

# MEETING OF THE ENGAGEMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

FRIDAY, 30 NOVEMBER 2012 10.30 AM



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## GROUP MEMBERS PRESENT

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

## PORTFOLIO HOLDER

**Strategic Resources/Well Run Council** - Councillor Mike Taylor

## OFFICERS

Chief Executive (Beverly Agass)  
Strategic Director Development and Growth (Ian Yates)  
Head of Finance (Richard Wyles)  
Head of People, Projects and Performance (Sue Griffiths)  
Service Manager Customer Services (Hayley Kent Simpson)  
Service Manager Human Resources and Organisational Development (Joyce Slater)  
Consultation and Engagement Officer (Deborah Wyles)  
Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer (Carol Drury)  
Democratic Officer (Lucy Bonshor)

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## 84. COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

No members of the public present.

## 85. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Jock Kerr. Councillor Carpenter the Portfolio Holder for Governance and Communications also sent his apologies. Apologies were also received from Daren Turner and Andy Nix.

## **86. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

None disclosed.

## **87. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 20TH OCTOBER 2012**

The action notes from the meeting held on 20th October were agreed as a correct record of the decisions taken.

## **88. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING**

Updates would be discussed in reports circulated with the agenda.

## **CHANGE OF AGENDA ORDER**

As the Strategic Director, Ian Yates had another meeting to attend the Chairman agreed that the item on Councillors IT Provision would be dealt with first on the agenda.

## **89. COUNCILLORS' IT PROVISION**

Members had been circulated with report HOF214 which informed the group about the ongoing work to review and potentially updated the ICT Provision for Members.

Mr Yates referred to the survey that was circulated to Members in October 2011. The outcome of the survey showed that the main issues for Members were the speed, flexibility and e-mail capabilities of the laptops provided by the Council. On the whole there was no major dissatisfaction with the machines, although portability to meetings was an issue and Councillors did not want to use their personal computers for council work, they preferred to keep the two separate. Various options had been looked at concerning the ICT equipment and these were appended to the report together with the advantages and disadvantages, all had a high cost attached, they covered:

- Providing a single sum allowance for members to purchase their own IT
- Providing a single sum allowance for members to purchase their own IT from a pre-defined list
- Providing all members with an iPad
- Providing all members with new laptop/netbook

As technology was moving at such a pace and because items like iPads were still seen by some as more of a leisure tool rather than a business device the conclusion was to wait until the next round of Member elections and have a major refresh of IT equipment then.

A discussion then followed about the use of iPads, Councillor Mike Taylor the

Portfolio Holder for Strategic Resources, had recently got an iPad and he had found it relatively easy to use and you could still put annotations on documents and bookmark specific places and in the long run it would save money and paper.

A further discussion then followed about speed in relation to connectivity, wireless devices and fibre optics which a lot of the time depended upon where you lived in the district. Work was being carried out by BT and other providers with regard to new fibre optic solutions. Members agreed that any new devices provided should be wireless and although the initial cost would be high this would even out over time and would contribute to having no paper. Members were happy to leave things as they were for the time being and look at issues in the short to medium term.

The Chairman thanked Mr Yates for attending in place of Mr Turner and Mr Nix.

## **INFORMATION ITEM**

*The following item was discussed due to the need to notify Members of the office closing time over the Christmas period.*

The Chief Executive informed the Group of the proposed closing time of the offices over the Christmas period. She said that this year, due to when Christmas fell, the offices would be closed on Christmas Eve. She said that looking at the footfall and telephone calls received last year it was clear that the council's customers did not want to be in the offices unless they had an emergency. She referred to the events that had taken place during the year such as the Olympic Torch and Gravity Fields and the staff who had volunteered to steward these events willing, often until late at night in their own time. As a gesture to staff and the fact that there had not been a pay rise in three years and because Christmas Eve fell on a Monday the decision had been taken to close the offices on Christmas Eve in recognition of the work that staff had done. There would still be an out of hour's service for all the necessary sections and there would still be a skeleton staff in place as always over the Christmas period, (building control, waste, repairs, CCTV). She said that there would be communications planned to inform everyone of the closing times and the out of hours services.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Executive for making the time to attend the meeting.

