

MEETING OF THE ENGAGEMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

THURSDAY, 19 SEPTEMBER 2013 2.30 PM



GROUP MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Ray Auger
Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing
Councillor Ibis Channell
Councillor Michael Cook (Chairman)
Councillor Vic Kerr
Councillor Nick Robins
Councillor Rosemary H Woolley (Vice-Chairman)

OFFICERS

Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer (Carol Drury)
Democratic Officer (Lucy Bonshor)

20. MEMBERSHIP

The Group were notified that Councillor Vic Kerr was substituting for Councillor Jock Kerr for this meeting only.

21. APOLOGIES

Councillor Channell apologised for being late.

22. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

None disclosed.

23. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 18TH JULY 2013

The action notes from the meeting held on 18th July were agreed as a correct record.

24. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

Training for Town and Parish Councillors

The Community Engagement & Policy Development Officer, Carol Drury informed the group that she had spoken to the Development Management Service Manager, Pat Reid and the Planning Policy and Partnerships Service Manager; Karen Sinclair concerning the question of training for Town and Parish Councillors. Mr Reid and Ms Sinclair had already had a request for guidance from Bourne Town Council on the role of Parish and Town Councillors and a pilot session was to be held on the 1st October at Bourne Corn Exchange. This session was specifically for the south west cluster of parishes and depending upon the outcome of the session further sessions would be arranged for the Parish Clusters.

A short discussion then followed about other parishes attending from Stamford Town Council however, it was felt that Stamford and the relevant parishes within that cluster should have their own session depending upon the outcome of the Bourne session.

The majority of the Group felt that it would be a good idea that all cluster who were interested should be offered a session.

25. FIRST CONTACT

The Chairman welcomed Jane Thomas from Age UK who gave a presentation to the Group about First Contact.

Ms Thomas gave a brief background to the Group.

- First Contact was first introduced in 2008.
- It gave over 60's access to services.
- It was a single gateway to free information and advice.
- The completion of one form did it all.
- Both public and voluntary services were involved.
- The form contained 13 checklist questions

She then gave examples of when First Contact could be used; the key was to get the leaflets out to people, the form could also be accessed online.

Within 24hrs of someone completing a form they would receive a letter confirming which services would be contacting them, the Service Level Agreements in place with those partners required them to contact people within 28 days, this may be sooner, it depended upon the resources available in the County at the time. Although the information and advice were free the use of some of the services was chargeable and outcomes would vary per person as would eligibility.

Since the launch over 8,000 people had used the service and over 24,000 referrals had been made to partner agencies.

Ms Thomas then spoke about getting the information out to people and informed the group about training that had been done, including training Boots Pharmacy staff to get the message about First Contact out to the relevant people. Any help that Members could give her in order for her to talk to groups of people would be welcome, whether it was a coffee morning or a Parish Council meeting. A meet in the street and street talking had been held in South Holland and this had been very successful and she was hoping to do the same in South Kesteven. She was also set to attend a GP surgery in the Deepings shortly and also hoped to attend flu clinics. She referred to the launches already carried out in South Kesteven and the future events planned, any help that Members could give or contacts would be greatly received in getting the message out to the community.

For Members information a breakdown had been done of the number of people who used the service within each of their wards and this was circulated.

Other partners would soon be coming on board such as the Environment Agency and more training and education would be undertaken.

A discussion followed with Members asking for copies of forms (circulated to all Members) and Ms Thomas's contact details and offering possible channels where she could get the message about First Contact out to the wider community, including adverts in some parish magazines.

One Member did ask how First Contact was different to the CVS and also how they were funded and whether they were paid by results to which Ms Thomas replied that they had targets as part of Age UK but Service Level Agreements were in place with partners and public health in order that the right level of checks were carried out and the partners achieved capacity. Public Health held the contract for First Contact which was funded by the NHS. Age UK hosted the front facing part of the service whilst Lincolnshire County Council hosted the back facing part of the service.

The Chairman thanked Ms Thomas for attending the meeting.

26. GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

Two Members of the Working Group began the discussion by giving their personal view of what they thought should happen with regard to the Cabinet verses Committee systems. One Member felt that after speaking to various people there was not a problem with the current system perse it was just that Members had a feeling of non ownership, that they weren't making decisions, only seven people made those decisions. He felt that the Cabinet should have a shake up and be more transparent and fair. If a committee structure was

followed each should be quasi judicial, able to make their own decisions. The second Member felt that by changing to a Committee system Members would feel more involved in decision making and although this may be costly in the short term in the long run there would be savings, Members he felt would feel more involved in a committee system based on the old system. As the Cabinet was made up of one party he felt that other party's views were ignored.

The Chairman informed the group that any committee system would have to be a new system and could not be based on the old committee system. PDG's did not make decisions they were Policy Development Groups and made recommendations to Cabinet. He then spoke about information that he had received from the Local Government Association LGA concerning governance.

