

MEETING OF THE ENGAGEMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

FRIDAY, 22 NOVEMBER 2013 10.30 AM



GROUP MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Ray Auger
Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing
Councillor Ibis Channell
Councillor Michael Cook (Chairman)
Councillor Nick Robins
Councillor Rosemary H Woolley (Vice-Chairman)

PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Councillor Paul Carpenter (Governance and Communication)

OFFICERS

Head of Legal & Democratic Services (Lucy Youles)
Service Manager HR & OD (Joyce Slater)
Interim Service Manager Customer Services (Lee Sirdifield)
Legal Executive (Shelley Hardy)
Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer (Carol Drury)
Democratic Officer (Lucy Bonshor)

30. COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Councillor Kelham Cooke spoke as a member of the public. He made a number of suggestions that he felt would make meetings of the Council more accessible and better publicise the work of the policy development groups. The suggestions echoed a piece of work that had been undertaken by the Governance Working Group and summarised in action point 37.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Cooke for his comments

31. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

None disclosed.

Your council working for you

32. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 19TH SEPTEMBER 2013

The notes from the meeting held on 19th September 2013 were agreed as a correct record.

33. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

A member referred to a training session that had been held at Castle Bytham for Parish Councils which had been well received. The content had been good and aimed at Parish Council level. Comments were made about the notice of the event, some Parish Councils had been given very short notice and it was asked that in future Parishes be given more notice.

The Chairman confirmed that a letter would be sent out shortly concerning the change of remit of Working Group.

The Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer, Carol Drury said that she had been in contact with Andy Nix and in principle he had no problem with having a drop in session, however, he was waiting for the outcome of the IT questionnaire before putting anything in place. A formal statement would be sent out in due course once sessions had been agreed.

Councillor Carpenter asked if the questionnaire could be sent electronically as well as paper as he had, received requests asking for an electronic copy. He referred to tests which Lincolnshire County Council carried out once a Councillor had been elected concerning IT equipment. Based on the outcome an assessment was made as to whether a Councillor was supplied with IT equipment.

A question was raised about the password facility and the Member was advised to forward his comments on the IT questionnaire.

34. CUSTOMER ACCESS STRATEGY

The Interim Customer Services Service Manager, Lee Sirdifield gave a presentation to the Group on the Customer Access Strategy. He referred to previous presentations to the Group on the topic and how it was being developed.

The presentation included broad principles such as how we will behave with our customers and keeping service delivery consistent across all mediums regardless of how the customer accessed the Council's services. Putting ourselves in the customer's shoes and resolving customer's queries in the quickest way possible at the point of contact. Having a single view of the customer with all relevant information to hand so that we are better placed to respond, learn and understand their issues and apologies if things go wrong.

A short discussion then followed with Members asking questions about the single view, how we respond to our customers and unique reference numbers to which both Lee Sirdifield and the Portfolio Holder for Governance and Communication responded.

Mr Sirdifield then spoke about the key outcomes which included customers influencing how services were delivered. The need to have clear and consistent standards of access to council services. An effective website was required with end to end functionality and service requests with “digital by preference” being the preferred option between the council and its customers, although support for vulnerable and complex issues still needed to be available as required. A comment was made about Apps to which Mr Sirdifield replied that there were a range on line and these were being looked into.

Generally 83% of households had access to the internet with 73% accessing the facility daily. Many organisations were digital by default with more automated telephony growing such as voice recognition. The use of technology had grown dramatically and was changing the way services were delivered.

Mr Sirdifield then spoke about the Citizen’s Panel and how it interacted with us. He then highlighted areas within the Council’s technology that needed to be reviewed including the Council’s core systems and the different telephony across the organisation which was perhaps not being used to maximise deployment. Consultants had been appointed to do a short piece of work to help scope an action plan, including the Council’s direction of travel.

He concluded the presentation by listing how the council would measure its success which included regularly surveying customers within the Customer Service Centre, (CSC) a more consistent telephony offer using “friendly” technology and on line functionality needed to improve to cover 75% of services.

The strategy would be going to Cabinet in January to be adopted and then it would be communicated to staff. The existing offers would be marketed to residents and the required IT and resources would be identified together with a detailed action plan put in place to support the strategy which would include communication of the Council’s approach to our customers.

One Member then gave an example where she felt that she was not getting a very good response when trying to pinpoint locations of fly tipping she preferred a direct route to contract services. Mr Sirdifield responded that each customer service advisor did have access to a mapping system which could pin point locations; also there was an app now available which required you to take a photograph which could pin point exact locations using GPS. Additional improvements had been made both in the CSC and on the web page so better solutions were in place for reporting problems such as fly tipping.

