

MEETING OF THE ENGAGEMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

THURSDAY, 6 JUNE 2013 10.30 AM



GROUP MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing
Councillor Ibis Channell
Councillor Michael Cook (Chairman)

Councillor Jock Kerr
Councillor Nick Robins

OFFICERS

Service Manager Human Resources and
Organisational Development (Joyce
Slater)
Community Engagement and Policy
Development Officer (Carol Drury)

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Mrs Linda Neal (Leader)

As this was the first meeting of the Group that the Chairman had chaired he welcomed everyone and said that he expected all Members to read the paperwork that they were sent for each meeting in order that they could make relevant and informed comments and that he would have no political "grandstanding".

1. COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

None received.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ray Auger and Councillor Rosemary Woolley.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

None disclosed.

4. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 21ST MARCH 2013

The action notes from the meeting held on 21st March 2013 were agreed as a correct record of the decisions taken.

5. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

Reference was made to the dog fouling issue that had been raised at the last meeting, one Member wished to know what the current position was. Councillor Robins briefly updated the Group and a short discussion then followed about how dog fouling was currently dealt with and whose responsibility it was. It was suggested that the Communities PDG was asked when they would be looking at the issue.

➤ **Action Note**

Check the Communities PDG's working programme for Dog Fouling

The Member then referred to tenant scrutiny and tenant involvement and the current tenant compacts and asked about how the selection process had been carried out. Ms Drury replied that she would invite Mr Richardson and Mr Hutchinson to attend the next meeting to explain the process.

➤ **Action Note**

Invite Mr Richardson (Head of Housing and Neighbourhoods) and Mr Hutchinson (Team Leader Resident Involvement) to the next meeting of the PDG.

6. QUESTION WITHOUT DISCUSSION REFERRED FROM COUNCIL 18TH APRIL 2013

Councillor Mrs Neal had been invited to the PDG following the question referred from Council in April from Councillor Selby. Councillor Selby had also been invited to attend, but was not present. Councillor Mrs Neal informed the group that to date the District Council had not spoken about having a statue of Margaret Thatcher, certainly not whilst she was alive. If a referendum was to be held for the borough of Grantham the money would have to come from the Grantham Special Expense Area (SEA) fund and no money was available. A referendum for the whole of the district would cost approximately £100,000 in these current financial times, was this a necessary expense?

A discussion followed with Members putting their personal views forward:

- What Baroness Thatcher achieved was history
- She had stated that she did not want a statue erected in Grantham

- during her lifetime
- A statue and a memorial were entirely different
- It was not for the public to decide

Reference was then made to having a poll for Grantham, Councillor Mrs Neal reiterated that a poll would require the same work as a referendum and there was no money available in the SEA to pay for a poll.

She informed the group that for a number of year's proposals had been discussed in the event of Baroness Thatcher's passing but it was an issue with a sensitive nature. Thought had been given to perhaps the addition of a water feature of some kind in Abbey Gardens not an interactive feature, more the flow of water within the area in recognition that Baroness Thatcher was a daughter of Grantham, who became the country's first women prime minister. However, this was a sensitive matter and permission would have to be sought from the family and a period of mourning had to be respected. It was agreed that a letter be drafted with the Chairman and Cllr Mrs Neal and forwarded to Councillor Selby informing him of the costs of a referendum and that the matter had been discussed by the PDG.

➤ **Action Note**

A letter to be sent to Councillor Selby.

7. MEMBER TRAINING UPDATE

Members had been circulated with a table which detailed the training that Members had undertaken in respect of the quasi judicial Committees (Development Control Committee, Licensing Committee and Governance and Audit Committee) since 2011. The Service Manager Human Resources and Organisational Development (HR & OD) Mrs Joyce Slater, referred to one Member who had undertaken some Development Control training but was not ticked on the sheet. It was recognised that not all Members could attend the first set of training in May 2001 and one to one training with officers had been set up for those Members who could not attend that training session..

Recent training had been undertaken with the Development Control Committee (DCC) as the landscape of development control was changing quickly and Members needed to be kept on up to date with changes on guidance and legislation.

One Member referred to substitutes and the need for them to have training before they can sit on DCC as often external trainers were used and they were expensive, only DCC Members attended. Mrs Slater assured Members that if either of the DCC training had been undertaken in May or June 2011 then that Member could sit as a substitute on the Development Control Committee. However, those Members who had had training prior to 2011 needed to attend more recent training as planning guidance and legislation had changed since

2006.

