

MEETING OF THE ENGAGEMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

THURSDAY, 11 NOVEMBER 2010 2.00 PM



GROUP MEMBERS PRESENT

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

Councillor Stuart McBride □ Councillor
Bob Russell □ Councillor Ian Selby

OFFICERS

Monitoring Officer – Lucy Youles
Service Manager ICT – Andy Nix
Democratic Officer – Lucy Bonshor

10. COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

None present.

11. APOLOGIES

None received.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

13. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 9TH SEPTEMBER 2010

The notes from the meeting held on 9th September were agreed.

14. MEMBER TRAINING

The Chairman referred to the issue of further IT training for Members which had been discussed at previous meetings and had invited the Service Manager (SM) ICT to the meeting. The SM ICT gave a brief presentation to Members about proposals to set some structured courses for Members to attend. He gave a brief background to the issue.

- Members had had their laptops now for about 18 – 24 months.
- They had access to broadband at varying levels.
- Programmes on their laptops included word, excel, e-mail, intranet and internet access and Modern.gov

He was very keen for Members to feedback to him with any problems they were having or how improvements to the service could be made. He appreciated that there were varying degrees of IT experience amongst the Members and he wanted them to be able to maximise the systems they had and use their machines with confidence. One of the Members present referred to the wireless connection and why currently Councillors had to go into a “double” system to get connected. The SM ICT said that this issue was currently being addressed and work was being done to make it simpler for Members and Officers alike to go straight into the network. He was proposing to put four two hour session on for Members covering the following:

- Session 1 - Refresh on the SKDC IT access including:
 - Use of smartcard
 - Main points of laptop
 - What cable goes where
 - How to log on and off
 - How to access email
 - How to access intranet, modern.gov
- Session 2 - Getting round Windows
 - What is Windows?
 - Start bar
 - Finding programs
 - Finding Files
 - Main Windows software, calculator, calendars etc
- Session 3 - Introduction to Word and Excel
 - Creating documents
 - Basic file tasks
 - Formatting documents
 - Tables
 - Page layouts
 - Spreadsheets
- Session 4 - The Internet
 - What is the internet and terms used
 - Accessing the internet
 - Searching e.g. google
 - Main government sites
 - Our corporate website
 - www.southkesteven.gov.uk

- Functionality
- Customer experience

As the topics were discussed Members asked questions about various aspects including:

- the need to use smartcards within their machines (this was for security in case the laptop was misplaced/stolen)
- Use of formulae in excel, key aspect showing Members how to “self surf “ the systems to find help

Members felt that there was a need to have training but expressed concern that there was only a six month period until the elections and was it cost effective to put training on for Members that perhaps come May would not be standing.

From looking at the proposed content of the sessions Members felt that both sessions 1 and 4 could be put on at the same time and also 2 and 3 to help mitigate the need for long sessions. It was suggested that a questionnaire should be sent out by both post and electronically to all Members asking what their training needs were and the results of this discussed at the next meeting of the Group to see how the training can be further progressed. It was suggested that if a group of Members had the same specific problems then a small training session could be arranged. Further comments were made about the use of council laptops by Members, if they were only specifically for council work, some Members found this too restrictive and preferred to use their own computer. A question was asked about having access to the intranet being installed on home computers was this a possibility? The SM ICT indicated that it was something he would look into.

Recommendation

That the SM ICT sends out a questionnaire to all Members both electronically and by post to find out Members IT training requirements and the results reported to the January meeting of the PDG.

► Action Note: *The SM ICT to look at the Intranet being put on Councillor’s home computers.*

15. PETITION SCHEME AND E-PETITIONS

Members were circulated with a further draft copy of the petition scheme which they had discussed at their last meeting and at which they had made a recommendation to the Portfolio Holder. Since that meeting the issue of who should be the delegated officer had been discussed at the Constitution Committee and they had recommended that the Constitution be amended to appoint the Monitoring Officer to be the Petitions Officer.

Following the submission of the draft scheme for approval by the Portfolio Holder queries had been raised about some of the content of the scheme and

the Engagement PDG had been asked to again look at the scheme before it went to Council in December. Also the issue of e-petitions needed to be addressed within the scheme as this aspect came into force on the 16th December and a section on e-petitions had been added.

Members went through the draft page by page and agreed the changes as shown in bold below:

Page 1 – **Members agreed the inclusion of the wording Petitions Officer by the side of the Monitoring Officer**

- The issue of including children and young people was then discussed and the difficulties faced about validating children and young people within the scheme. After an in depth discussion **Members decided not to include the wording (including children and young people)** within the scheme.

Page 3, 8 & 9 – The Monitoring Officer informed the Group that the wording included in 2.1.4 and 2.1.5 in relation to “affected area” was very hard to define and felt that this issue would be challenged when it got to Council. (The same wording also appeared on pages 8 & 9). They needed to define an affected area and she referred to the electoral ward areas that had been circulated and asked Members to reconsider the wording. It was proposed and seconded to raise the number of signatories from 3,000 to 5,000 but leave in the 51% of the electorate in the affected area if less than 5,000.

The Monitoring Officer argued strongly that the definition of “an affected area” would be very difficult to define when a petition was received and she referred to other authorities’ petitions that she had looked at which only gave a figure as none had a satisfactory solution when defining an affected area. Members who had been involved in the working group referred to the long period of time that had been taken up by the Group discussing this issue and they felt very strongly that the sentence should be kept in the document to allow everyone the opportunity of putting their petition before Council. One Member did offer that if the signatories were increased to 5,000 and the wording restricted to cover two or one ward if someone felt strongly enough then they would actively seek people to sign their petition to get the necessary signatories. Other Members disagreed and referred to the parishes of Swayfield and Swinstead who would not be interested in something happening at Boothby Pagnell. **On being put to the vote it was agreed to increase the figure to 5,000 and keep (this is reduced to 51% of the electorate in the affected area if less than 5,000).** The Monitoring Officer then gave an example to Members about how this

would work in practice and that by not defining a specific area they were fettering the Council with issues that affected a very small number of people. Members were adamant that the size of an affected area should not mean that people were treated differently. Further discussions followed on the subject with examples being given by Members and the Monitoring Officer reiterating that by not defining a specific area the Council could easily be challenged. **If was further agreed to include a sentence which said “the figures in 2.1.4 and 2.1.5 above can be revised by Council at any time.”**

With regard to holding an Officer to Account **Members agreed to keep the figure at 1,500 but still retain (this is reduced to 51% of the electorate in the affected area if less than 1,500).**

Page 4 – **Members agreed the inclusion of the note on inappropriate words with the inclusion after Planning & Licensing (which will be referred direct to the relevant committee)**

Page 9 & 10 – **Members agreed the wording of the scheme in relation to e-petitions 8.1 to 8.7**

A short presentation was then given to Members by the Democratic Officer about how the new e-petition scheme would work.

16. CLOSE OF MEETING

Before the meeting closed a Member referred to a recent public meeting he had attended and perhaps the Group would like to invite the speaker to attend a meeting of the Group. The Chairman indicated that the issue was not within the remit of this PDG and the Member should seek clarification of which PDG's remit the issue came under.

The meeting closed at 3.50pm.