The Portfolio Holder stressed that first points of contact were not oracles and that a list of telephone numbers of officers had been circulated to Members. A question was asked about fly tipping on land that did not belong to the Council. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services stated that fly tipping would be removed unless it was on private land.

The Chairman thanked Mr Sirdifield for his presentation.

35. MEMBER TRAINING CHAMPIONS

The Service Manager Human Resources & Organisational Development, Joyce Slater, spoke to the Group about Member Training Champions. Currently the training programmes for Members both the core and specialist training was put together by officers with very little input from Members. As the PDG had received reports about Member training she felt that the PDG was the correct avenue to appoint Member Training Champions to liaise with both Members and Officers on the Member training programme. The Champions would form a non political panel and bring to the table good practice to help inform the training programme. There was no prescriptive approach and she asked for the Groups views on how to take the project forward.

The Chairman agreed in principle to the proposal stressing the non political aspect of the role. Some Members agreed that the proposal was good although some had doubts due to the lack of enthusiasm for training by Members.

Mrs Slater said that formal evaluations would be undertaken but she valued the informal feedback from Members. She referred to the Lincolnshire Member development programme which was testing county wide proposals for Member training

A discussion followed on the different aspects of training required by Members and also inviting a Member from the group not represented on the PDG. It was hoped that any programme put in place would be on a four year cycle. The Chairman said that it had merit to use the PDG as a working group and that the Group Leaders be contacted with a view to inviting other Members to attend the working group so that each group was represented.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Slater for attending the meeting.

36. ENFORCEMENT POLICY

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced Shelley Hardy, Legal Executive to the PDG who was involved in drafting the revised Corporate Enforcement Policy. The last policy had been produced in 2006 to include the

National Concordant. However, updated legislation was now in force and a revised policy was needed to include obligations imposed by the Regulatory Reform Act 2006 and the statutory guidance including the Regulators Compliance Code. Both of these documents post dated the previous revision of the document. Other guidance existed that also required the Council to have a documented enforcement policy such as the National Planning Policy framework, Health and Safety Executive Section 18 Guidance, and the Food Standards Agency Framework Agreement.

The updated document would establish a single over-arching policy that encompassed the key factors and principles common to all aspects of enforcement undertaken by the Council which included building control enforcement, anti social behaviour, environmental health, licensing, public sector housing and rent and debt recovery.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services suggested setting up a working group of the PDG to review the service specific elements of the policy to ensure enforcement was consistent, fair and effective to protecting economic interests, public health and safety and the environment.

As the timescale was tight for the project it was decided that the whole PDG would look at the documents at its scheduled meeting in January. Given the complexity of the Enforcement Policy the meeting's agenda would only contain this item.

37. UPDATE FROM WORKING GROUP

Councillor Woolley updated the PDG on the work of the Working Group.

- The governance remained as a Cabinet system.
- The Working Group was looking at ways to improve the current system.
- Various ideas had been looked at and District Councillors approached for their views.
- Most popular view was to have a question time (30 – 45minutes) at Council.
- Questions to Cabinet Members with 48hours notice being given.
- Council and Development Control meetings to appear on the web (live streaming) although it was appreciated that this had a financial implication. Further investigation was required in into costs and the potential impact on the members of the public who attended and spoke at meetings.
- The information bulletins already circulated were welcomed by Members.
- A suggestion had been put forward that some Councillors shadow the Cabinet Members in a mentoring role.
- Also that PDG's report to Council annually or six monthly on the work they had been doing.
- That the Cabinet be scrutinized.

A question was asked about the Executive Leader to which the Head of Legal and Democratic Services replied that the role was a statutory one.

Further comments were made about the suggestions and it was commented that with the future economic strains on councils perhaps the introduction of webcasting could be perceived by the public as an unnecessary cost especially in light of the reduction in future grant settlement. It was argued that a case could be made either way and it was decided that more work was required to look at live streaming of council meetings.

Comments were then made about having members shadow Cabinet Members and the Portfolio Holder present gave his views. It was suggested that perhaps a poll of the Cabinet would be a way forward and to look at other authorities and what they did.

The Chairman concluded that the Working Group needed to do more investigation into web streaming costs, pros and cons, etc, also what other authorities did with regard to shadowing cabinet members.

38. FEEDBACK FROM THE EXECUTIVE

Members had been circulated with information bulletins which detailed the decisions made by the Cabinet since the last meeting of the PDG. This information was already available to Members but the Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer had just put it together in a different format for ease of reference.

The bulletins were provided for Members of the PDG for information only.

39. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 12.35pm.