

MEETING OF THE ENGAGEMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

THURSDAY, 10 SEPTEMBER 2009 2.00 PM



PANEL MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Jock Kerr
Councillor Stuart McBride
Councillor Bob Russell

Councillor Ian Selby
Councillor Tom Webster (Vice-Chairman)

OFFICERS

Corporate Head of Finance and
Customer Services
Corporate Head, Sustainable
Communities
Partnerships and Community Safety
Manager
Service Manager Business
Transformation and Information
Management

OFFICERS

Principal Democracy Officer
Democratic Support Officer

17. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors' Exton and Cook.

18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations made.

19. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 9TH JULY 2009

The notes from the meeting held on 9th July were agreed as a correct record.

20. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

The Corporate Head of Finance and Customer Services (CHFCS) said that the Council's response to the consultation on concessionary travel had been submitted. Once a response to the consultation was received, this was due in the autumn, a further report would be submitted to the Group.



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21. EQUALITIES MONITORING FORM AND INFORMATION LEAFLET

Recommendation:

- 1. The Engagement PDG notes the work done to date on changes to equality monitoring.***
- 2. The monitoring form to be amended as per the amendments made during the meeting.***

Members had been circulated with report CHSC018 which dealt with changes to equality monitoring following the Governments introduction of the Equality Bill 2009 which was due to receive Royal Assent in spring 2010. The bill placed new statutory duties on public bodies including the duty to promote equality in respect of religion/belief, sexual orientation and towards people who are transgender.

The Corporate Head Sustainable Communities (CHSC), Teena Twelves informed Members that the proposed new legislation would look at equalities in a different way which would affect the whole of Council services. The legislation expanded equalities to look at it more as a “community” needs culture rather than a tick box culture. Currently there was a great variation in the information collected by different sections within the Council. Some sections such as housing and homelessness have legal requirements to collect information which is pertinent to the situation and required under the Communities and Local Government Acts elsewhere in the authority equality information gathering was not consistent, a more consistent template was needed. The Council would have a statutory responsibility to collect the information; however people were not obliged to give it. The CHSC then gave examples of how far reaching the new Bill would be to the Council. Members then discussed what information was currently collected and held by the Council and what was done with this information if anything. Also discussed was whether “prefer not to say” should be included on the form or not, some Members expressing the view that it should be included whilst other indicating that it should be excluded. What format the form came in, audio, Braille, not English speaking were also discussed and the difficulties this entailed.

The base information that the Council collected would help drive the delivery of services in the future in a more tailored way, to some degree this was already being done in Tenancy Services and the CHSC gave an example of where tenants who had difficulty reading were flagged on the computer so that all information which went out to them from the Council be it a newsletter or an ordinary letter was in large print. Questions were asked about the resources in place to deal with collating the information to which the CHSC replied that other than herself and Elaine Claridge who worked in Tenancy Services there were no other resources.

Further discussion followed on how the information would be collected, changes to the form and what was classed as a disability. Although the Bill would not be passed until next year the Council needed to start to embed

processes within its procedures to start a base line of collected information. Members agreed with the work done to date and awaited further reports when more information was available.

22. EMERGENCY PLANNING

The Partnerships & Community Safety Service Manager, (PCSSM), Mark Jones and the Corporate Head Finance and Customer Services (CHFCS), Richard Wyles did a joint presentation to the Group about what emergency planning procedures had been put in place following the outbreak of swineflu in the Country. The Council had always had emergency planning in place but historically this had been in place to deal with incidents of flooding, heavy snow etc. The swine flu pandemic was slightly different and was something that had to be looked at corporately. The presentation looked at the impact to date and when the next wave was due (end of October beginning November). Issues looked at were:

- Priorities
- Community impacts
- Measures to reduce spread within SKDC
- Service area staff protection
- Critical functions

Members asked if this scenario had been looked at previously, the PCSSM replied that it had but not on this scale, business continuity planning had always been in place but this was on a larger scale and affected more people. The issue of informing people locally was raised and whether any thought had been given to local radio advertising. The NHS was the lead agency on this issue and it was expected that they would use all mediums available to them to communicate the necessary information. A question was asked about what percentage of the general population would be affected, the PCSSM replied 12%. The Vice-Chairman thanked Mr Jones and Mr Wyles for their presentation.

23. IT - MEMBER PAGES

Recommendation

- (1) *That further work be carried out on costings for wireless access in the Civic end of the Council building.***
- (2) *That further training for Councillors be arranged on use of laptops.***
- (3) *All Members to be asked if they wish to have more information about themselves put on the Modern.gov detail page.***

The Service Manager Business Transformation and Information Management (SMBTIM), Andy Nix discussed with Members the following:

- Use of laptops in meetings
- Webcasting
- IT facilities within the Council
- Website features

He referred to the questionnaire which he had circulated at the last Council meeting asking Members about their laptops to which 76% indicated that the laptops were as good as before, with over 50% indicating they were better. One issue that had been raised was whether Members could have two cards one for the laptop, one to enter the building but due to the security issue the SMBTIM did not consider this as a good idea. The issue of wireless access in the civic end of the Council building was seen by Members as a good idea and it was agreed that the SMBTIM look further at costings for this. The use of laptops at meetings was seen as a good idea by some but not by others, however this could be due to lack of training on how to use laptops and it was suggested that perhaps further training could be arranged as it was "assumed" that Members knew how to use their laptops. E-mail attachments were also discussed and the problems that some Members encountered when trying to open them. The SMBTIM referred to audio and video meetings, webcasting which some authorities now put on their website. Members felt that this was something that should not be pursued. Reference was then made to Members having more personal information placed on the Modern.gov area where their details were kept; however, it was felt that this was something that should be asked of all Members, not just the Engagement PDG. The issue of SPAM was then discussed and the SMBTIM said he would look at the template to see if it could be made clearer.

24. LOCAL FORUMS REVIEW

The Principal Democracy Officer briefly outlined the background to Local Forums which had started out as Local Area Assemblies in 2004 and changed to forums in 2006. Some forums were more successful and better attended than others, Bourne and Stamford being the main ones. Deepings was well attended if the items on the agenda concerned the area but the rural forums and Grantham forum were not well attended. The Vice-Chairman said that forums that he had gone to were badly attended and tended to attract those persistent complainers who were not representative of the public. The Principal Democracy Officer said that in his experience if there was a genuine interest then people would attend and he referred to the Deepings Forum which dealt with the gypsy and travellers sites and the 400+ public that had attended. Another Member referred to the Bourne Forum which he felt was excellent although not so well attended when the meetings took place away from the Corn Exchange. The Portfolio Holder, Councillor Auger referred to the reasons that the forums were initially set up to invite representatives from various public bodies to respond to current issues such as the police and health authorities. Some forums such as the Stamford forum, he felt as a past chairman of that forum, had been taken over by Stamford Councillors and had to some extent

become a second town council.

The Group felt that the forums needed strong Chairman and advertising was essential. The Principal Democracy Officer informed the Group that unfortunately there was no budget for items such as advertising, although press releases were sent to newspapers it was then up to them whether or not they advertised that a forum was taking place and the issues to be discussed. The venues of the forums were also discussed and it was suggested that perhaps the rural forums could be held in a room in local public houses as they were currently suffering in the current economic climate and perhaps more people would attend. Further comments about whether the forums were working in the right way, had they run out of their usefulness, did the formats need updating were put forwarded. The Group decided that the issue should be discussed further and the item be put on the next agenda.

› ***Action Note***

Place Review of Local Forums on next Engagement PDG agenda.

25. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 4.30pm.