



MEETING OF THE ENGAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY, 12 JANUARY 2006 2.30 PM

PANEL MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Albert Victor Kerr
Councillor Mano Nadarajah (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Norman Radley

Councillor Michael Taylor (Chairman)
Councillor John Wilks

OFFICERS

Training Manager
Communications Manager
Economic Development Team Leader
Scrutiny Officer
Acting Scrutiny Officer
Scrutiny Support Officer

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Paul Carpenter (Portfolio Holder:
Access and Engagement)

42. COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

None.

43. MEMBERSHIP

None.

44. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Conboy, Craft and Hurst.

45. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

46. ACTION NOTES

Noted.

47. FEEDBACK FROM THE EXECUTIVE

The Cabinet accepted the recommendations made by the DSP on cash collection on Monday 5th December 2005. No formal feedback had been received on IT and Members Broadband; informal feedback had been positive.

48. E-GOVERNMENT

Notes of the meeting held on Wednesday 4th January 2006 were circulated for information. A recommendation had been made to the Engagement DSP with regard to IT staffing levels. It requested that the DSP should ask the Portfolio Holder to seriously consider the provision of a Project Manager, an Information Manager and a Programme Analyst. Working Group members present at the

meeting justified their recommendation; the ratio per staff member to an IT support officer was approximately 137 to 1. This proportion would not provide suitable support to enable development of information technology services to the level required.

After consideration, members of the working group felt that the listed specialists would be necessary to allow the complete link-up of Council IT services. The new customer contact centre would require the link-up of computers in the contact centre to back-office systems. The roles of the suggested positions were discussed: as development proceeded, specialists would be able to identify potential areas for ongoing enhancement and code applications accordingly.

One member was concerned that there was no specific plan for IT Development. Panel members were advised that given constant improvements in technology, the nature of IT Services would be open-ended. Other elements had been specifically identified in the service plan for IT Services.

The Portfolio Holder requested that any recommendations made on IT Support be submitted to him prior to Gateway 3 Reviews, commencing on 17th January 2006.

Members of the DSP supported the recommendation of the working group and agreed that it should be forwarded to the Portfolio Holder.

Conclusions:

1. ***That the Portfolio Holder be asked to consider the information received at the Panel meeting regarding ICT Services staffing and the concerns of the Panel about staffing levels within the department.***
2. ***That the Portfolio Holder be asked to seriously consider the provision of a Project Manager, Information Manager and Programme Analyst.***

49. BROADBAND FOR MEMBERS

The Training Manager summarised the report of the Members' IT Working Group, which was noted and considered. A lot of work had been done on the possibility of introducing broadband internet connections for all members. Work on this was ongoing as quotes on broadband and telephone packages were being fully considered.

There would be tax implications if broadband were to be introduced for Members. To simplify tax implications, a line would need to be fitted exclusively for Council use. A member would need to prove that this was used only for Council business. If a generic line were to be introduced, including personal use, sums would be taxable with income tax and national insurance. It was felt that provision of a grant for members who already had broadband connectivity was inappropriate.

Work on efficiency savings would follow. The Training Manager reported that there were only three areas within the District in which access to broadband was constrained.

Discussion ensued as to whether sending the agenda cover sheet via email, as formal notice of a meeting was an acceptable. The Council's legal section had interpreted the wording to mean that official notice had to be posted. This query was being followed-up with the Local Government Association.

It was suggested that the most appropriate way to proceed would be for all Members to have a dedicated line installed for Council business only, with very clear terms and conditions and a contract for the use of equipment. A dedicated line was thought to be the most suitable because it could be installed for all new Councillors when elected, immaterial to any personal provision they may have and could be removed at the end of their term, leaving them no less than they were before they were elected.

A six-month limit had been suggested for changeover from paper agendas to electronic agendas. The time limit had been chosen to allow members who had only limited ICT knowledge to develop their skills. Members considered reducing the time frame to three months but felt that this might not be appropriate given the resources that would be required to get all members to a point where they were confident handling documents electronically.

The Panel felt that it would be appropriate to look at the work that the County Council had done when they introduced broadband for all members. Some contact had been made but the packages offered to SKDC had superseded the one to which the County Council had subscribed. Members of the County Council had been provided with a dedicated line for internet access.

50. DEMOCRATIC REVIEW WORKING GROUP

The working group, led by Councillor Shorrocks, would have its first meeting on 15th February. The core group would include the District Council's Election Officer, a representative from a Parish, District and County Council level, representatives from schools, Grantham College, Grantham Volunteer Bureau, Grantham Business Club and a representative from the College Students Union. At the first meeting, the terms of reference would be outlined and a work programme set down. The group would undertake work examining both district-wide and national levels.

During preparatory research, a number of useful information sources had been identified including Power, who have carried out research into who did not vote and why, comparing this information to people's interest in political issues. The working group would also identify other individuals, agencies and organisations that could be involved on a one off basis.

51. CITIZENS' JURY

Following the first Citizen's Jury, held by the Council on December 8th 2005, the Scrutiny Support Officer had prepared a report evaluating the event. The officer commented that the event had been viewed as an overall success, although

there was room for improvement. The jury did not feel that they had received enough information to form a verdict, although feedback on the event was useful. The report was considered by CMT on Wednesday January 11th 2006, who supported the idea of having fewer topics to discuss. They also suggested that the topic could be specific to the jury, i.e. having a Stamford issue with a jury from Stamford, or a young person's issue, with the jury comprising of young people. It had also been suggested by the Judge from the event, that a similar format could be followed on-line. The format could also be packaged and taken into schools, who would pick their own topic and organise the event.