Mrs Slater then spoke about the need for training on individual topics for Planning Members and how these could be delivered in a flexible way whether in small groups or on a one to one basis by in house officers or external specialists. Pat Reid, the Service Manager for Development Management Services had recently held training/workshops before a DCC.

A short discussion then followed about what was core training and what was mandatory training.

In the past funding for county wide training had been accessed from LEAP as part of East Midlands Councils. It was hoped that a similar county wide training programme would emerge but to date this had not happened.

Further discussion followed about being a substitute member on planning and the training required. A question was asked about Parish/Town Councils being able to attend training put on by the District to help with costs. Mrs Slater replied that there may be a conflict of interest and she would have to get clarification from the Monitoring Officer.

➤ **Action Note**

Clarification required from the Monitoring Officer as to whether Parish/Town Council's could be invited to attend District Council training on planning matters. Would this present a conflict of interest.

The majority of training that was required was in relation to the quasi judicial committees such as DCC and Licensing due to changes in legislation. Changes in financial legislation affected the Governance and Audit Committee and it was clear within the Constitution what training substitutes required to attend this committee.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Slater for attending the meeting.

8. REVIEW OF GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

The Chairman hoped that all Members had read the documents that had been circulated especially the Musical Chairs¹ publication. As this was the first meeting that he had chaired his initial thought was for a small working group to be set up to work through the scoping exercise and report their findings back to the PDG at alternative meetings. From looking at the issues numbered on the scoping checklist he thought that some of the issues should be in a different order and proposed that item 4 should become item 2 and item 5 should become item 3, he was looking for volunteers for the Working Group. Both Councillor Robins and Councillor Bisnauthsing volunteered; Councillor Cook was volunteered as the third member of the Group.

A discussion then followed with views being expressed about representation of the electorate by Ward Members.

The question was asked that if a committee system was reintroduced would Members feel more informed and representative of their electorate if they only sat on one committee and made decisions on that committee. If a new committee system was introduced it would not be like the old system where the minutes of the meetings would all go to Council for ratification. A committee would be delegated with decision making powers and the decision would stay with them.

Further discussion followed on member involvement. The work that Ward Members did 'on the ground' was vital as it helped the electorate's voices be heard when shaping policies and strategies, making a decision was not the same as representing the people. It was suggested that the opportunities were there for Members to be involved as much or as little as they wished to be, just attending meetings did not make them 'good councillors' there was no set formula which made a Member a fantastic Ward councillor they were there to assist and support their electorate wherever they could and it was a poor councillor who did little ward work.

It was agreed that items 1, 4 and 5 on the scoping sheet be looked at first by the Working Group and possibly 10. A date and time would be arranged and Members notified accordingly.

➤ **Action Note**

Items 1, 4, 5 and possibly 10 of the scoping checklist to be looked at by the Working Group at their first meeting. Councillors Bisnauthsing, Cook and Robins to be notified of the date, time and place of the first meeting.

9. WORK PROGRAMME

Ms Drury (Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer) gave a verbal overview of what the PDG had looked at over the year; a hard copy had been circulated with the agenda which showed the issues discussed and the recommendations made. Although the Engagement PDG had only made one recommendation it had looked at various policies, strategies and schemes and had made recommendations to Officers to help shape those documents. Between all three PDG's there had been 43 substantive items and 32 recommendations made. In order to help Members make informed decisions reports and presentations had been circulated to Members with the agenda packs wherever possible.

She referred to the recent Cabinet and PDG Liaison Group which had looked at a draft list of items to come forward to the PDG. One Member asked about the

ICT provision for Members and Ms Drury replied that the ICT Strategy was perhaps an issue to look at collectively between the Resources and the Engagement PDGs.

Reference was made to Customer Feedback and Ms Drury informed the Group that this issue was coming back to the next meeting. Councillor Robins referred to the tour that he had previously taken around the CSC and comments that had been made; he wondered if any of these had been implemented, would it be possible to take a further tour. Councillor Bisnauthsing asked if he could also have a tour. Ms Drury said that she would get Kirsty Callacher from the CSC to contact both Councillors.

10. TIME MEETING CLOSED

The meeting closed at 12.10am.

ⁱ Centre for Public Scrutiny document published April 2013