

Serving our Community in Difficult Times

Presentation by Tom Day & James Hallam of Harborough District Council

James Hallam and Tom Day from Harborough District Council were introduced to the Forum.

James spoke regarding the health and wellbeing and raised issues regarding the vulnerable and encouragement which was given regarding keeping fit and healthy lifestyle in order to prevent rather than cure illnesses. He reported that support was given to families with multi-problems and education and prevention of future generations getting into the same difficulties.

Tom Day (Community Partnerships at HDC) reported what his role was strategic. He spoke of ways for HDC and the CTH to work together for the good of the community. He reported that HDC were looking at the best ways of using the facilities in the town. The Symington Building had just been refurbished to accommodate the District Council, Library, Museum, County Council local office, Citizen's Advice Bureau and also rooms to let. There is the Innovation Centre on the A6 just on the out-skirts of the town.

Community Partnership

Does policy of involvement with volunteer organisations work? Tom spoke about the scale of the financial challenges which we are under and likely to be under for the next few years and our response and how it is managed proactively. There are corporate objectives, one of which is supporting vulnerable people in the heart of where they live.

Scale of the challenge

Turnover is about £10.5M per year. 40-50% is for recycling, waste collections and environmental services. Have saved £1.8M recently. Getting less from central government again next year and so more cuts to come. Want to try and make better use of assets. Had headquarters refurbished and these are due to open in April 2014. 12 months ago only HDC in there and a lot of room - lots of paper. Have spent £5.7M turning it from an old decrepit building to a modern building. District and County Council and all public services are having to work closer together.

Innovation Centre on Airfield Farm

A multi-million pound project a few years ago from European funding. Important to have businesses to get economy going, important on a local level too. As central government gives us less money, we have to generate more income locally, and business rates are part of that. Lots of business rates used to go to central government, but now more of that money will stay locally, so really encourages us to focus on local growth. We have been fortunate with homes bonus money recently where we were rewarded for building local houses – district this size £600/house really mounts up. So, we're looking at need and future need and how we manage that. Want to create strong communities.

Also on cutting costs we're putting more services online. Obviously we recognise that not everyone is online, but large proportion is, and using smart phones, but the more admin we can do online the more efficient it will be for the council.

One of our 4 key community priorities involves supporting vulnerable people. Would like to know if CTH think they're getting it right. Recent welfare reform has been a big agenda item. The big difference between the duty we have to do things in a particular way, and when you get people coming with a hardship crisis it's difficult to respond because of the legalities, but then other services like the ones James is involved in have cut through the red tape to work with families in much more flexible and constructive ways.

Council administers council tax and housing benefit, in partnership with Hinckley and North West Leicestershire to get scale savings. Also trying to help people find affordable homes using a database. Council also does home adaptations to help people with disabilities stay in their home.

Good relationship with CAB. Hopping Clockwise Credit Union will be housed in Symington's Building as well as CAB. Would enhance the image and role of the building as the place to go to access services.

Victims of crime and antisocial behaviour. District council is involved in this, protecting victims of crimes and antisocial behaviour. They are phoned and talked to, a risk assessment to see if there are any underlying problems (e.g. learning disabilities, mental health problems) that make them a target. Council see its role to protect these people, working with the police who are now better at this.

Family support workers – will work with the family over 3-6 months, understand the problems with parents or children, and so tailor appropriate services. This is about saving money – national Saving Troubled Families project. If one averts the crisis before it happens, the social consequence and attendant costs afterwards can be saved.. Only a small service because it's highly intensive work, so each person has a small case load. Referral goes to a triage assessment to bring in the appropriate help. If the problem is obvious and there is a need for the service it is activated.

Grants given to VASL and Lutterworth volunteer centre. Quite a lot of commissioning of services these days. When commissioning, the danger is that being too prescriptive, particularly for vulnerable people. Some of the things they've achieved includes the county-wide carers project which supports people who are carers for others. Lutterworth VC has been involved in the foodbank. 60 referrals since the launch in January.

How do we work with Churches together projects? Supporting Leicestershire families team have referred people to the Bower House. Street Pastors, working with Angela and her team really well, also the police. Having eyes and ears out on Friday and Saturday nights, CCTV, really important. Emphasis on preventing problems, whether bad behaviour or unnecessary accidents. CUBE – doesn't know too much but knows we are opening soon. Fairtrade Town going to get embedded into council work.

HDC is only on the top floor of the renovated building and so there is space on the other floors for other organisations to come and be part of the hub. General sense of more collective responsibility.

Finally – reassuring that Council recognises the projects CTH get involved in, but there are ways we can build on what we do together.

What's the future of the Harborough Improvement Team?

This has gone through a big change recently. One of the areas where the council wanted to save money was here. HiT have been on a bit of a journey looking at different options: Town centre partnership and raising money from businesses, etc. But has settled on becoming a public forum for the town centre. Has quite wide representative. No easy choices. Hope it does continue and council will help the transition. The key work of the team was Harborough by the Sea, Christmas lights switch on. These will still continue and will run in much the same way through the community.

Questions:

- a) *Dave Tomlin - Asked regarding one off events in the community whether it is possible to open up overall things in the town and promote these to get the projects moving? He suggested Coach parking, and to build a campaign of events to sell Harborough for tourism.*
- b) *Father Owen – ask if there could be any help regarding Homelessness and if a Home Search Team could be set up?*
- c) *Rob Kanpp asked why are we capping Council Tax rather than raising it and spending it usefully?*

The Council agreed to Report back to Churches Together on the above questions for the next Forum

John Pearse concluded by saying that he hoped the Council and CTH would continue to share information and concerns relating to people in the community – issues of common concerns.