

MEETING OF THE ENGAGEMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

THURSDAY, 9 SEPTEMBER 2010

2.00 PM



GROUP MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Michael Cook
Councillor Mike Exton (Chairman)
Councillor Reginald Howard

Councillor Jock Kerr
Councillor Bob Russell
Councillor Ian Selby

PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Councillor Ray Auger

OFFICERS

Team Leader Software Development - Lynda Foster
Democratic and Scrutiny Support Officer – Jenni Gibson
Democratic Officer – Lucy Bonshor

1. MEMBERSHIP

The Group were notified that Councillor Howard was substituting for Councillor McBride for this meeting only.

2. APOLOGIES

An apology was received from Councillor Tom Webster.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

4. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 11TH MAY 2010

The notes from the meeting held on 11th May were agreed.

5. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chairman said that he was disappointed that nothing further had been done about a full days IT training for Members, although “drop in” sessions had been arranged Members felt that a full days training for all Members was

required if at all possible. A question was asked about the percentage of Members who did not use their laptops, the Democratic Officer replied that there were five Members who did not use laptops. A question was then asked about Members using their laptops at meetings, could more power points/extension leads be made available or docking stations in Committee Rooms for Members to use.

A question was then asked about a hard copy internal phone book. The Portfolio Holder for Access and Engagement, Councillor Auger replied that he would speak to IT about Members being given access on their laptops so they could just click on an icon for the information which could be used off line. Another Member referred to the Council's website and its improving presentation and use.

6. NEW MEMBERS EXPENSE CLAIM FORM

Lynda Foster and Jenni Gibson gave a presentation to Members about the use of an electronic expense claim form. Members of the Group had asked at a previous meeting about the possibility of having an electronic claim form for Members to fill in online which would be helpful for those Members who lived some distance from the Head Office at Grantham.

Members had before them a draft claim form which contained all the information currently on the paper form plus extracts from the Constitution on the amount of subsistence that can be claimed. Ms Foster took Members through how the form should be completed and what fields had to be filled in. The new form automatically calculated the sums involved which would save time and an electronic form saved on paper.

Some Members felt that an electronic version of the form was a step in the right direction and would be very helpful where other Members felt the form in its current format was far too complicated and perhaps an excel version of the current form would be a better option. It was agreed that Members of the Group should go away and “play” with the new form and put forward any constructive suggestions they had about how the form could be improved.

› Action point

That Members “play” with the current draft form and put forward any constructive suggestions that they think will improve it.

The Chairman thanked both Ms Foster and Miss Gibson for their hard work in putting the draft form together.

7. PETITION SCHEME - TASK GROUP TO DISCUSS RECOMMENDATION

Members had before them a draft petition scheme that had been based on the Model Scheme adopted by the Council in April 2010. A Task Group of the Engagement PDG (comprising Councillors Exton, Cook, Jock Kerr and Russell) had met with the remit of looking at the scheme in detail and recommending their findings to the Portfolio Holder for Access and Engagement. Councillor Cook who had been nominated "Chairman" of the Task Group advised the Group that a lot of discussion and hard work had gone into the final scheme and he recommended that the Group accept the final document. He also gave a vote of thanks to both Lucy Bonshor and Lucy Youles for their hard work in putting the document together.

One Member questioned the number of signatures required together with the time that petitioners had to present their petition to which Members of the Task Group responded. It was recommended that the document be forwarded to the Portfolio Holder for Access and Engagement for approval. The Chairman thanked all those Members who had attended the Task Group for all their hard work.

Recommendation

That the draft petition scheme be recommended to the Portfolio Holder for Access and Engagement for approval.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS, WHICH THE CHAIRMAN, BY REASONS OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, DECIDES IS URGENT

The following item was discussed as a matter of urgency after the issue was forwarded to the Engagement PDG following the Council meeting held on 2nd September 2010..

At the Council meeting on 2nd September the following question without discussion was forwarded to the Engagement PDG.

*Would Councillor Mrs Neal tell us what actions can be taken against the member for Grantham St John's Ward who does not appear to attend any meetings and hardly ever bothers to submit his apologies. I believe that his actions are totally unfair, especially as he is being paid the same salary as other members who, as a whole are extremely conscientious. Neither is it fair on the other member of his ward who has to pick up all the extra problems associated with the role of a councillor. **Councillor Mike Williams***

The Chairman informed the Group that this issue had cropped up many times in the past and as the law stood nothing could be done unless the Member did

not attend a meeting in a six month period. Councillor Mike Williams had been invited to attend the meeting but had not arrived. There were other Members that this applied to not just the one referred to in the question. Members appreciated that legally nothing could be done, but the fact that the Member concerned did not even have the courtesy to offer his apologies for non attendance and give a reason was something Members felt he should do out of politeness to his other colleagues. It was agreed that the Member's Group Leader be asked to write to the Member concerned asking for an explanation for non attendance at meetings and the reason why his apologies are never submitted.

Recommendation

That the Group Leader for the Member concerned be asked to write to him asking for an explanation for his non attendance at meetings and the reason for not submitting his apologies.

Before the close of the meeting the Chairman asked Members if they had any items that they wished to discuss at the next meeting. One Member said that with the Olympic Games coming in 2012 could something proactive be done to engage the general public and benefit the community as this was a massive issue for the country. The Democratic Officer said she would speak to the Communication Team to see if they were aware of anything that was taking place.

9. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 3.20pm.