- Committees were autocratic
- A determination had to be made on the number of committees required
- The committees would have to be sub judicial in order to make their own decisions
- The councillors on each committee would all be accountable for the decisions made.
- If the Council was sued following a decision made, councillors maybe liable for the financial penalty
- All decisions would have to go to Council and therefore a meeting of all chairmen of committees would have to be held before a council meeting
- Chairmen of committees tended to be members of the ruling party

Using a version similar to the old committee system of governance:

- Committees were democratic
- All decisions had to go to Council to be ratified and could be amended by Council which would require the decision to go back to the original Committee to be re discussed and then back again to Council.
- A meeting would have to be held with all Chairmen before the Council meeting.
- Again all Chairman would in majority be in the ruling party (mini cabinet)

The Chairman made it clear to the Group that the LGA were not biased on either side. He then spoke of the findings to date of the Working Group and why he felt that the remit of the Working Group should be amended to look at how the current Cabinet system could be improved.

A discussion followed with views being put forward about increasing the number of Members on PDG's and the Working Group inviting Members from other parties to make presentations. A remark was made about the Chairmanship of committees and it was stated that in reality whoever the majority party was had the right to choose the chairmanships. One Member felt disenfranchised about being a Councillor and felt that she was not involved in the decision making process and would like a return to a committee structure. She felt that Councillor Wood should have attended the meeting to put his case, however it was stated that he had been to a previous meeting and documentation that he had collected had been circulated to Members. Ms Drury

confirmed that he had been invited to attend the Working Group but due to commitments had been unable to attend.

It was commented that a Members level of involvement was a personal choice, Members could attend all meetings and with the permission of the Chairman in most cases could present their view on an issue.

The Chairman again put the proposal forward that the remit of the Working Group be changed to look at how the current Cabinet system could be improved. The proposal was seconded and on being put to the vote carried.

Councillor Woolley asked if she could be included on the Working Group and it was agreed that the Working Group going forward would comprise of Councillors Bisnauthsing, Robins and Woolley, Councillor Cook would step down.

(4.15pm Councillor Bisnauthsing left the meeting)

It was agreed that a letter be drafted to those who had originally signed the letter requesting that a return to the Committee system be looked at informing them that the remit of the Working Group had been changed.

>Action Note

A letter to be sent to those Members who had signed the letter requesting a return to the Committee system informing them of the change of remit of the Working Group

27. FURTHER TRAINING FOR MEMBERS

The Chairman discussed with the Group training for Members. The emphasis of the training was on the rights and obligations of councillors, where they could find information, what they could and couldn't do, what meetings they could attend. It was felt that an easy understandable form was required and he asked if an e-mail/or form could be sent to all Members to complete (anonymously) asking what information they would like on rights and privileges, does and don'ts that they had as councillors to see if there was a genuine need or problem.

>Action Note

Ms Drury to look at circulating a form to all Members.

On the topic of IT the Chairman felt that further training was needed especially as technology was being used more and more and it was becoming more important. It was suggested that because each Member had different needs generic training would not be useful, more specific training was necessary. A

suggestion was made about having a regular drop-in session or an IT clinic fortnightly so that Members could attend if they had a problem. This could be anything from a 10 minute session to a longer session if the Member's issue required more time.

>Action Note

Ms Drury to speak to Andy Nix about drop-in sessions or IT clinics for Members.

Following the discussion Ms Drury said that there seemed to be two issues relating to IT one was troubleshooting a laptop, the other where to find information on the laptop. With regard to help to find information within the Modern.gov system she informed the Group that she, together with Jo Toomey and Lucy Bonshor could advise/help Councillors on where information could be found, they were there to support Members.

One Member then referred to having a buddy system which had been spoken about when Members were first elected two years ago, this would help in locating people within the building especially when they move office or department or if they had any issues. Reference was also made to having the direct dial number of officers. The Chairman referred to a telephone directory that he had asked for and he found very helpful, even though it was a fairly large document.

28. WORK PROGRAMME

The Community Engagement & Policy Development Officer, Carol Drury circulated to Members information bulletins which listed the recommendations made by PDG's and the subsequent decisions made by Cabinet. Each PDG had a bulletin and both the bulletins for Communities PDG and Resources PDG were circulated. The bulletins were for Members information in order that they could see how their recommendations fitted in with the Cabinet decisions. In future the bulletin for the relevant PDG would be sent with the agenda, other PDG bulletins would be circulated at the meeting for Members information. Feedback from the Executive would also be included on the agenda and this would enable Portfolio Holders to attend meetings and speak to the Group about decisions made by Cabinet where a decision was different to that recommended by the PDG.

The work programme layout had also been streamlined with some columns being taken out. It was hoped that the changes to the work programme and the introduction of the bulletins would help Members be better informed of decisions taken by the Cabinet.

The Chairman thanked Ms Drury and commended her for her work on the bulletins.

29. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 4.45pm.