



# MEETING OF THE ENGAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY, 12 APRIL 2007 2.30 PM

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## PANEL MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Robert Conboy  
Councillor Mrs Joyce Gaffigan  
Councillor Peter Martin-Mayhew  
Councillor Alan Parkin

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

## OFFICERS

Scrutiny Officer  
Scrutiny Support Officer  
Strategic Director – Beverly Agass (note 170 only)

## OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Ray Auger  
Councillor Paul Carpenter (Portfolio Holder: Access and Engagement)  
Councillor Mrs Frances Cartwright  
Councillor Nick Craft

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## 162. MEMBERSHIP

The Panel were notified that Councillor Parkin would be substituting for Councillor Nadarajah, Councillor Stokes would substitute for Councillor Radley and Councillor Martin-Mayhew would substitute for Councillor Webster.

## 163. APOLOGIES

An apology was received from Councillor Shorrock.

Councillor Bryant and Councillor Nicholson, who had been invited to attend the DigiTV presentation, also sent their apologies.

## 164. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

## 165. ACTION NOTES

Noted.

## 166. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

- The Scrutiny Officer confirmed that a letter had been sent to the

relevant minister regarding the closure of Post Office Card Accounts, but that no reply had been received.

- All DSP Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen had been invited to attend the DigiTV presentation.
- It was indicated that the Scrutiny Officer had still not heard a reply from North Kesteven District Council regarding the amount of officer time involved in their youth engagement event.

## **167. DIGITV**

Guy Giles and Joanne Preece from Kirklees District Council made a presentation on the use of Digital TV by councils.

- Kirklees Metropolitan District Council was responsible for the running of the Digital TV project. The project was designed to establish if there was any value in using Digital TV to deliver Council services. The project had expanded to include mobile telephones and kiosks.
- The target audience for Digital TV services are primarily those who wouldn't have access to PC's and broadband services, but with a reasonable chance of having Digital TV. The people most likely to need Council services were the ones least likely to have access to online services.
- At the time over 70 local authorities were signed up to the scheme. There were also police forces and housing associations signed up to the scheme.
- As well as allowing access to Council services, the system could be easily configured to link up to websites and databases to provide access to such things as choice based lettings for housing, arranging appointments and repeat prescriptions at doctor's surgeries, employment opportunities, learndirect and local travel information. The link to Jobcentre Plus at Kirklees had been particularly successful.
- Members were informed there was a strong business case for implementing the service. To engage with the service would cost £12,000 which would reduce to £10,000 if cable services were not included. The costs are low because most of the services are already in place and just need connecting up to be accessible through television. The service was a cheaper way of delivering services to people than either face to face or over the telephone. It had been established that most of the people currently using the television service would not use websites but rather return to the telephone or face to face meetings.
- A bureau service is provided by Kirklees Council to keep the service up to date. Members noted that this service would only be as good as the information provided by the council, which had been a problem with the website. Members were advised that the bureau would chase up information to keep the service accurate. Eventually the Council would take over running the service themselves once they had seen how it all worked. Marketing the service would be important to get people using the system.
- Most people interact with the system using a remote control, using an interface similar to sending a text message via mobile

phone. People tended to not want a keyboard in their living rooms.

- Members were concerned that some people – particularly the older generation – wanted the social interaction of dealing with people face to face and would not want to access Council services through Digital TV. Members were informed that some people would always want to interact with the council in other ways, but that this provided another option for people to self serve. This is useful for members of the public who may find it difficult to travel to council offices or who are not available during working hours. Members were also informed that two-way video was also being trialled, opening the possibility for face to face interaction that way.
- Members were concerned that some people had Digital TV and faced problems with reception quality. Members were advised that this was due to the service being provided by Freeview, and that this was generally not an interactive service. Most people accessing Council services would be provided with their digital service through either Sky or a cable provider, as a telephone connection to the digital receiver was also required. This method of connection to digital television suffers far less from reception difficulties.
- The analogue service would definitely close down and everyone would have to switch to a digital service at some point. Therefore it was almost inevitable that council services would be available through the medium. Members accepted it was a case of it either being available now or catching up later, but expressed some concern over the lack of social interaction with the service.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

***That the issue of access to Council services through Digital TV be looked at in more detail by the Council following the May elections.***

## **168. ROLE AND FUNCTION OF COUNCILLORS IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

This item had been deferred for consideration at the two previous meetings of the Panel. The item was excluded from the agenda as not all members of the Panel were present.

