

MEETING OF THE ENGAGEMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

FRIDAY, 18 JANUARY 2013 10.30 AM



GROUP MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Bob Adams (Chairman)
Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing
Councillor Ibis Channell
Councillor Jock Kerr
Councillor Mrs Jean Taylor
Councillor Rosemary H Woolley (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Raymond Wootten

PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Strategic Resources/Well Run Council – Councillor Mike Taylor

OFFICERS

Chief Executive (Beverly Agass)
Service Manager Human Resources and Organisational Development (Joyce Slater)
Service Manager Reputation, Communication & Consultation (Geoff O'Neill)
Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer (Carol Drury)
Democratic Officer (Lucy Bonshor)

96. COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

No members of the public present.

97. MEMBERSHIP

Councillor Jean Taylor substituted for Councillor Ray Auger and Councillor Ray Wootten substituted for Councillor Nick Robbins for this meeting only.

98. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

None disclosed.

99. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 30TH NOVEMBER 2012

The notes from the meeting held on 30th November were agreed as a correct record of the decisions taken.

100. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

The Group were informed that the dog fouling issue was being looked into by the Environmental Health Team and an update would be given at a future meeting.

A Member referred to the ICT provision which was discussed at the last meeting. The Chief Executive said that the paper had been brought to the PDG as a mid-term information paper which highlighted issues that the IT team were looking at with regard to technology and to get Member feedback on their usage of their laptops. Work was still being done on the pros and cons, especially as technology moved on daily, however, the role out of any new equipment would not be until after the elections in 2015.

A further question was asked about whether the early closure of the offices at Christmas had any effects. The Chief Executive replied that she had not been made aware of anything and although the offices were closed, certain sections were still on call to reply to urgent requests.

101. UPDATE ON MEMBER TRAINING

Members had been circulated with report HR&OD115 from the Service Manager Human Resources and Organisational Development (HR&OD), Mrs Joyce Slater, which addressed issues raised by Members at the last meeting of the Group.

- *Training for Parish Councils on the Code of Conduct*
There was no single code for Parish Councils with each Parish adopting a code to suit their needs (National Association of Local Councils [NALC] SKDC, or variations on these codes) The variety of codes adopted would make any generic training unsuitable. However, the District Council was willing to support the Parishes where they could, but it was difficult to understand the scale of demand, especially as not all Parishes had informed the Council what Code they had adopted.

- *A list of those Members who had attended training since election*
Appendix 1 to the report circulated showed a list of how many Members attended particular training. Some training was better supported than others due to other commitments that Members had. Where a Member had not attended training which was required, such as quasi judicial training one to one training was arranged.

- *A list of training available to Members, itemising core elements*
Appendix 2 to the report showed the core training elements in line with the Constitution together other suggested training Members would find useful. A County wide initiative had been put in place for Members to attend training at other locations; however, the geography of these locations could have influenced attendance.
- *Notification of Training*
It had been hoped that further county wide training would be available but this had not been the case so the Council was taking its own approach to further training identifying where more training was needed. Mrs Slater referred to a link on the Local Government Association website:

http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=0847a1ac-3eb6-43ad-ab1a-858b28e31cc4&groupId=10171

which was a self assessment toolkit that Members could assess. This would help Members feedback any further training needs they had.

A discussion then followed about Member training with questions being asked about compulsory training for experienced Councillors and the three Councillors who had not attended training: were they experienced Members? Mrs Slater replied that the three were experienced Members. The Constitution required new Members to attend core training and from the feedback received, new Members had found it beneficial to hear the contributions made by the experienced Members, the sharing of information and experiences. Also those Members who had been re-elected had found it a refresher for their knowledge base. One Member said that rather than put training on and have poor attendance and associated costs, wait until Members ask to have help with topics. Mrs Slater replied that often the costs involved were officer time as the majority of the core training had been done in house, it was only the specialist training for the quasi judicial committees that external trainers had been used. As it had been unknown as to the number of new Members the training programme had been put together in order to give a complete overview of the information that the Member would need in order to carry out their duties. Further discussion followed with reference being made to the need to have maps of the offices indicating where people can be found, perhaps having a "buddy" and information for prospective candidates to be more widely available before the election.

Further training had been asked for by Members of the Development Control Committee and would include biodiversity and noise in relation to wind farms. It was stressed that training opportunities should be available to every Member particularly those that acted as substitutes on Committees such as Development Control and Licensing.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Slater for attending.

102. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

The Reputation, Communication & Consultation Service Manager, Mr Geoff O'Neill gave a presentation to the Group on the draft Communications Strategy which had been circulated with the agenda. The draft document had been compiled using a very broad brush and it needed comments from Members and the Management Team. The document was for councillors, partners and staff to ensure that everyone knew how to communicate openly and clearly, that people knew what we were doing and why we were doing it. Mr O'Neill then spoke about the massive changes that had taken place within the communication industry with the introduction of the internet and social media such as Twitter and Facebook growing daily. The new strategy would acknowledge this role and how it can be used to influence people. He referred to the Gravity Fields Festival and how the use of Twitter had generated publicity for the event widely making it the most talked about science festival. The use of social media had the potential to have a massive impact on major projects such as Grantham Growth and Destination SK and the beauty of it was that it was free. Mr O'Neill then referred to the short films that had been made showing the Olympic Torch run through the District and the Gravity Fields Festival. The films had been played at the Grantham Arts Centre and the Stamford Arts Centre and sports centres in the District which enabled people who were there to re live their experiences but also gave those who had not attended an insight into what had gone on. The popularity of the films had meant that people had bought copies with the proceeds going towards the Mayors charities. The Heritage Lottery had been approached with regard to funding for the Gravity Fields Festival but had been turned down, since the festival had taken place and the film made a further bid had been put in for 2014 and this was being considered which showed the impact pictures and films had.

He then spoke about the local newspapers within the district and the changes that they had made which now included more use of their websites to inform the public of breaking news stories. The use of newspapers as a communication tool used to be a strong one; however, with the introduction of the internet and social media it was now a dwindling communication tool and this was something that the communications strategy was taking into account. Newspapers tended to be looked at by older generations with younger generations listening to the radio or using the social media network and all these factors were being taken into account in the communications strategy.

The use of hoardings was also another good way of communicating with a large number of people. He then referred to the Parish Newsletter, SK Today and Skyline which were all documents sent out by the Council to communicate with various sectors of the district. All the documents now went through the Communication Team so that they fall within the corporate branding.

Mr O'Neill then briefly spoke about discussions that were being undertaken with a company who wish to advertise in our car parks and leisure centres. The company would deal with all the set up costs but the Council would receive 50 % of the revenue from the advertising. However, talks were still at an early stage and an audit of the sites concerned still had to be carried out.

Internally two newsletters were sent out weekly by e-mail, one to Members and one to staff; depending on the feedback received it was proposed that the two newsletters be merged to one document as often parts of the newsletters were duplicated. Some of the Members present indicated that they never read the document as they found it had too much content.

Reference was then made to the website and the need to make it more user friendly, it was a window to the Council and teams needed to be more responsible for keeping their pages up to date. Although some payments could be made on line it needed to be developed which would be a massive project.

One Member then referred to the list of Parish Council Members shown and that it was not up to date. Ms Drury said that she would look into the issue.

Mr O'Neill then referred to the culture within the Council and the work being undertaken to improve communications, supporting staff in writing letters and answering the telephone and newsletters going through the Communication team to ensure branding was consistently applied. He referred to the advertising account which had been integrated across the Council to the Communication Team which enabled the maximum discount for adverts to be applied and would make a saving in the region of £20,000.

A question was asked about what the revenue to the Council would be on the use of car parks for advertising. Mr O'Neill replied that at the current time he could not say as discussions were still in progress and an audit had not yet been completed.

A discussion followed about SK Today, its distribution, content and how many times it was produced a year (quarterly). A comment was made that a lot of people seemed to throw it away as junk mail, would it be better to target households to save cost. Mr O'Neill replied that it would cost more for the distributors to target households rather than blanket deliver to the whole district.

The Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer referred to the Community Focus Forum who represented groups across the district and were used as a conduit to feed in to policies and procedures of the Council. They had been very complimentary about SK Today and for those vulnerable people who were rurally isolated and lacked good quality broadband it was their lifeline as to what was going on in the Council.

The Chairman thanked Mr O'Neill for attending the meeting and the Chief Executive also thanked him for his input with the Communication Team since

joining the Council and the cohesive approach being taken.

103. ISSUE REFERRED FROM THE POLICY DEVELOPMENT CO-ORDINATION GROUP

Members briefly discussed the motion that had been referred to the PDG and what they wished to do with it. The Chairman asked for the views of the Group. Some Members agreed with the motion referring to Nottinghamshire County Councils return to a committee system whilst others preferred the current governance arrangements. The Chairman said that more research and information was needed for the Group to discuss the subject more fully. Although no resource had been allocated to look at the issue the PDG could incorporate it into its work plan. The issue was one where all parties should have the opportunity to put their views forward and therefore it was suggested that a joint PDG working group look at the issue to include both the Communities and Resources PDG.

Members were given the opportunity to input whether they were for or against the issue.

One Member said that maybe this was something that the people of South Kesteven should have a say in. The Leader and Cabinet model that had been adopted at Council relatively recently had been consulted on with the public via SK Today and the website although the feedback could have been better.

It was indicated that any new committee system would not be the same as the previous system with everything having to be ratified by the Council; anomalies within that system would need to be addressed. It was agreed that more investigation into the process was required.

>Action Note

Investigation into the Committee system process and research was required before further work could be undertaken by the Group.

104. WORK PROGRAMME

Members noted the work programme.

105. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 12.06pm.