

# MEETING OF THE ENGAGEMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

THURSDAY, 28 JULY 2011 10.30 AM



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## GROUP MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Bob Adams (Chairman)  
Councillor Ray Auger  
Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing  
Councillor Ibis Channell  
Councillor Michael Cook  
Councillor Jock Kerr  
Councillor Rosemary H Woolley (Vice-Chairman)

## OFFICERS

Service Manager Human Resources & Organisational Development - Joyce Slater  
Consultation Officer, Performance Consultation and Communications - Deb Wyles  
Democratic Officer - Lucy Bonshor

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## 11. COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

None in attendance.

## 12. MEMBERSHIP

The Group were notified that Councillor Cook was substituting for Councillor Robins for this meeting only.

## 13. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from the Councillor Carpenter (Portfolio Holder Engagement & Corporate Services).

## 14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Woolley declared a personal interest in item 8 on the agenda as she was a parish clerk to various parish councils. Councillor Bisnauthsing declared a personal interest also in item 8 as he was a Town Councillor on Stamford Town Council.

## 15. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 9TH JUNE 2011

The action notes from the meeting on 9th June were agreed as a correct record of the decisions taken.

## **16. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Democratic Officer informed the Group that the Standards Committee were to arrange a working group to look at policies which the Council could adopt in place of the current Code of Conduct. It was hoped that this meeting would have taken place before the Group's next meeting. The Review of Outside Bodies and the Review of Access to Services issues would be looked at once the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and the Head of HR & Customer Services returned to their offices.

## **17. QUESTION WITHOUT DISCUSSION FROM COUNCIL 7TH JULY 2011**

Members had before them report HR&OD112 which had been compiled following the question that had been asked at Council on 7th July 2011 and had been referred to the Engagement PDG concerning the cost of delivering Member training. The Service Manager for Human Resources & Organisational Development (HR & OD), Joyce Slater briefly outlined to Members the background to the Member training programme and the report listed the objectives of the training programme.

- Basic work on the training programme began in spring.
- A large number of new councillors were expected to be elected
- E-learning was a valuable tool; however it was felt that face to face training would enable new councillors to get to know one another and there would be insufficient laptops to roll out to new Members when the inductions started.
- The training programme was one of the biggest programmes that had been put on for councillors with 24 events planned of which 307 places had been taken up.
- Officers that delivered events already had material available to them, and did not keep a record of specific time spent on training so this had been estimated. However, officer delivery and preparation was done within work time and therefore there was no additional cost to the salaries budget.
- There was no separate budget heading for member training which came under the corporate training budget however, costs were factored in to this budget. By using the contribution of internal officers to deliver the programme the costs had been considerably less.

Members felt that face to face training had been the appropriate method of training to use and felt that perhaps e-learning was a better tool for revision. Mrs Slater said that in the context of the induction process face to face training was a better option especially as brand new members would not have the in depth knowledge of how the council , committees and meetings worked and were able to ask questions. Core training had been kept to 2 hours with quasi judicial training taking longer due to substantial knowledge that was required for these committees. Some Members felt that the training should have been a

requirement that all Members attended regardless of whether or not they were new to the Council. Unfortunately, the Constitution only referred to training to have been undertaken if not already done so. However, officers were on hand to offer one to one training to Members if updates needed to be passed on or changes to legislation made i.e. to the planning process. One Member felt that all quasi judicial training should be mandatory to all Members regardless as to whether or not they were on that committee. Other Members felt that all training should be available to everyone if they wished to attend it.

Members felt that the cost of the training programme had been done well and at a very reasonable cost.

Mrs Slater added that a lot of organisations successfully used e-learning and referred to section 3.7 of her report. However the investment of time and resources (20hrs officer time for 1hour of learning) could not currently be justified. The majority of councils that used the learning pool were county and unitary authorities who had dedicated people for both the technical and administration of the system. The use of e-learning though may be an option for the future.

The Lincolnshire Learning Together which had 39 places taken up had been funded by LEAP funding which was no longer available. The trainers had been good and those Members who had attended the training agreed with this but to procure such trainers would be expensive.

