

# MEETING OF THE ENGAGEMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

THURSDAY, 15 SEPTEMBER 2011 2.30 PM



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## GROUP MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Bob Adams (Chairman)  
Councillor Ray Auger  
Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing  
Councillor Ibis Channell  
Councillor Reginald Howard  
Councillor Nick Robins  
Councillor Rosemary H Woolley (Vice-Chairman)

## OFFICERS

Chief Executive (Beverly Agass)  
Head of HR & Customer Services (Sue Griffiths)  
Head of Legal & Democratic Services/Monitoring Officer (Lucy Youles)  
Democratic Officer (Lucy Bonshor)

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## 22. COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

None in attendance.

## 23. MEMBERSHIP

Councillor Howard was substituting for Councillor Jock Kerr for this meeting only.

## 24. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

## 25. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 28TH JULY 2011

The notes from the meeting held on 28th July were agreed as a correct record of the decisions taken.

## 26. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

A Member referred to the item on Ward Members being allocated a sum of money and informed Members that at Lincolnshire County Council the Members rather than take a remuneration increase they had used it for charitable purposes.

The Member who had raised the issue asked if a prepared statement from the relevant authorities who had this in place would be helpful. Further discussion followed on the topic of an amount of money being given to Ward Members with Members putting their views forward. As this year's budget had already been set it was not appropriate for the money to come out of this year's budget. It was felt that at the current time it was not an issue for the PDG to consider, more information was required and the project would have massive resource implications. As the Member wished to pursue the topic it was suggested that she might wish to submit a motion to Council on the subject, it would then be for all Members of the Council to debate.

The Democratic Officer circulated an information paper compiled by Mrs Wyles about BT telephone boxes that had been discussed at the last meeting. The paper listed in chronological order correspondence that had been undertaken with BT with regard to the telephone boxes and the current position.

## **27. REVIEW OF CUSTOMER ACCESS**

The Interim Head of HR and Customer Services, Sue Griffiths introduced herself to the Group. She informed the group that she was also the Deputy Chief Executive at Rushcliffe Borough Council and her remit at Rushcliffe included customer services.

The presentation concerned the review of customer access to services of the Council. Customer access was a changing environment both nationally and locally with authorities being asked to focus resources and reduce costs and shared services more widely used within different elements of the public sector. Residents did not distinguish between the local authority and the county council and therefore for front facing services a more joined up approach was required.

Changes were due to be made with housing benefits in future being dealt with by the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) and there were changes due to the council tax. How people use services was changing with more people using the internet and access to services needed to be fit for purpose. Currently work was being carried out with Lincolnshire County Council in having a single point of access in Bourne which would be used by both the district and county council and this was being lead by the Head of Finance, Richard Wyles. A short discussion followed on how the library space in Bourne may be used and it was agreed that an update report on the Bourne Customer Access Point (CAP) be presented to a future meeting of the Group.

### **► Action Note**

***An update report on the Bourne CAP project to be presented to a future meeting of the Group.***

The issue of bus passes was raised. As concessionary travel now came under the remit of the County, people had to travel to Lincoln or correspond by post in order to get a pass; surely this was an aspect that perhaps the District could help with as a face to face service.

In order to carry out the review, data was required in order to profile our customer's needs such as geographical spread, languages used within the district. A best practice need to be established and a draft strategy agreed to be implemented on a phased basis. Information listed below needed to be gathered:

- How many people were contacting us and where
- How are they contacting us
- Who is contacting us
- Why are they contacting us
- Who is not contacting us

Clear customer standards needed to be in place, with clear behaviours by all staff for both internal and external customers. That all complaints are taken seriously and lessons are learnt from these complaints to improve our service with training being given across the board to all staff and a commitment from the top of a level of care and consistency.

The strategy would cover what we offered face to face, our approach to channels of access, and how we continue to understand our customers' views and adapt. Timescales for the project were as listed below with the main people involved beside Ms Griffiths being Councillor Paul Carpenter portfolio holder, Daren Turner Strategic Director, Richard Wyles Head of Finance and the Lead on the Bourne CAP project and, Lee Sirdifield, Team Leader Revenues and Benefits and the Customer Services Team.

- Data gathering up to December 2011
- Profiling for the future to February 2012
- Draft Strategy available March 2012
- Implementation during 2012/13

The Chairman referred to the staff within customer services and said a lot of issues could be stopped at source if the right people were recruited. Ms Griffiths replied that all customer service staff had strong customer service skills, long inductions and a wide understanding of the Council. Members were pleased with what they had heard but felt that the tracking of issues needed improvement and asked for a print out of the screens for call logs. It was suggested that as Members were interested in the subject arrangements were made for them to visit the Customer Service Centre (CSC).

