

MEETING OF THE ENGAGEMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

TUESDAY, 11 MAY 2010 10.00 AM



GROUP MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Michael Cook
Councillor Mike Exton (Chairman)
Councillor Reginald Howard
Councillor Jock Kerr

Councillor Bob Russell
Councillor Ian Selby
Councillor Tom Webster (Vice-Chairman)

PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Councillor Ray Auger

OFFICERS

Corporate Head Partnerships and Improvements – Robert Moreland
Monitoring Officer – Lucy Youles
Communications Officer – Chris England
Democratic Officer – Lucy Bonshor

1. MEMBERSHIP

The Group were notified that Councillor Howard was substituting for Councillor McBride for this meeting only.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

3. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 25TH MARCH 2010

The notes from the meeting held on 25th March were agreed as a correct record subject to the questionnaire question on sexual orientation should have the word gay replaced with homosexual as it was felt that this would better reflect the answers received.

4. PETITIONS SCHEME

Members had before them report LEG066 which referred to the decision made at Council on 22nd April that a model petition scheme be adopted. A petition scheme had to be in place by 15th June to comply with the statutory regulations introduced under Sections 10-22 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. At Council it had been agreed that petitions with 5,000 signatures would be discussed at Council and petitions with 2,500 signatures would be discussed at the Scrutiny Committee. The Monitoring Officer informed the Group that they had been asked to form a task group to look at issues relating to the petition scheme to ensure that the model scheme was as informative as possible and had the ability to look at any petition that was submitted to the Council. A short discussion followed with members asking about what constituted a petition and what other authorities had set as their figures for signatures. The Monitoring Officer said that authorities that she had looked at had set a lower figure than this Council had. Mention was then made about planning and licensing decisions as it was often these decisions that most people had issue with. The Monitoring Officer said there was a process already in place to deal with these decisions through the appeals process and these decisions were not included in the petition scheme. The petition scheme had scope within it to deal with other issues such as planning policy decisions which affected a wider public. The Chairman then asked for volunteers for the task group and Councillors; Cook, Jock Kerr and Russell expressed an interest; the Chairman also said he would be happy to be involved in the group. A request was made that at the first meeting of the task group a remit and guidelines be circulated.

Recommendation:

That a Task Group comprising of Councillors; Cook, Exton, Jock Kerr and Russell be established to look at the model petition scheme adopted by the Council.

5. WELCOME TO GRANTHAM - A SHORT FILM PRODUCED BY PUPILS AT ST HUGH'S SCHOOL

Members watched a short film entitled "Welcome to Grantham" which had been made by the students of St Hugh's C of E Mathematics and Computing College as part of the SKDC Community Cohesion Project with Grantham Youth Centre and film makers Electric Egg.

The film had been made by children from migrant families who had come to Grantham to work.

After the film the Local Strategic Partnership Co-ordinator (LSPCO), Carol Drury discussed the issue of community cohesion and why this phrase meant many things to many people. For many of the children who had made the film

they had not had any say about coming to this Country they were uprooted because their parents had come over here for work. They did not speak the language had left other members of their families, friends and pets behind and were expected to integrate in to a strange new society and speak a common language. They were taken out of school on a Monday and Friday morning to attend the youth centre to learn English and new skills and although they felt safe doing this during the day they did not attend in the evening as they did not feel safe.

A discussion then followed about people's perception about things and whether in some cases the perception was worse than what actually transpired.

Although the children came from different eastern European countries, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Ukraine, Hungary and Portugal they were put together as a group with the assumption that they will "get on" regardless of the fact that they speak different languages this forces them to speak English.

Tensions in schools were also mentioned with the schools dealing with issues themselves. Members asked how the Council could help to ease these tensions and help the children feel safer within the community. The LSPCO spoke of the work being undertaken with the Youth Centre and the Local Children's Partnership to try and get more involved with the migrant families and gain their trust to enable them to reach more families within the area.

Further comments were then made about funding of projects and the unseen prejudice within families which affects children when they take their parent's prejudice into schools.

More work was needed to try and bring about a more cohesive community with more people coming from Eastern European countries the issue was not going to die down. The Chairman congratulated Carol Drury on the work done to date and said that the Group would be pleased to receive further reports on the work being undertaken.

6. COUNCIL WEBSITE – PRESENTATION

The Corporate Head Partnerships and Improvements (CHPI), Robert Moreland referred to the redesigned website that had been launched last November. More functionality had been added to the website and he thought Members would be interested in the new features of the website and analytical information that can be obtained about usage. He introduced Chris England to the Group who was the Communications Officer who dealt with the website.

Members were circulated with a list which highlighted the most popular pages and new functionality together with analytical information and user satisfaction.

Members then discussed the website and raised the following:

- Problems with planning application numbers – this was being looked at and a “fix” was being put in place.
- Training for Members
- Trying to find your councillor on the new website was more difficult than on the old website – needs simplifying
- Languages on website – all information should be together - this was being addressed
- New ability to add news items – see Chris England
- Lack of use of intranet by Councillors – training required
- Can Members expenses be completed on line?

Chris England gave a demonstration of the new “flicker” feature on the website which enabled pictures to be downloaded on to the site and although Members liked the new feature the over riding consensus was Members inability to use the website to its full capacity because they simply did not have the training. This was echoed by nearly all of those Members present and it was agreed that a full days training for all Members to attend with their laptops should be arranged.

Recommendation

That a full days training on IT issues and use of the website be arranged for all Members to attend with their laptops.

Another Member then spoke about the wi-fi connection and that no information had been given about which of the three options which come up is the correct one to get on to the SKDC system - it should be that Members only had to press a button to get on to the system not go through 5 steps to get logged on. The CHPI said that this was something that could be covered in the training session.

The Portfolio Holder for Access and Engagement asked if the website and literature concerning recycling and green waste could be updated as he was sure there were far more items that could now be put in the recycling bin.

7. CLOSE OF MEETING

Before the meeting closed a Member referred to the comprehensive telephone directory that the CHPI had said he would look to get printed, although they had been given a loose sheet version something more substantial was needed.

The meeting closed at 11.50am