

MEETING OF THE ENGAGEMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

THURSDAY, 31 MARCH 2016 10.30 AM



GROUP MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Mike Exton
Councillor Nick Neilson
Councillor Nick Robins (Chairman)
Councillor Adam Stokes

Councillor Brian Sumner
Councillor Hannah Westropp
Councillor Paul Wood

EXECUTIVE MEMBER

Councillor Bob Adams (Economic)
Councillor Kelham Cooke (Governance)

OFFICERS

Strategic Director Growth (Steve Ingram)
Executive Manager Corporate (Lucy Youles)
Business Manager Spatial and Economic Growth (Roger Ranson)
Consultation and Engagement Officer (Deb Wyles)
Assistant Consultation and Engagement Officer (Devon Bradley)
Community Engagement & Policy Development Officer (Carol Drury)
Democratic Officer (Lucy Bonshor)

54. COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

None received.

55. MEMBERSHIP

The Group were notified that Councillor Adam Stokes was substituting for Councillor Helen Goral and Councillor Paul Wood was substituting for Councillor Judy Stevens.

56. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

None disclosed.

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57. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 15TH JANUARY 2016

Action notes from the meeting held on 15th January 2016 were agreed as a correct record.

58. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

A Member asked how blind short listing was progressing and the Democratic Officer replied that she would find out.

59. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

Members had been circulated with report LDS170 from the Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer. The report gave Members information to evaluate training and development opportunities offered during 2015/16. A questionnaire, to be circulated to all Members was attached to the report which included the following, what training they had participated in, what had been most useful, least useful, what they would like to see included to help them in their role and the timing of the training.

At the elections in 2011 the main complaint from Members had been that too much information was given to new Councillors in a short space of time and they had nothing to “compare” it with for it to be meaningful. Following last year’s election the training had been reduced so that Members were not overloaded. An indicative programme for the next year was appended to the report.

The Chairman referred to his experience at some of the training sessions which he felt had been poorly attended by Members and he asked if there was a mechanism to make Members attend. Other than the mandatory training for Development Control Committee, Licensing Committee and Governance and Audit Committee there was nothing compulsory to make Members attend training. One Member asked if more iPad training could be included now that Members had been in possession of their devices for a year such as being able to print from the wireless printer available in the Members room.

Further discussion on training ensued. Issues raised included the high quality of the training, using on line training platforms and the possibility of having succession planning training for those Members who aspired to be Chairmen/Vice-Chairmen or Executive Members. Another aspect discussed was having certificates following the completion of training as they did at the County or having a “passport” which could be stamped accordingly when the training had been completed.

60. QUESTIONS WITHOUT DISCUSSION - WORKING GROUP UPDATE

The Chairman had agreed to re-arrange the agenda so that agenda item 10 could be discussed next.

The Chairman referred to the Working Group that had met at the beginning of March to discuss the issue of Questions at Council. Although the issue had been discussed previously by the PDG nothing had come to fruition. The Working Group's recommendation to the PDG was to introduce questions at Council similar to the model used at the County Council. The questions would be put to the Leader, Executive Members, the Chairman/Vice-Chairman of PDG's and the Opposition Leaders. Questions could not be put to the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Development Control Committee, Licensing or Governance and Audit. No questions could be asked of Officers and no questions could be asked at the Budget meeting. The period of time for questions was 45 minutes and questions would be taken on a first come first served basis following the introduction of a queuing system installed in the Council Chamber. If any questions could not be answered a response would be sent within three working days and this response would be available at the next Council meeting. There was to be no political band standing or point scoring and each Member was to show respect to each other regardless of political party. Only one question per Member was allowed. The pilot was to take place over six months.

A proposal was put for the recommendations as outlined by the Working Group. It was suggested that no supplementary questions be included in the recommendation and the proposer was happy to include this amendment. Another suggestion was made that perhaps the first meeting after an election should not include questions either. Further discussion followed on what happened at the County, each political group gave a list before the meeting of who would be asked what question and this was given to the Chairman before the meeting. It was then for the Chairman to use his discretion who asked which question in which order. A Member who was in favour of questions and was also a County Councillor said that as a matter of courtesy he informed the Member he was going to ask a question and what it was about a few days before the meeting. Members were in agreement that respect and courtesy must be given to all Members. A question was asked about the number of questions that could be asked and it was confirmed that only one question could be asked per Member. Confirmation was also sought about the minutes and it was confirmed that only the name of the Member asking the question and the name of the Member answering the question and the topic were to be recorded. It had been agreed by the Working Group that a pilot take place and clarity was sort about how this would be progressed but as the PDG discussed the issue it was suggested that perhaps a motion at Council on 21st April should be put introducing the pilot scheme. It was therefore proposed and agreed that a motion be put to Council on 21st April 2016 to introduce a pilot

scheme based on the recommendations from the PDG Working Group.

61. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY UPDATE

Members were given a presentation on the findings of the Economic Development Strategy consultation that had taken place between 14th December and 31st January. A pre consultation exercise had been carried out between August and September 2015 to help to inform the final consultation document which had the following five core themes:

- Encouraging high value jobs across our four towns and rural areas.
- Expanding the visitor economy and attracting visitor investment.
- Addressing the skills and employment challenges to meet current and future needs.
- Establishing Grantham as a leading sub-regional centre.
- Ensuring that key components are in position for growth to take place.