## **90. UPDATE ON CONSULTATION**

### **Recommendation:**

***The PDG notes the activities to date in respect of consultation and supports the formation of a citizens' panel to further develop the council's processes.***

***The proposed citizen's panel to have the following characteristics:***

- ***A minimum of 500 members but costs to be obtained for up to 1000 members***
- ***Membership to be representative of our local community***
- ***Replenishment of a third of the panel annually (thereby ensuring regular turnover)***
- ***A reserves list holding the personal details of those wishing to join***
- ***Database to include details on how members of the panel prefer to be contacted***
- ***A dedicated area of the website to be made available to promote future topics and provide feedback from consultations already undertaken***
- ***Quotes be obtained from external providers for setting up, maintaining and refreshing a citizens' panel with separate prices for each element thereby allowing us to pick and choose according to our requirements***
- ***The consultations using the citizens' panel to be carried out in house***

Members had been circulated with report RCC06 which gave an update on current consultation activities and also the implementation of a Citizens Panel. It also addressed action points raised at the previous meeting in connection with parish cluster maps, the results of consultation undertaken with parish councils and the number of enquires that had been received by the respective heads of service responsible for each parish cluster. The main part of the report dealt with the formation of a Citizens Panel.

Sue Griffiths the Head of People, Projects and Performance said that there were a number of parishes who had yet to respond to a letter sent to them in August asking them to identify areas of concern for their local area. A list of those who had responded and their concerns had been appended to the report for Members information. A hard copy and an electronic copy of the cluster map showing which parish came under which area had been circulated and a further appendix attached to the report detailed the number and nature of enquires received by cluster heads from Parish Councils both of which had been asked for at the last meeting of the PDG.

She then spoke about the implementation of a Citizens Panel which was a large demographically representative group of citizens who had agreed to

participate in consultation activities. They were used by local councils to consult on major issues that affected the area and provided regular and accessible feedback on the attitudes and perceptions of local people. Citizens Panel's had been around for about 10 years and one of the advantages of having a Citizens Panel was that overtime they became an informed group who kept up to date with the work of the council and therefore were ideal to consult with.

The report detailed how the panels were established, the number of Members, the communication methods used, frequency of consultations, costs and feedback and provision of relevant information to the panel. North Kesteven had a panel in place and felt that the investment was worthwhile as Councils had difficult choices to make and having an informed panel to help contribute to those decisions helped. It was proposed to use an external company to set up the Panel but the Panel would be run internally by the Communications Section who had a wealth of knowledge and experience in connection with surveys, questionnaires and consultation processes. There would be the initial investment costs with smaller costs in the future to refresh the panel.

A discussion followed with Members putting forward suggestions and comments about the number of consultations, the method of consultation, written, electronic, telephone or face to face. Mrs Wyles said that when the consultee agreed to be part of the Panel they would stipulate how they wished to be contacted. A question was asked about the costs involved and whether or not these had been budgeted for. The Head of Finance, Mr Wyles replied that if the issue was supported by the PDG then there was money available from underspends that could be used to get the project underway. A further question was asked about why an external company would be used. Mrs Griffiths replied that they had the expertise on how to recruit the right people for the job. The Panel would complement the existing consultation processes and help broaden it, it would improve the way in which we consult with our residents and give a much more representative view.

Further comments were then made about costs and the refresh period to which Mrs Griffiths replied following which it was agreed to support the proposal for a Citizens Panel.

## **91. CUSTOMER FEEDBACK**

The Head of People, Projects and Performance, Sue Griffiths referred to the previous presentations given on Customer feedback and what people saw as good customer service and how this can be applied. She worked closed with Hayley Kent Simpson who was the Service Manager for Customer Services to see how people interacted with the council and what experience they had, whether good or bad.