Members discussed whether schools would have the capacity to take on an event such as this. Schools have some flexibility in teaching citizenship and it was suggested that they might welcome the approach. The Training Manager stated that, depending on the desired age range and the time that was suggested, schools could be accommodating. It was suggested that the programme could be undertaken with one school and then, if successful, rolled out to other schools across the District. As this could be an important means of engaging young people with the political process, it was tasked to the Democratic Review Working Group to consider this further.

Members considered the number of items it would be appropriate to discuss at any future events held by the Council. Members felt that one or two issues would be most suitable. It was suggested that a jury day could be held at the end of a week of events on one activity, i.e. an anti-social behaviour jury following an anti-social behaviour awareness week. Following discussion on the time constraints of the last event, members felt that it would be appropriate, if another event were to be held in the daytime, it should be split into two sessions with one topic to be considered in each. Members also suggested that there could be an evening jury at which one item could be considered. Members thought that as the public become more aware of the events, they might be encouraged to attend.

During discussion, members considered the likes and dislikes of the day that had been identified by members of the jury. They had stated that they could not identify Councillors from members of the public. Councillors stated that they too, would have preferred to be able to identify the members of the jury and from whence they had come.

One Member commented that the feedback he had received on the day had been positive. Members considered the implications of calling the event a 'jury'. It was suggested that the choice of word might suggest to participants that any decisions or recommendations they made would be binding. It was commented that instead the event was more a forum for feedback. After discussion, members of the DSP felt that it would be more appropriate to change the name of the event to 'Citizens' Panel'. Operating as a Panel, there would be greater opportunity for members of the public involved to ask more detailed questions. It was suggested that members of the public be asked for subjects that would interest them, to allow them to be considered at any future events.

Conclusions:

- 1. That the Democratic Review Working Group should consider the format and audience of any future Citizens' Jury/Panel events.**
- 2. To recommend to the Access and Engagement Portfolio Holder that for an all day event, there should be two sessions of one topic each, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. If an evening event were to be held, one topic should be considered.**
- 3. To recommend to the Access and Engagement Portfolio Holder that the name should be altered to 'Citizens' Panel'.**

52. COMMUNITY STRATEGY

The Chairman agreed to take the item on the Community Strategy as urgent business, following its recommendation to the Engagement DSP by the Community DSP on Thursday 5th January 2006.

The Panel were advised that the report had been referred to them following consideration by the Community DSP. The DSP were informed that the Community DSP had expressed concern that the report demonstrated problematic cross agency linkages.

The Economic Development Team Leader stated that there would be a new approach in the development of the new Community Strategy to ensure that it was "Community Friendly". It would comprise a detailed action plan from the LSP and would be ready in March/April 2006. It was hoped that the new document would be easy to read for all members of the community, instead of a series of action plans for each member of the LSP, as had constituted the document previously.

To ensure that all members had the same level of understanding and background knowledge, it was suggested that the Panel should receive a presentation on the LSP from the Economic Development Team Leader. The Panel felt that this would be helpful and agreed to have a presentation at their next meeting.

Conclusion:

The Panel should receive a presentation at its next meeting on Thursday 9th March 2006, on details of the Local Strategic Partnership.

53. ANNUAL SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

Following a meeting of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Group, it was proposed that the programme of meeting should be amended to cover a period of four-years. This would run from election to election and would be implemented in May 2007. It was explained to the Panel that the idea had been suggested to allow better planning and could save time.

The Training Manager informed the Panel that under the IdeA Member Development Charter, the schedule of meetings should be reviewed regularly to ensure that meetings are accessible.

Members of the DSP discussed the potential for changes if a longer-term timetable was developed. Some members were concerned that the timetable would be too inflexible. Following discussion, it was agreed that additional meetings could be called as required under the same terms as the one-year timetable. In preparing a timetable, the only thing that would be established would be the dates of meetings; the time of meetings and their locations would be left to the discretion of the Chairman.

Members considered having a two-year rolling programme so that meetings would always be known a year in advance. This would mean that there would be sufficient notice for all meetings for every municipal year, rather than having to wait until the annual council meeting at the end of the designated timetable period. To ensure sufficient notice, members suggested that the timetable for each four-year term, if adopted, should be drafted in January/February of an election year and then confirmed at the annual council meeting.

Conclusions:

The Engagement DSP recommends the Cabinet consider the introduction of a four-year programme of meetings for the Council beginning in 2007. The programme should be collated in January/February of an election year and presented to the Annual General Meeting.

54. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Panel were advised that all indicators were green. This was noted.

55. WORK PROGRAMME

A report on the format of Local Area Assemblies would be included at the next meeting of the Panel on March 9th 2006. A new forward plan was due to be published, which may result in additional items being added to the Work Programme. Members were asked to advise the Chairman, Scrutiny Officer or Scrutiny Support Officer of any matters they would like raised for consideration.

56. ANY OTHER BUSINESS, WHICH THE CHAIRMAN, BY REASONS OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, DECIDES IS URGENT.

A response from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister with regard to recommendations from the fire services working group was circulated for information.

The minutes of the South Kesteven multicultural forum were circulated for information.

Members were advised about an email that had been received on the national Take-up campaign. Copies would be available from the Scrutiny Support Officer on request.

57. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 16:38.