

## Barnet Civic Network

Tuesday 21 April 2009

### ‘Moving from Consultation to Conversation’

**Councillor Richard Cornelius**

Cabinet Member for Policy & Performance

Councillor Cornelius opened by saying that attendees represented the many strands that make society, and Barnet, work. Organisations needed to work together, to learn from other’s mistakes, as we could not afford to waste money by duplicating efforts. Councillor Cornelius then welcomed the Network, as having so many local partners attending was a positive step in working together.

What was networking? Councillor Cornelius discussed that there were old and new forms, such as newspapers and blogs. The evening was about looking forward at new ways of working and moving from consultation into a real conversation with residents and customers.

Councillor Cornelius then thanked Chas Hollwey for attending the meeting, his last as Chief Executive of Barnet Primary Care Trust (PCT).

**Dominic Campbell**

Social Media Manager – Barnet Council

Dominic announced that the evening was about information. While it would focus on the internet, the internet supplemented the great work already being done across the borough. Dominic highlighted the opportunity the web provided to reach out to new groups that may not currently be engaging with the council and other organisations through traditional forms of communication. He said that the web was an especially good place to attract the attention of the young.

**Councillor Mike Freer**  
Leader of Barnet Council

A podcast which Councillor Freer had specially recorded for the Civic Network was shown, outlining his approach to using new technologies to engage. He said that young professionals especially were too busy for traditional council meetings and that social networking was a good chance to reach this group of people.

The Leader and the council had been engaging with this group through use of a Leader's blog, as well as websites such as Facebook and Twitter. Councillors in other boroughs and councils across the country were approaching Barnet to see how we were using these mediums to speak to people. The press could also see that the council was engaging with its customers.

As part of the council's work with social media the communications team discovered a website dedicated to complaints about alley fly-tipping. Finding this information allowed the council to clean up the area and make the owner take responsibility for it.

Councillor Freer said that he was expecting an increasing reliance on electronic forms of communication. The medium is very quick and easy to use and customers expect a fast answer. Councillor Freer explained that he believed this electronic communication should be a dialogue with the community, not just people checking what the council is doing.

**Dominic Campbell**  
Social Media Manager – Barnet Council

**Introduction to the workshop**

Dominic began by explaining that the communications team at the council had been reviewing communication and engagement and discovered that there was a gap between communicating information and fully engaging with residents.

There was a fear of the electronic and the web. While there is a digital divide of those who are and aren't comfortable with the internet, Barnet is generally web literate. From the organisation's point of view there was also a danger that users of an online forum would post inflammatory or offensive messages in the hopes of provoking a response.

The council is trying to get more people involved online as it will mean more conversation and interaction as part of changing the relationship with customers. Web 2.0, the next stage, should be about conversations online not just providing flat information.

Dominic asked how the council could work with partners more effectively using this new technology. Dominic referred to Councillor Freer's comments on using social media to discover residents having problems with fly-tipping. The residents were shocked and pleasantly surprised that the council had gone to the trouble of tracking them down and speaking to them and this was an example of using social media to solve a problem and increase resident satisfaction.

Dominic then listed a number of websites that were engaging with people where they live, instead of making people come to them:

- [www.whereilive.org](http://www.whereilive.org) – a forum for residents to discuss issues that affect their wards initially being piloted for Childs Hill and Hale
- [www.dothegreenthing.com](http://www.dothegreenthing.com) – a not-for-profit public service that inspires people to lead a greener life
- [www.mumsnet.com](http://www.mumsnet.com) – an online network for people seeking advice on parenting issues
- [www.patientopinion.org.uk](http://www.patientopinion.org.uk) – a place for patients to post about NHS treatment and facilities
- [www.twitter.com/mssocietyuk](https://www.twitter.com/mssocietyuk) - the Multiple Sclerosis Society using Twitter
- [www.harringayonline.com](http://www.harringayonline.com) – community website for the Harringay ward of the London Borough of Haringey
- <http://eastfinchley.ning.com/> - community website for people living in and around the East Finchley area

### **Question & Answer session**

- What is the council doing to advertise what we're working on with social media?
- The council has been publicising these initiatives on its website and through Barnet First, the magazine that is sent to Barnet residents six times a year.
- What about the Barnet Homes magazine, At Home?
- Currently the council does not use the Barnet Homes magazine but the council can look into that possibility.
- Who initiated East Finchley online? There was interest in starting something similar for other areas.
- A resident of East Finchley started that group and it is open to everyone.
- How are people with no knowledge of the internet being included?
- The council leads a programme to give computers to residents of the borough who are over 55.  
There is free internet access at the leading libraries.  
Barnet Homes provides internet access at a number of locations and organises courses.

## **Anna Maybank**

Director – Social Innovation Camp

Anna introduced the Social Innovation Camp [www.sicamp.org/](http://www.sicamp.org/). The organisation was not-for-profit and was about bringing ideas, people and web tools together to get social innovations onto the web. The web was a good place to organise information and it is cheap and easy to use. Individuals can use the web to organise themselves better and use the online world to change the offline world.

Anna explained that a year ago a group of 80 people got together in Bethnal Green and spent two days setting up websites for communities. Several of these websites were now standalone with their own funding.

Social Innovation Camp (SIC) existed to meet the challenge of bringing together people with ideas for change and people with the technical ability to make this happen. SIC has three main parts:

- the initial call for ideas – people volunteer ideas and a panel of judges chooses 6 or 7 ideas to take forward
- the camp – SIC invites marketers, designers, lawyers and entrepreneurs among others to work in teams on each idea
- the winner – a panel of judges chooses the winning project

Examples from the Bethnal Green Camp included the winner 'Enabled by Design' <http://enabledbydesign.org/>, a resource for anyone looking to make adjustments to their lives, be it as a result of disability, injury or impairment; and the runner-up 'Visiting Prisons' <http://visitingprisons.org/> a tool to support the families of prisoners coping with the experience of being apart from a loved one.

Anna explained that a 'camp' takes about four months from starting to ask for ideas to finishing the weekend. However, as brainstorming forms a large part of the camp process, it could be done in a shorter time period and the workshop would be a mini camp.

## **Workshop**

The Network was asked to organise into groups to run through a mini social innovation camp; looking at local problems and how to solve them using technology.

Questions to ask when looking at problems:

1. What is the social need?
2. What sort of technology will you use to solve it?
3. How will the project be sustained?
4. What will you call it?
5. How do people get to use it?

Ideas were captured on post-its and the Network had the opportunity to work through some of the suggestions and gain ideas for possible future engagement work.

**Councillor Richard Cornelius**

Cabinet Member for Policy & Performance

Councillor Cornelius once again thanked everyone for attending, especially those for whom it was a new experience. He said that information would be fed back to the group and thanked those people who would be feeding back. Computers and social networking were an add-on to the traditional processes the council uses, Councillor Cornelius explained, and the council continues to listen to all consultees.