The consultation had been carried out with stakeholders including businesses, residents, charity sector representatives and education providers. Around 400 stakeholders had been contacted by e-mail with press releases, the website, a dedicated Facebook campaign, LinkedIn and Twitter had been used to advertise the consultation document. 117 responses had been received (34 from the business community, 58 residents, 7 from the charity sector, 3 education providers and 15 other).

The responses to the first three and the fifth themes had over 90% agreeing with them. The fourth theme which referred to establishing Grantham as a leading sub-regional centre had less agreement and from analysing the results businesses who had disagreed with the theme were not located in Grantham.

Results from the business community results showed a strong acceptance of the core themes, the majority of stakeholders thought that we were concentrating on the right areas within the themes and this was also reflected in the results from the business community results.

The top barriers to growth for business were business rates, business premises and car parking.

20 people from the Grantham Canal Society had responded to the consultation which because they were less likely to agree with the themes had affected the overall results, a decision would need to be made as to whether or not they were included within the Economic Development Strategy.

A Member asked about how to increase the responses received and both the Strategic Director for Growth and the Business Manager for Spatial and Economic Growth spoke of the meetings that they had attended in both Grantham and Stamford where businesses had been invited. Also offers had been made to attend business clubs in both Bourne and the Deepings. Businesses had been encouraged to respond to the consultation although the challenge came when a more in depth response was required and people felt that they did not have the necessary information to be able to answer the questions asked. It would be necessary to reflect on the responses that had been received to see how to take the Economic Development Strategy forward. A more measured response had been received from the Grantham Canal Society and talks would be arranged with them.

The Leader of the Council spoke about the SIMALTO exercise that had previously been done where stakeholders were asked what they felt the Council should concentrate on given a set of parameters that they needed to abide by.

One Member felt that perhaps people did not understand what establishing Grantham as a leading sub-regional centre meant and therefore didn't answer the question. The Business Manager for Spatial and Economic Growth felt that this was a fair comment and they had tried to keep away from using jargon, a business situated in Bourne or the Deepings would not see that as a theme that affected them.

Comments were then made about the response to the consultation exercise with one Member questioning the responses received from the education sector. Members asked whether any valid information could be gained to support the ED Strategy considering the poor response to the consultation exercise following the number of stakeholders that had been contacted.

The Chief Executive said that the information before Members had to be put into context, it was a snapshot and it was not just this information that informed the ED Strategy. Follow up work would be done and other dialogue would be undertaken, what issues the business sector had what was required to keep them located in the district, how we could help them to expand etc. The themes were just a broad brush and other engagement would be undertaken for both current and future businesses, what skill levels were required. Engagement would be done in a variety of ways to help inform the strategy.

Work would be taken on board for the current and future needs of colleges and how to drive up skill levels and for people to gain higher value employment.

Further discussion on schools ensued following which the Chairman thanked officers for giving the presentation.

62. GRAVITY FIELDS

The Project Manager for Gravity Fields, Paul Stokes gave an update on what was happening with Gravity Fields 2016. The Steering Group for the Project included representatives from the community, the business club, civic society and also the National Trust. A schools and education programme had been put together and this had been circulated before Easter and several schools had already booked tickets. Various locations would be included in the Gravity Fields Programme including the Arts Centre, the Kings School, the Angel and Royal, Harlaxton Manor, St Wulfram's and Woolsthorpe Manor. Two Ministry of Science shows would be put on at the Meres Leisure Centre one aimed at schools the other at families.

Work on the programme was currently two months ahead of schedule with a more commercial focus. The application for Arts Council funding had been successful and a full 100% of the grant had been awarded. Other bids had been made to the Big Lottery Fund and a Leader Bid which was part of EU funding and administered by the County. The National Trust were doing work "in kind" as it was the 350th anniversary of Sir Isaac Newton's scientific breakthrough.

A question was asked about budgets and making a profit. Mr Stokes replied that all spend was within budget and for this type of festival it was not possible to "make a profit". The outcomes were reflected in the economic impact that such a festival had on the district and the opportunity to put the district on the map.

A Member asked about the number of schools involved and Mr Stokes indicated that over 200 schools were contacted both in the district and across the Council's borders including Leicestershire. Reference was also made to the number of volunteers who helped with both this festival and also the Georgian Festival with staff volunteering their time at no expense to the authority.

The Chairman thanked Mr Stokes for his update.

As it was the last meeting of the Engagement PDG the Chairman thanked all Members for the work that they had done to date.

63. ANY OTHER BUSINESS, WHICH THE CHAIRMAN, BY REASONS OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, DECIDES IS URGENT

The Chief Executive asked Members which was the best way to engage with them, face to face, fact sheet, e-mail etc as Members would need to be briefed on aspects of Devolution outside the formal setting of a Council meeting. Members felt that the best day for an informal briefing would be a full Council day but for the briefing to be short.

The Chief Executive indicated that an Extraordinary meeting of Council may need to be held in relation to Devolution.

64. CLOSE OF MEETING

Meeting closed at 12.18pm.