

MEETING OF THE ENGAGEMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

THURSDAY, 24 MAY 2012 2.30 PM



GROUP MEMBERS PRESENT

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

OFFICERS

Head of People, Projects and Performance – Sue Griffiths
Head of Legal and Democratic Services – Lucy Youles
Benefits Manager, Revenue and Benefits – Lee Sirdifield
Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer – Carol Drury
Democratic Officer – Lucy Bonshor

The Chairman introduced Carol Drury to the Group who was working in a new role as the Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer. She still dealt with equalities and diversity work and supported safeguarding work especially children. She would soon be arranging a meeting with the Chairmen of the PDG's to discuss what works within the PDG system and what doesn't and work flows.

60. COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

None received.

61. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

62. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 1ST FEBRUARY 2012

The action notes of the meeting held on 1st February 2012 were noted. One Member referred to the polling station situation in the All Saints Ward in

Stamford. The Chairman reminded the group that the review of polling districts and polling places had been before Council. The issue of polling stations would be looked at again when the boundary review started.

63. QUESTION WITHOUT DISCUSSION REFERRED FROM COUNCIL 3RD MAY 2012

The Chairman referred to the question without discussion which had been forwarded to the Engagement PDG from the last Council meeting. All the decisions of the Cabinet could be found on the Forward Plan which was published every month and activities that the Cabinet were involved in were reported on the Councils website so information was available widely of the decisions that the Cabinet made and projects that they were involved in. The Chairman asked that a letter be sent to the Councillor informing him of this.

64. COMMUNITY DROP IN SESSIONS - UPDATE

The Head of People, Projects and Performance presented report RCC04 which updated Members on how the first round of Community drop in session went in January 2012. Five sessions were held throughout the district each one attended by a Head of Service. Each event was publicised locally with libraries, doctors surgeries and offices being asked to put up posters. Parish and Town councils were informed as well as District Councillors. The Council's website publicised the events also.

Queries/questions from members of the public were answered where possible or taken back to the relevant officer who could answer the question and the member of the public notified accordingly. Members were circulated with a list of those questions asked and the responses received. Each drop in session was held between 4pm and 7pm and displayed the council's new priorities and projects that would be forthcoming in the district. People who attended the sessions were asked if they found the information helpful and whether or not they were in agreement with the projects proposed. Although the responses to these questions were important to the Council they were perhaps not seen as so important by the general public. Attendance at the sessions was not high but that could have been contributed to the time of year or the time that the sessions were held.

The next planned sessions were to be in conjunction with other community events that were taking place at the same time. Grantham and Stamford sessions were to be held at the same time as the Olympic torch relay was coming through the towns, Grantham was on 28th June and Stamford on 3rd July. The Deepings session on 7th July which was Deeping's carnival day and the Bourne session would be held on Bourne market day on 19th July. It was hoped that by going to where the people would be, better attendance would be recorded. The theme for the sessions would be quality of life, clean, green and

healthy and promoting leisure, arts and culture.

The second strand of communication concerned communicating with the Parish and Town Councils. The first Parish and Town Council newsletter had just been sent out to councils which would be sent quarterly with the aim of keeping parish and town councils better informed and creating a two-way channel of communication between them and the district council.

>Action point:

Members of the District Council to be circulated with a copy of the Parish update newsletter.

It was suggested that publicity for the next drop in sessions should be distributed earlier than the last sessions, as Members felt there was a too short period of notification. The Chairman said that the banner on the front page of the website should be used to tell people when and where the sessions would be taking place. Further discussion followed on the number of people who attended the last session and the costs involved and what areas the clusters referred to in the Parish update covered. Did the Parishes have any input into the clusters? The Head of Legal and Democratic Services said that LALC (Lincolnshire Association of Local Councils) had been consulted. The Head of People, Projects and Performance said that she had to look at the best use of officers time and it was hoped that by going out into the community and being on site whilst other activities were taking place the sessions would be better supported, but she would keep the Group informed.

65. CUSTOMER ACCESS STRATEGY

The Head of People, Projects and Performance, Sue Griffiths informed the Group that the Customer Access Strategy had been before the group before and introduced Lee Sirdifield to the Group who was the Project Manager and had spoken to the Group previously during the mystery shopping phase of the project. She and Lee were attending the meeting to give an update to Members on the projects current position. It was hoped that the strategy would be going to Cabinet for adoption in September.

The presentation covered what is good customer service, 25 Managers of the Council were asked what they saw as good customer service relating to their everyday lives when contacting organisations. Their responses included:

- Having a relationship with the organisation
- Being listened to by someone who seemed to care
- Someone knowing about their case without having to ask again
- Choice of methods – phone or online depending on query
- Promises being kept

- Honesty if cannot answer but “know someone that can”.