Mrs Griffiths was the customer champion and dedicated at least one day a week to looking at improving the current service working closely with the

Customer Services, Service Manager. She worked closely with other services also feeding into Management Team on a monthly basis. Results were already being seen but customer service was not consistent across the Council, there was no detailed guidance or culture of how to deal with customer feedback. Although complaints were always logged this was not the case with compliments and the performance management software used was not fully understood by all those who used it. Also complaints which were cross services were not owned by a particular person.

In order to address these issues feedback was now looked at in detail on a weekly basis. Issues were fed to the relevant managers both complaints and compliments. Meetings were held with teams to understand what they did currently and how they could improve. Research had been undertaken with other authorities to see what their best practice was. Training had been commissioned for all staff to show what good customer service was. A letter template had been made with careful wording to acknowledge how the customer feels which could be accessed on the intranet and a focus group set up.

The processes now in place ensured that complaints were handled more swiftly, letters were produced which were less likely to escalate the complaint. Services were clearer about what was a complaint; not just that someone does not like a decision that has been made following the proper process for example at a Development Control Committee. The Performance data software was better populated so that lessons could be learnt. Compliments were captured and customers thanked for them.

The information was used to inform changes needed, training would be continued to be given as required and an annual review would take place. Mrs Griffiths would continue in her role as customer champion so that more complex complaints could be dealt with corporately and the complaints and compliments would be used to give feedback to staff as part of the new behavioural framework that was being put in place.

A discussion followed with Members commenting about only reporting something one time without having to repeat it. Unfortunately the software systems currently in place could not “speak” to each other although this was being looked into. The telephony system was also being looked at as there were limitations to this system also. A Member asked about having customer survey cards and Mrs Griffiths replied that these had been used in the past. Further discussion followed about having a “history” for people so that as soon as they gave their name all the information would appear on the screen. Again Mrs Griffiths replied that the current technology was not integrated to allow for this to happen but it was being looked into. The Service Manager Customer Services did inform the Group that there was a national initiative whereby births and deaths were notified within agencies therefore the information only had to be given once and it was shared between several government bodies. Reference was then made to changes to Parish Clerks, unfortunately, even if a

change is given within the authority not all lists are updated. Carol Drury replied that a definitive list was held by Legal and Democratic Services and it should be this list that was used and changes notified accordingly.

**>Action Note**

***Remind all Services to use the Parish Council list held by Legal and Democratic Services and that all changes should be notified to Legal and Democratic Services.***

The Chairman thanked Sue Griffiths and Haley Kent Simpson for attending the meeting and looked forward to an update in the future.

**92. BOURNE COMMUNITY ACCESS POINT - UPDATE**

The Head of Finance, Richard Wyles updated Members on the Bourne Community Access Point (CAP) which was a key project for the Council and would deliver a number of priority outcomes. Cabinet had approved the project in November 2011 and work on site had begun in April 2012. The formal opening of the CAP was due to take place on 6th March 2013. The CAP would bring multiple services together under one roof and would make use of a building that was underutilized. The project had developed since the original concept and a number of added benefits would be delivered such as:

- Customers would have direct access to all council services including the opportunity for face to face appointments with officers
- There would be a choice of self service and free internet access
- Customers would be able to access a wider range of County services including the library service, Registrars and Social Services
- Customers would be able to visit the Town Council
- There would be an increase in opening hours including late evenings and Saturday mornings
- Teams would be able to utilize the extended floor space to create a focussed service for the south of the district which in turn would create additional space at Grantham for alternative uses.
- New public toilets would be provided these would be operated by the Bourne Town Council

There would be enhanced partnership working between Lincolnshire County Council, Bourne Town Council and the NHS and the CAP would be the first of it's kind in the County. It had preserved key County services in the town such as the library service and the registrars. The funding model that had been developed would also deliver revenue savings for both Councils.

The function hall would be improved with new decor and better toilet facilities. Costs had increased due to the age of the building and the need to update mechanical and electrical applications, the fire alarm and underpinning works. However, all partners had shared the responsibility of the extra funding

required. Mr Wyles then spoke about the lease arrangements for the town hall and the running costs of the CAP.