One Member felt that training should be optional and a Member should attend if they had an interest or expertise in a specific area as attending committees, meetings was only part of a Councillors role. Reference was then made to mandatory training which had to be undertaken in order to be able to sit on certain committees and the tight timescale in which to hold such training before the committee cycle started after the elections and the need for core training for Members to be aware of staying within the law, relevant financial information to enable them to “see the bigger picture” and ward profiles.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Slater for her comprehensive report.

► **Action Note**

***Copy of report and minute to be forwarded to the Member who raised the question at Council on 7th July 2011.***

***Copy of report and minutes available to all members on the website.***

## **18. PARISH COUNCIL AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Members had been circulated with report PCC03 from the Head of HR and Customer Services which concerned the work currently being undertaken to developing a strategic approach for the Council to improve its relationship and overall engagement with the community of South Kesteven which included the Local Forums.

Mrs Wyles, Consultation Officer, Performance Consultation and Communications who presented the report on behalf of the Head of HR and Customer Services briefly outlined to Member the background to the local forums and how they had operated with some having good parish council attendance and some not.

The role of parish councils was seen by the Council as pivotal to the way it operated so getting good communication with parish councils was essential.

An audit of the local forums had been undertaken together with workshops for both the Cabinet and the public. The purpose was to clarify what people thought of the local forums in their current format and identify improvements.

The main issues raised were the structure of the meetings, who attended, the topics discussed, advertising well in advance of when the meeting was held and that the meetings be far less formal. The parish council's would like the meetings more tailored to them.

Contact with parish councils was wide and varied but specifically service based and therefore they were a key group with which the Council communicated. The Localism Bill currently going through parliament would have an affect on parishes and how they worked with the local community so it was vital that the Council had good relationships with the parishes to be able to liaise within them and through them to the community.

Mrs Wyles then referred to community events that the Council had attended such as the Grantham Carnival and Stamford, Bourne markets. These had been well attended as the Council had gone to where the public were rather than the public coming to them.

Members agreed that the format and layout for local forums had been too formal and that we should be going to them rather than them coming to us. Issues raised should be relevant to parishes with perhaps one officer attending in an informal setting. Reference was then made to those areas without parishes, how were they engaged, however contact through community groups in these areas did occur with the Council. Other issues raised were the "boundaries" between the local forums which excluded people because that village did not come under that forum. Any parish should be allowed to attend a meeting. Also feedback from meetings, an item would be raised at a meeting

but no feedback would be given. Other Members then gave examples of forum meetings that they had attended. It was felt that the ward members for the areas should have a direct involvement, any issues raised should be meaningful and feedback be given. The issue of commonality should also be looked at for issues specific to certain parishes and the chairing of the meetings.

Training was another issue that could be given by the Council to parish councillors and clerks although not to interfere with the training currently carried out by the Lincolnshire Association of Local Councils this would be more to do with standards and the model code of conduct especially in light of the changes that the Localism Bill will make and the need for a scheme of some kind to be in place.

► **Action note**

***Members noted the work done to date and the proposed recommendations within the report.***

One Member referred to the last meeting of the Group at which she had raised the issue of Ward Members being given a sum of money to spend as they saw fit within their ward. She then gave a brief presentation to the Group about her proposal and how the Councillors Divisional Funds would work and be used. The presentation covered guidance, the scheme itself and how this would be reviewed.

► **Action note**

***It was agreed that the presentation be forwarded to each member of the Group for further discussion at a future meeting.***

**19. WORK PROGRAMME**

Members had been circulated with a copy of the work programme which contained all issues from each of the three PDG's.

**20. POST OFFICE - PUBLIC CONSULTATION - SERVICE RELOCATION**

Members noted the letter circulated by the Post Office and asked that a response be sent welcoming the re introduction of services in the village shop with the hope that more post office services can be established at other outlets within villages in the District.

► **Action Note**

***Send response to the Post Office welcoming the re introduction of services at Woolsthorpe by Belvoir's village shop with the hope that more post office services can be established at other outlets within villages in the District.***

A comment was then made about the position with BT and the red phone

boxes as all had gone “quiet” following the consultation about two years ago. A brief discussion followed and Mrs Wyles indicated that she would look into what was currently happening and update the Group accordingly.

► *Action Note*

*Mrs Wyles to report on the current situation to a future meeting of the Group*

**21. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 12.10pm.