

MEETING OF THE ENGAGEMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

THURSDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER 2012 2.30 PM



GROUP MEMBERS PRESENT

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

OFFICERS

Chief Executive (Beverly Agass)
Service Manager Legal and Democratic Services (John Armstrong)
Democratic Officer (Lucy Bonshor)

77. MEMBERSHIP

The Group were informed that Councillor Howard was substituting for Councillor Bisnauthsing.

78. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

None disclosed.

79. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 26TH JULY 2012

The notes taken on 26th July 2012 were agreed as a correct record.

80. CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES - UPDATE

The Chairman welcomed Beverly Agass, the Chief Executive to the meeting who presented the Head of People Projects and Performance's report on consultation activities.

She began by briefly referring to the forums that used to take place across the

district. The format of these had tended to be formal and used to be attended by a small core of residents each time. In order to try and engage with more people on a less formal setting, the Council were trialling different approaches.

Drop in sessions had been held at various locations in the District earlier in the year and just recently they had been held as part of other activities that had been happening such as the Olympic Torch run through the District and community events. They had been themed on quality of life and service representatives had been on hand to advise residents on topics linked to this theme including healthy eating/healthy walks and healthy environment.

More formal consultation activities had been held in connection with issues such as the Grantham Action Plan where display boards and Planning Policy Officers had been on hand to answer specific questions, the Wyndham Park survey where both face to face and web based sources had been used and analysed. The Community Access Point and Wherry's Lane projects at Bourne. Officers from both Assets and Finance Sections had attended to inform the public on the main proposals.

Consultation events and activities coming up were the Gravity Fields Festival and the promotion of the Destination SK project. The third phase of the southern quadrant consultation was being undertaken by Planning Policy and would involve drop in sessions at Grantham Library and Witham Place in November 2012.

Feedback to residents had been undertaken quickly with issues being resolved or questions answered in a shorter space of time.

The second edition of the Parish newsletter had been circulated, including an update on which Head of Section was the contact point for each Parish. The Parishes had been split into five clusters with each one having 12 parishes and a Head of Section as a contact point for any issue that a Parish had. It was hoped that this would help build a better understanding between the Council and Parishes.

Mrs Agass then spoke about other issues that were being looked into by the Consultation Team who had been asked to carry out a scoping exercise to determine what the corporate consultation requirements were for the Council as a whole. This would include the drop in sessions and the community events that had been held during the year. Other areas being looked at were a citizen's panel with a cross section of people both young and old who were engaged with issues including social media such as twitter, facebook etc. It needed to be established what the Councils requirements were and how we can consistently improve, keep in touch with all residents, be accessible and open to new methods.

A comment was made about how many people we consulted, reference was made to the small proportion of people who attended the old forums, how did

we consult with the vast amount of people within the district. Mrs Agass referred to SK Today which went to all households in the district. Consultations were mentioned in these publications and residents signposted to where they could contribute, whether by post, phone or through the website. Often unless an issue affected people locally they would not get involved with a consultation, they expected the "Council" to just get on with the job.

Discussion then followed on various issues including feedback and the parish clusters. Ward Members wished to know which parish fell into which cluster especially as some District wards straddled parishes. If there was an overlap who should the Parish Clerk Contact?

➤ **Action Note**

Members were to be circulated with a list of the Parish Clusters showing both Parishes and District Wards and which Section Head covered the area.

Further discussion followed on contacts within the Council and how some Parish Clerks who were new to the job did not fully understand what they were expected to do, they could benefit from having a buddy system which they had had in the past. If the Parish Clerk knew to go direct to an Officer to deal with a specific issue they should go direct rather than through the Cluster Officer who could be inundated with e-mails about issues that they personally could not deal with. Mrs Agass said it was a way for Parishes to communicate with the Council and get real time intelligence on issues which specifically affected that Parish. The Chairman asked if numbers could be submitted to the next meeting showing how many Parishes had contacted their Cluster Officer.

➤ **Action Note**

To feedback to the next meeting the volume of contact (phone calls, e-mails) that the Cluster Officers had with Parishes in their area.

The emphasis was on communication between the parishes and the Council. Reference was made to the new Planning Regulations and the affect that this would have. The Service Manager Legal and Democratic indicated that the changes would make disputes such a boundary disputes extremely difficult, but this area did not come under the remit of this PDG.

A Member asked if it would be possible for Members who wished to have a face book page; Mrs Agass said it was something that could be looked into. Further discussion followed with a Member expressing the view that the Ward Councillor for an area should be the conduit for information between the Council and Parishes.

Further discussion followed on how the Council consulted on issues to get

views and opinions of the residents of the District by using a Citizens Panel. The Chairman asked if an update could be given at the next meeting on the current situation with regard to the Citizens Panel.

➤ **Action Note**

An update on the Citizens Panel to be given at the next meeting of the Group.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Agass for attending the meeting.

81. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY ACT UPDATE

The Service Manager Legal and Democratic Services, John Armstrong, informed the Group about changes which were due to be made under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act ("the Act"), specifically concerning covert surveillance. He highlighted how the powers under the act may currently be used to prevent or detect a crime or to prevent disorder. The powers under the Act had been used by the Council where there had been incidents of anti social behaviour, where surveillance was specifically aimed at certain areas for the prevention and detection of crime. The new legislation which was coming into force on 1st November 2012 altered the circumstances and the authority that was required to use the powers. Firstly to use covert surveillance it must be demonstrated that the offence being committed was a crime that would result in a prison sentence of at least six months or, be an offence of selling, allowing to be sold or permitting the sale of alcohol to children or the selling of tobacco to children. This means that it can be used for the detection of prevention of a crime but use of the power was no longer permitted for the prevention of disorder. The scope of the power was therefore reduced and with it the potential to use the covert surveillance power under the Act was reduced. Secondly, whilst the Council's authorising officer must in the first instance determine whether the use of the power was necessary and proportionate to achieve the aim it was seeking, the Council if satisfied at that stage must then make an application to the Magistrates Court. The Council would need to satisfy the Magistrate that the use of the power was both necessary and proportionate and demonstrate that the crime was so serious that it was possible that a six month prison sentence was available. This meant that perhaps in the future the public may view the council as being less effective but it would be a case of managing expectations with regard to the use of covert surveillance. In any event it must not be forgotten that in many cases where the possibility of covert surveillance was being considered a more appropriate response to stop the activity that the Council was seeking to prevent was to be overt and put the public on notice that surveillance would be carried out to prevent a specific act.

He then spoke about the use of covert surveillance for checking that alcohol

and tobacco was not being sold to children. This was carried out under the Licensing Act 2003 and it was usually Trading Standards who were the leading authority who carried out these operations.

Questions were then asked about CCTV to which the Service Manager Legal and Democratic Services replied.

The Chairman thanked Mr Armstrong for attending the meeting.

82. DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME

An updated copy of the draft programme was circulated to Members for noting. Comments were made about the timing of some of the issues and the Democratic Officer said they were not set in stone and were amended according to progress on the issues.

83. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 3.35pm.