The CAP would make a significant improvement to the customer's experience; it was a blueprint for the future with agile working space and office accommodation, enhanced opening hours and revenue savings going forward. He then showed Members a mock up picture of what the outside of the facility would look like and referred to the car parking and the possible introduction of an order to regulate the usage of the car park. He indicated to Members that if they wished to hold a site visit nearer to the completion time that could be arranged.

A short discussion then followed with Members congratulating Mr Wyles on a worthwhile project. Questions were asked about the final costs and IT issues to which Mr Wyles replied. The Vice-Chairman referred to the possibility of the police being involved, to which Mr Wyles replied that although they had been approached they were happy with their current facilities at the present time.

The Chairman thanked Mr Wyles for attending the meeting and updating Members on the project.

### **93. COUNCILLOR TRAINING PROGRAMME**

The Service Manager, Human Resources and Organisational Development (HR & OD), Joyce Slater, gave a presentation to Members on the Member Development programme. Due to the number of new Councillors expected at the last elections the programme had been front loaded for the first year as there was a lot of information that new councillors needed to know in order to carry out their duties. The programme had been a collaborative one across Lincolnshire. Two suites of programmes had been arranged and she detailed the contents of the programmes with the total training delivered being 426 days equivalent to over 7 days per councillor. Mrs Slater then referred to post induction training. A tiered approach was being put in place which covered the following;

- Level 1 – core training for all members
- Level 2 – committee based specialist training (Scrutiny, Development Control, Licensing, Governance and Audit, Constitution)
- Level 3 – PDG based training (specific updates, briefings as and when required)
- Level 4 – Chair/Vice Chair of Committee/PDG
- Level 5 – Cabinet (topical updates, leadership development, partnership working)

Unfortunately there was no funding stream available therefore training would be done either in house or through collaborative working with Lincolnshire Authorities.

A discussion followed with Members asking about the costs and why all Members had to attend core training even if they had attended in the past. Mrs Slater replied that information changed and assumptions could not be made about what Councillors knew of didn't know. Also by having both new and old Members together information and knowledge could be shared. The District had changed dramatically and with changes being made following the Localism Act a refresh on topics such as the Code of Conduct was necessary. A question was asked about inviting Parishes to training on Code of Conduct to which Mrs Slater replied that she would explore this with Lucy Youles as the budget provision for training was for district only.

**> Action Note**

- 1. Joyce Slater to ask Lucy Youles about training for Parishes on the Code of Conduct. Also;**
- 2. To produce a list of courses available to members, itemising the core elements.**
- 3. To compile a schedule of the courses attended by members since being elected and;**
- 4. To ask members to notify her or the courses they would wish to attend particularly in respect of substitutions.**

***The Chairman thanked Mrs Slater for attending the meeting.***

**94. WORK PROGRAMME**

Before Ms Drury presented the work programme Councillor Robbins informed the Group that he had spoken to the Chief Executive about the issue of dog fouling and the problems encountered by Parishes and PCSO's. He had looked at a company that gave a cost neutral response to dog fouling, issuing on the spot fines and perhaps this was something that the Group could look at. Dog fouling did not come under the remit of the Engagement PDG and therefore Ms Drury said that she would take it to the PDG Co-ordinating Group which was meeting the following week.

**➤ Action Note**

***To refer the Dog Fouling issue to the Strategic Director for further investigation.***

Ms Drury then referred to the work programme which had been circulated with the agenda. The programme now showed both the past and the future issues that the Group had or will be looking at and the recommendations made to Cabinet/Council. Discussions could be tracked and could give a robust overview of what the PDG had achieved during the year. She referred to both the Communities PDG and the Engagement PDG and issues which overlapped

these two PDG's, the Resources PDG was more structured and was framed around the budget.

She asked Members if they felt that a workshop would be valuable to discuss issues that the PDG could look at.

Councillor Bisnauthsing referred to the Stamford museum building and its possible use. As there was some confusion over which PDG remit this came under Carol Drury said that she would investigate, although it was possible that the non use of the asset could be an issue for the Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairman thanked the members for their input and as this was the last meeting before Christmas, wished all present a Happy Christmas and a Happy New Year.

## **95. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 1.20pm.