



MEETING OF THE ENGAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY, 8 MARCH 2007 2.30 PM

PANEL MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Mike Exton
Councillor Stephen O'Hare (note 159 onwards)

Councillor Ian Stokes
Councillor Mike Taylor (Chairman)
Councillor Avril Williams

OFFICERS

Scrutiny Officer
Service Manager, Performance Management and Engagement (Notes 150-158)
Management Accountant (Note 159 only)
Scrutiny Support Officer (2)

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Paul Carpenter (Portfolio Holder: Access and Engagement) (note 156 onwards)

Members present were disappointed by the poor attendance at the meeting.

150. MEMBERSHIP

The Panel were notified that Councillor Exton would be substituting for Councillor Conboy, Councillor Stokes would be substituting for Councillor Radley and Councillor O'Hare would be substituting for Councillor Mrs. Gaffigan for this meeting only.

151. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

152. ACTION NOTES

Noted.

153. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

- The Scrutiny Officer indicated that he had not heard from North Kesteven District Council about the amount of officer time involved in their youth engagement event.
- The Engagement DSP had referred the Shaping Acute Services consultation paper to the Healthy Environment DSP. A copy of the notes from the Healthy Environment DSP on 16th January 2007 were circulated.

154. DIGITV

Consideration of this item was deferred until the meeting on 12th April 2007 due to the indisposition of the visiting speaker.

155. CLOSURE OF POST OFFICE CARD ACCOUNTS

The Panel scrutinised the briefing paper on the closure of post office card accounts:

- The accounts were set up in 2003 when it was decided that pensioners and those on benefits without their own bank accounts would no longer be able to withdraw cash from post offices.
- The government had announced that it intends to phase out post office card accounts by 2010. This announcement received cross-party opposition.
- The closure of the accounts, which could potentially lead to the closure of post offices, would affect people living in rural areas and jeopardise the sustainability of villages.
- Reliance on transport in private vehicles would be increased if the sustainability of villages was jeopardised because of poor rural bus services.
- Access to a service for the most vulnerable people in society would be removed.
- The withdrawal of post office card accounts could have an adverse impact on the Council's allpay scheme.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Access and Engagement Portfolio Holder should write a letter to the relevant government Minister expressing the DSP's concerns about:

- ***The sustainability of villages***
- ***The effect on vulnerable people***
- ***The impact on the carbon footprint***
- ***The increased reliance on private transport for access to services***

JT/DL to complete rec form. PC to write letter

156. MONITORING OF TELEPHONE CALLS - RESPONSES

Panel members scrutinised report PME1, which provided an update on the performance of the authority against the customer service standards.

- The report illustrated growth within the customer service centre as more services were taken on board. There were dips in standards when new services were added.
- If a call was picked up by the customer service centre within customer service standards but not answered within standards when transferred to the relevant officer, the call would show positively against customer services' performance but would count against the individual officer.
- Members discussed whether a message should cut-in when a

customer was waiting to be answered. There was no support for this idea because of the charge to the customer.

- Results of the 2006/7 residents' survey showed that the telephone was the most popular way of contacting the Council.
- Other aspects of customer service needed reviewing.
 - When away from the office, an e-mail auto-reply with alternate contacts should be generated or another officer should be tasked with checking e-mails.
 - Staff within the customer service centre should notify members of the public when they have forwarded an e-mail to a relevant officer; this should include details of the officer dealing with their request.
- Recording of communications against customer service standards needed to be more effective.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Engagement DSP recommended that the Service Manager, Performance Management and Engagement should carry out proactive work with Service Managers promoting the Council's customer service standards and their monitoring.

SY to liaise with service managers

157. ROLE AND FUNCTION OF COUNCILLORS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

This item was deferred for consideration at the meeting scheduled for 12th April 2007, due to the absence of key proponents at the meeting.

Correspondence received by the Chief Executive on a call for evidence on strengthening the role of rural councillors was circulated. A working group could be created to look into this.

158. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Noted.

- Indicators SK21 and SK22 were under review. A report would be submitted to the Cabinet.
- SK23 had risen to 534 self-service transactions. This was still below target.
- SK70 and SK71 had been coloured incorrectly. These were on target.

159. FINANCIAL REPORTS

Noted.

- Revised budget figures had not been included because these were only approved when the budget for 2007/8 was set at the meeting of the full Council on 1st March 2007.
- No budget profiling had been done for 2006/7 however this would be in place for 2007/8.
- Support service costs had been stripped from the breakdown of

expenditure for each service.

- Most areas were on course for being on budget.

ACTION POINT:

The financial report should include details of which month the breakdown of figures covers. DS to include month

160. WORK PROGRAMME

Noted. The review of the Communications Strategy had been scheduled for a decision “not before April”.

ACTION POINT:

1. To include on the agenda for 12th April 2007:

- *DigiTV*
- *The role and function of Councillors in the 21st century and the times and days of meetings*

DL to include on agenda
DL, PM to invite portfolio holders and DSP
Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen

2. To invite all members of the Cabinet and the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of all DSPs to the presentation on DigiTv.

161. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting was closed at 15:10.