

## Annual Review 2012/13: Engagement Policy Development Group

1.1 Members of the Engagement PDG met a total of six times during the municipal year 2012/13. During these meetings fourteen substantive items were considered:

Means of Engagement – Local Forums and Community Drop In	Means of Engagement – communication with Parish and Town Councils	Question without Discussion referred by Council: Leader’s Activity Report
Means of Engagement – Customer Access Strategy	<b>Members Code of Conduct</b>	Bourne Community Access Point
Community Focus Forum	Means of Engagement – Citizens Panels	Customer Feedback
Protection of Freedoms Act	ICT Provision for Members	Communications Strategy
Councillor Training Programme	Review of Governance Arrangements	Tenant Involvement

- 1.2 The question without discussion on a Leader’s activity report put to Council on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2012 was referred to the Engagement PDG for response. This was given in the form of a letter to the elected member who put the question.
- 1.3 The items considered by Engagement PDG during this year have, for the most part, been in the form of reports and presentations for information and not requiring recommendations to be put forward. The only recommendation made to Cabinet in 2012/13 related to the Members’ Code of Conduct as shown in bold in the table above.
- 1.4 Engagement PDG has worked closely with the Head of People, Projects and Performance on a wide range of actions relating to improving and increasing the Council’s means of engagement with its customers and staff.
- 1.5 Members have been particularly keen to ensure effective communication channels exist between the district council and the parish and town councils across South Kesteven and requested that they be circulated with copies of the newly developed Parish and Town Council Newsletter.
- 1.6 Regular updates have been provided by the Head of Finance on the refurbishment of Bourne Corn Exchange and its development into the South Kesteven Community Access Point.
- 1.7 Members received a presentation on the Community Focus Forum – the Council’s consultation and network group in July 2012. This group was established to help fulfil the Council’s commitment to equality and diversity. The Chairman has regularly attended meetings of the Community Focus Forum and as a result of the information given in the presentation an additional member of the PDG has begun attending.

- 1.8 The Policy Development Coordinating Group was asked to consider a question requesting a review of Governance arrangements. The Group determined that Engagement PDG was the most appropriate to carry out this review. This item is ongoing.

## **2. Conclusion**

- 2.1 It has been a productive year for the three Policy Development Groups. Collectively the PDGs have considered forty-three substantive items, made thirty-two recommendations to Cabinet and helped to develop seventeen policies, strategies and schemes for the Authority.
- 2.2 The work programme for Engagement PDG has primarily focused on items relating to means of engagement helping to ensure that communication channels both externally and internally are effective.
- 2.2 Ensuring that reports and presentations were prepared and distributed within the agenda management timetable Members consistently had the appropriate information to allow for informed deliberation and subsequent recommendations to officers and Cabinet.
- 2.3 The production and distribution of the work programme within agenda packs further assists in the Council's accountability and transparency in the development of policy. Improved systems for following up action points have ensured that members of the PDG are fully aware of milestones and achievements throughout the process of policy development.
- 2.4 It is interesting to note that for the first time since 2010 no meeting of the Engagement PDG has had to be cancelled due to lack of items.

## **3. Moving Forward**

- 3.1 Cross-over between Policy Development Groups should be encouraged if we are to work effectively in the future. A joined-up approach to the development of policies and procedures has the potential to involve greater numbers of elected members in a policy's path from proposal through to recommendation and ultimately decision making. This approach has been shown to be effective this year with both Resources PDG and Communities PDG working on the development and implementation of the Car Parking Strategy. This approach could be further enhanced through the use of joint (cross-PDG) working groups so that the different components of policy development could be addressed simultaneously or items that have council-wide implications, such as the governance review, can be robustly and equitably debated.