the neighbourhood panels by getting involved and reporting incidents.

St Anthony's Court: This has been a long-standing facility in Eastbourne. Currently St Anthony's provides respite care and step down from hospital provision, both much-needed services with high demand and in short supply. East Sussex County Council proposes to close St Anthony's Court on the basis that the service can be better provided in the private sector. Eastbourne Borough Council disputes this and Councillor Tutt asked the Seniors Forum to take this up and support the Council.

Councillor Tutt then took questions from the floor:

Future upkeep plans for Motcombe Pool. Councillor Tutt confirmed that there are no plans to close the pool. Currently the contract for running both Motcombe Pool and the Sovereign Centre is with Serco. Improvements have been made to both pools, but members felt that insufficient attention had been paid to Motcombe pool and the maintenance undertaken so far was below the standard expected for a public pool. Councillor Tutt agreed to investigate and inform the Seniors Forum of the programme of improvements.

Pavements. Councillor Tutt was asked if there were official statistics to show the cost of people's injuries caused by badly maintained pavements to the NHS. Councillor Tutt explained that national government does not look at issues in a people centric way – if they did it would undoubtedly save money. Mrs Cope took the floor and gave a very moving account of her injuries caused by badly maintained pavements during the seven years since she and her husband moved to Eastbourne. Members' attention was drawn to the Falls Awareness programme and the web-site Fix My Street. Councillor Tutt explained that cars parked illegally on the pavements should be reported to the NCP Parking Shop in Gildredge Road. Pavement damage by a utility company should be reported to Eastbourne Borough Council. East Sussex County Council had a policy of repairing damaged pavements with tarmac, rather than replacing paving slabs, because there was less likelihood of injury to residents from tripping or falling.



ESF member, Mrs Cope

Transport. A question had been asked about the possibility of a Dial A Ride or similar service for Eastbourne. Councillor Tutt asked Councillor Andrew Goodwin, the Disabilities Champion, to speak on this.



Cllr. Andrew Goodwin

Councillor Goodwin explained that a similar scheme had been tried in Eastbourne but it had been closed down in 2006 because of lack of use. Any

community transport introduced in Eastbourne would need to be actively promoted and used. The Strategic Authority for providing this kind of transport is the County Council. Councillor Goodwin explained that the County Council have funding from Central Government to pilot some form of community transport for Eastbourne but it will be a case of use it or lose it. Councillor Goodwin is working with Eastbourne Disability Involvement Group, Age Concern, WRVS and WI to determine the need for a community transport scheme and what type of scheme would be required. This information can then be passed on to East Sussex County Council to reinforce the need for a pilot to be run in Eastbourne. Councillor Goodwin felt that forum members could help with demonstrating the need for this and using any pilot system to demonstrate to the County Council that there is, indeed, a need.

Other transport issues raised were the lack of local buses in the evening and the times for using a free bus pass. The Chairman explained that he had recently attended a transport meeting and the representative from Stagecoach had indicated that the Company were open to enquiries, suggestions and correspondence from residents.

Resident Wardens: A question was raised about the replacement of resident wardens with an alarm service by Eastbourne Homes. Councillor Tutt replied that this was a funding issue. It was necessary to lobby National Government for an additional level of support. This was another area where Seniors Forums could have an impact.

Compost and recycling: One Member wished to know why residents cannot buy compost produced from the green recycling bins. Councillor Tutt explained that the Borough has a contract with Wealden Council and so has no control over the processing of the compost. He agreed investigate and report back to the Seniors Forum. Another Member pointed out that there was no provision for recycling in communal blocks of flats for the elderly – the residents are unable to travel to local recycling facilities. Councillor Tutt explained that there would be a cost impact to providing this, but he would arrange for research and costings to be done and would provide the Seniors Forum with the results.

Good Neighbour Scheme: Councillor Carolyn Heaps asked for Member's opinion on piloting a Good Neighbour Scheme in Old Town. The majority of Members were in favour.



Cllr. Carolyn Heaps

Under-collected Council Tax: A Member asked for an explanation, as reports in the local newspaper were confusing. Councillor Tutt explained that a mistake had been made with the formula for calculating the number of residents entitled to discounts on Council Tax. Consequently the amount quoted to the County Council was too low and thus they received a smaller contribution than expected. This was a serious error that has been corrected, but there is no council tax to be repaid to the County Council, because there wasn't any council tax to be collected. The Borough Council has a new Head of Finance and he has made it his personal responsibility to see that the mistake is not repeated.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Tutt for his contribution and formally closed the Open Meeting.