## **169. COUNCIL MEETING TIMES AND DATES**

This item was linked to the previous item regarding the role and function of Councillors in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

- Members questioned whether it would be better to schedule meetings when it is best for those most concerned with them, but believed there was nothing to be gained for scheduling evening meetings without good reason.
- It was the Chairman's prerogative to schedule meeting times

**RECOMMENDATION:**

***It was not the right time to determine this matter. It was an issue for the new Council to decide after the May election.***

**170. REVIEW OF COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY**

Beverly Agass answered questions from the Panel regarding the draft Communications Strategy and Protocols and Guidelines.

- It was stressed how important communications were. Over one third of the community were of the belief that they receive more information from the press than from the Council. There were some sections of the community that knew the Council emptied the bins but of little else of the Council's activities. It was important for the Council to have a corporate image so that people would be aware they were dealing with the Council. Communications should be simple, in plain English and well targeted. It was hoped the strategy would also assist members in their communications with the public.
- Members questioned the accuracy of the pie chart on page 12 of the draft Communications Strategy. The true figures showed that the media actually had approximately 2% more respondents answering that it was their main source of information regarding the authority at the expense of the Council.
- On page 13, item 8 should also state "following consultation with the Cabinet".
- Members were concerned that the report switched between using the terms "residents" and "customers" too frequently, and that one term should be used.
- Members observed that they were concerned that the news stories concerning the Council were generated by the media and the Council was always on the defensive. It was felt the media preferred negative stories and that very little credit was given to the Council. It was noted that there was rarely a press presence at Panel meetings. Members welcomed item 1 on page 13 to proactively generate good news stories.
- With regard to item 12 on page 17, Members pointed out that the item should refer to DVD, not video. It was also noted that "Councillors" was misspelled on page 18.
- Members were concerned that there was no mention of the Freedom of Information Act and its consequences in the draft Protocols and Guidelines.
- Members questioned why there were differences in the signage of letters. It was an issue for Corporate Heads to decide if a letter should be signed by the author or another person, such as the Corporate Head themselves. Members also asked if they would have access to the electronic diaries of officers. This was confirmed.
- Members had concerns regarding the answering of telephones. In order to be a brilliant council it was important that phones are answered and that staff should answer other officers calls when they were away from their desks.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- *Members wished to see corrections to the issues they had highlighted.*
- *Members wished to confirm that the corporate font should be Verdana 12 point rather than 11 point, as this was easier to read. The report had mentioned both font sizes.*
- *Members wished to see an updated contacts list of who does what, to be produced after the election.*

SY to action amendments to reports and to arrange production of updated contacts list after the election.

**171. EQUALITIES**

The Panel noted the minutes of the Equalities and Diversity steering group meetings of the 18<sup>th</sup> January and 22<sup>nd</sup> February.

**172. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

The Panel noted the updated Best Value Performance Indicators.

**173. WORK PROGRAMME**

The Panel noted the work programme.

- Council meeting times and the roll and function of Councillors in the 21<sup>st</sup> century would be removed from the work programme.
- The Members IT Working Group would continue to meet, as would the Access and Modernisation Working Group.
- As this was to be the last meeting of the Panel before the election, the remaining items would be looked at by the relevant group formed from the new Council.

The Chairman wished to thank the Panel Members for their attendance at meetings.

**174. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting concluded at 4:08pm.