Within the organisation ‘Customer First’ was perceived as a ‘given’ however it needed to have support in order to turn the perception into reality in order to support the delivery of the corporate priorities and for services to become efficient. A clear direction of travel for the Council’s customers and employees was needed and the Customer Access Strategy would address this. Mrs Griffiths then discussed the approach taken to date including the research into the current situation with regard to transactions undertaken with the council, what types, customer satisfaction, technology usage and issues. Reference was made to the recent green bin contribution campaign which had resulted in excess of a 43% online saving of nearly 500 hours. This result gave a clear indication that people were willing to carry out certain transactions online which enabled officers to use their time more effectively. She then referred to the new Bourne Community Access Point which would offer the public a different way of accessing the Council’s services in conjunction with other partners such as Lincolnshire County Council. In order to progress with the Strategy there were certain elements and plans to be considered. An operating model needed to be in place with a phased approach being the preferred option. Changes to the culture and support within the organisation were needed together with better communication and ICT enabling technology and there would be financial implications.

The proposed operating model would have the following key points:

- A virtual customer service ‘centre’ to help customers gain a resolution the first time
- Channel migration which would allow choice
- For customers who were computer savvy they would be able to get answers to easy queries electronically this would free up time for officers to deal with vulnerable customers with complex queries who wished to communicate by the telephone or have a face to face conversation
- There would be enhanced internal communication
- A seamless service for the customer even on the most complex query would be offered with the Customer Services Manager looking after the customer standards element and the Head of Service managing the technical and professional element.

The project would be in three phases. A slide was put up which showed Members how each of the three phases worked for the customer, the employee, SKDC and the outcomes to be reached. The first phase dealt with understanding, gathering data being aware of the customer, the second stage was compete, which looked at electronic solutions, answering enquires at first point of contact and the third stage lead looking at introducing additional revenue streams not just responding to the proactive market. Lee Sirdifield then gave examples of customer journeys when contacting the Council for members to see how services would work. The emphasis was to look at the project in a holistic way.

Members discussed the presentation and the work done to date it was agreed that in future all presentations be circulated to Members before the meeting and that the Customer Access Strategy be on the next agenda. A question was asked about having apps for iphones to which Lee Sirdifield replied.

>Action Note

In future Members of the Group to be circulated with presentations before the meeting.

>Action Note:

That the Customer Access Strategy be on the next agenda for the Engagement PDG.

66. MEMBERS CODE OF CONDUCT

Recommendation:

That the Engagement PDG agree with the Standards Committee recommendations to Council to adopt the draft Lincolnshire County Council Members' Code of Conduct to include a paragraph concerning respect.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services presented her report LDS068 which concerned adopting a Members Code of Conduct. Three draft codes were appended to the report and the Standards Committee at their meeting on 18th June had agreed to adopt the draft code from Lincolnshire County Council with the inclusion of a paragraph on respect.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services informed the Group that under the provisions of the Localism Act the new Code had to be adopted by 1st July. However, it was proposed that the Code be adopted at the Council meeting on 12th July which would leave a hiatus of two weeks but she felt that this did not merit a special meeting of the council as the 1st July was not a statutory deadline. Any complaints that came in during that period would be informed that a new scheme would be coming into affect and their complaint would be dealt with after the 12th July.

She informed the Group that regulations on disclosure of pecuniary interests were still awaited, but it was hoped that across the County there would be a continuity of the Code. All the draft Codes appended to the report included the seven principals of good conduct although one aspect was missing, the matter of respect. As most complaints received covered this aspect it was felt that it should be included within any Code adopted. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services then spoke about how the new structure could work with hearings being carried out using Members of the Licensing Committee which was the current practice if it was found that the Code had been breached.

Parishes were not obliged to adopt the District's Code and could adopt their own Code which would differ from the Districts Code. The District Council would be there to provide advice to the Parishes and could deal with an investigation if required, however they had no powers to apply sanctions.

The Chairman raised the issue of Parish Clerks who were often criticised; the Head of Legal and Democratic Services said that the new proposals were clearly aimed at Members rather than clerks. A short discussion followed with the Head of Legal and Democratic Services answering various questions about the new proposals. Members agreed with the recommendations put forward by the Standards Committee with the inclusion of a paragraph on respect.

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

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services informed the Group that it was proposed to bring a work plan to the next meeting of the Group. The plan would include the following issues:

- Other means of engagement
- Communication Strategy
- Feedback process i.e complaints
- Freedom of Information Policy update
- Major projects (Destination South Kesteven)

She said that she had recently received some information on the Community Right to Challenge which would be implemented from 27th June and it maybe that another meeting of the Group would be required before then but she did not have enough detail at the present.

A member asked if Broadband could be put on the agenda. The Head of Legal and Democratic replied that an update could be given; the issue was being looked at by the Communities PDG.

The Chairman referred to an incident that had happened concerning BT and trying to contact them when you were not the account customer for a particular phone line. The Head of Legal and Democratic said it may be related to data protection and although the Democratic Officer had contacted BT she had yet to receive a reply.

Close of meeting 4.07pm.