► **Action Note**

***That arrangements are made for Members to visit the CSC and speak with the Customer Services Manager.***

Further discussion followed on what Members saw as the need for continuity with a complaint and being able to direct dial officers.

The Chairman thanked Ms Griffiths for an interesting and informative presentation and looked forward to the draft strategy coming before the Group.

*NOTE: A copy of the presentation would be circulated to Members of the Group*

**28. PRIORITIES - STATE OF THE DISTRICT**

*The following item was discussed as a matter of urgency due to the need to get Members opinion on the way forward*

The Chairman welcomed Beverly Agass, the Chief Executive to the meeting. Mrs Agass referred to the Council priorities which were currently being looked at and refreshed. Issues which currently concerned the community were the provision of jobs, whether places were clean and tidy and things for young people to do. Various sessions had been held with the Cabinet to discuss the state of the district including issues such as unemployment level, fuel poverty and life expectancy. Currently the four main theme blocks were the economy, having balanced housing, culture and leisure and clean, green and healthy. A document had been put together and in order for Members to be given some context behind the refresh she asked if they would be interested in attending some sessions or workshops before the item goes to Council in October for them to understand the issues facing the district and how they can be addressed. .

Members agreed that a session before the Council meeting would be welcome.

**It was AGREED that a date of Wednesday 12th October at 2pm be put forward as a possible time and date and all Members of the Council would be sent an invitation to attend the session, together with a summary of the main points of the refresh.**

**29. REVIEW OF OUTSIDE BODIES**

Members had been circulated with report LDS037 from the Head of Legal & Democratic Services which contained an up to date list of outside bodies. The Chairman had asked the item to come before the Group because of those bodies which seemed to have “dropped off the radar”. The issue had been looked at and those organisations who had become defunct or no longer

wished to have a representative or who had not replied within a given timeframe had been taken off the list. The Head of Legal & Democratic Services informed the group that the main purpose of outside bodies' reports going before Council was to appoint Members; historically there had never been reports back to Council on Members attendance. The Scrutiny Committee had looked at the issue at a recent meeting and it had been decided that Members who had been appointed to an outside body should feedback to the Scrutiny Committee.

A discussion followed on what criteria was used to appoint people and why some people appeared more eligible than others. It was felt that if a Member had an interest in a particular topic then they should be allowed to put themselves forward. Another suggestion was that the Group Leaders held a meeting and they put Members forward who had indicated a preference for a particular body.

It was suggested that before the next cycle occurs in four years the issue of how outside bodies were voted upon be revisited.

### **30. UPDATE ON STANDARDS**

The Head Legal & Democratic Services circulated a paper which contained a snapshot of the Localism Bill in relation to the Standards Committee. She briefly gave a background to the Standards Committee and how the Localism Bill would change the current process, nationally the Standards Board would be abolished. She outlined how complaints were currently dealt with by the Assessment Sub Committee and the time and resources incurred. If the complaint required further investigation by the Review Sub Committee this could increase the time by a further three months. Investigations cost in the region of £3,000 - £5,000 and were carried out internally and were time consuming.

Complaints would still be received and the Council needed to have a code of conduct in place that was fit for purpose. Although there were no statutory sanctions the Council needed a system to be able to resolve problems or offer training so that issues did not happen again in the future.

The Localism Bill had been amended with the proposal that all Council's have a Standards Committee. They had also introduced a provision about disclosing pecuniary interests which was very important for Members to grasp because if they knowingly failed to disclose an interest it would be classed as a criminal offence. The Head of Legal & Democratic said that perhaps this was a piece of work that the PDG could look at in more detail and how it affected Members.

It was hoped that the Standards Committee would be holding a working group on 4th November (tbc), however this did depend on the number of items that they had on the agenda. Members felt they should attend as observers to get

a background to the Standards Committees ideas. The Head of Legal & Democratic Services said that a report should be ready for the PDG to discuss at its November meeting. She reminded Members though that the Bill had yet to be enacted although a proviso could be added to the work depending upon the progress of the bill through parliament.

► **Action Note**

***That a report on the Standards Committee proposals be discussed at the next meeting of the Group.***

### **31. WORK PROGRAMME**

Members noted the current programme. The affects of the Localism Bill on other areas was briefly discussed and it was

**AGREED that a presentation on the Bill be made to the next meeting of the Group.**

The presentation would centre on issues under the remit of the Engagement PDG but would touch on other areas affected by the Bill.

### **32. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 4.47pm.