

MEETING OF THE ENGAGEMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

FRIDAY, 28 NOVEMBER 2014 10.30 AM



GROUP MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing
Councillor Ibis Channell
Councillor Jock Kerr
Councillor Nick Robins
Councillor Rosemary H Woolley (Vice-Chairman)

PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Councillor Paul Carpenter (Governance & Communication Portfolio)

OFFICERS

Executive Manager Corporate (Lucy Youles)
Executive Manager Development & Growth (Paul Thomas)
Service Manager Policy & Partnerships (Karen Sinclair)
Deployment Manager (Lee Sirdifield)
Community Engagement & Policy Development Officer (Carol Drury)
Democratic Officer (Lucy Bonshor)

86. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Auger and Councillor Cook.

87. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

None disclosed.

88. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 18TH SEPTEMBER 2014

The action notes from the meeting held on 18th September 2014 were agreed as a correct record.

Your council working for you

89. WEBSITE UPDATE

Members had been circulated with report DM004 which gave an update on progress to introduce a clean, simple and visually engaging website as part of the Customer Access Strategy.

Research had been undertaken to understand how people accessed the current website and what transactions they undertook. A number of surveys had been carried out electronically, by telephone and face to face. 1500 responses had been received, 410 of these from the Citizens Panel. Further research was being undertaken to understand how customers used the existing website so that the Council could introduce a website that was simple and clear to use. The top hits on the website were for waste & recycling, council tax and benefits and planning & building control. Mixd Limited who were working on the website design had undertaken their own research which had validated the research that the Council had undertaken but had also revealed that a quarter of customers who accessed the website used mobile telephones or tablet devices. Facebook and Twitter were key media outlets for disseminating information from the website.

Design workshops were due to be held the week commencing 1st December with the project team to look at design templates both from a business point of view and also a customer point of view. 20 member of the Citizens Panel had agreed to test ideas and help refine them to meet expectations. Testing would also take place on different devices in order that a seamless experience of using the website could be had regardless of how it was accessed. It was hoped that the new site would be launched in February/March 2015 with more and more transactions being able to be done on line. Although transactions on line were a more cost effective way of carrying out the business of the council it was stressed that this way of working was not a complete replacement of traditional methods as it was recognised that not everyone had access to a computer or had good connectivity within the district.

The website would be designed around customers' needs.

A discussion followed with Members asking about site navigation, transactions that were aborted and the reasons why, whether there would be a facility for a "shopping basket" facility. Members also asked whether we would continue to use the existing software to monitor transactions on the site. Mr Sirdifield replied that the software was only being used on a temporary basis to gather information and was not used as an audit trail, nor did it show personal information. The new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and Document Management System (DMS) would be linked to the website; the CRM would be able to track transactions and if these were abandoned the reasons why could be identified. Currently transactions could only be carried out singularly.

The Portfolio Holder for Governance and Communications spoke to the Group

about his “wish list” which included a “pop up chat box” which was useful if you were stuck and needed some guidance; however, items like this added complexity to the website and the design of the website had to take into account the level of customer expertise. Transactions relating to the most popular services would be phased first such as waste and recycling, licensing, revenue and benefits and planning.

90. SOUTH KESTEVEN LOCAL PLAN - REGULATION 18 STATEMENT

The Business Manager Development & Growth gave a presentation to the Group about the new Local Plan and Regulation 18 consultation which was the first stage for public involvement in the preparation of the Local Plan (LP).

The Government had made legislation changes to move back towards authorities having a Local Plan. Documents such as the Core Strategy and the Sites Allocations Policy would still be relevant but as the LP progressed more weight would be given to the LP as this would contain more up to date information. Work done on the Grantham Area Action Plan would be used to progress the Local Plan together with information from the Strategic Housing Market Assessment SHMA and also the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA). A key issue would be evidence based information and also the Statement of Community Involvement adopted in November this year. The SHMA which was published earlier in the year sets out the objectively assessed housing need for South Kesteven with the current annual requirement being 680 homes per year.

The first step to the LP would be a scoping paper. Consultations would be held with residents, businesses, local groups, anyone who had an interest in the content of LP including parish and town councils.

A key issue of the plan was the SHMA, with the need for new homes being balanced against affordability and employment. The infrastructure of the district was also key with locations needing to be sustainable.

The LP would include a long term vision for the district with the spatial strategy identifying areas where growth would be acceptable and where development would be restricted.

Consultation on the scoping exercise, Regulation 18 was due to start in January 2015; public participation on the submission document would hopefully be November 2015 with submission to the Secretary of State in June 2016. The examination process would be between July 2016 and February 2017 with adoption in April 2017.

Members felt that it was essential that the scoping document was widely made available so that everyone who wished to comment could.

91. MEMBER TRAINING UPDATE

Members had been circulated with report LDS139 which contained draft proposals for the Member training programme for the years 2015 – 2019.

The training programme had been developed in consultation with relevant officers and taking into account the views expressed by Members of the PDG. The first year of the training programme would concentrate on the induction, core and skills training with mandatory training for those Members who wished to become members of the Development Management Committee, Licensing Committee or Governance & Audit Committee.

As part of the “Market Place” event which would take place at induction, it was proposed to hold an IT and general skills audit of Members. A training log would be created for each Member and maintained throughout the four year period. The development of the training plan for years 2 – 4 would be determined by the findings of the skills tests and the training log.

The People and Organisational Development Team would be commissioned to administer and source delivery of the programme. The commission would require that the all training delivered was carried out in a way that engaged with Members to provide timely, relevant and consistent training.

The timetable for training would start very soon after the elections with Members attending, the welcome on the Monday/Tuesday following election. Sessions would be held during the morning, afternoon and evening to accommodate all Members. Workshops and informal drop in sessions would be held and training buddies identified from within the Members.

Reference was made to holding mock council meetings to help those Members “see” how a meeting should/should not be conducted, especially helpful for those Members who were interested in becoming a Chairman or Vice-Chairman of a Group/Committee, the training would be as interactive as possible.

The Communication team would be commissioned to provide training and information material, quick guides, leaflets, flyers for upcoming events etc to support the training programme. Members would be issued with certificates when they had completed training so that they could keep a log. An electronic log would also be kept of all training attended.

Core skills training would be staggered over a three month period as feedback from the last core training was that too much information was crammed into a short space of time and “overloaded” Members.

Members discussed the programme. It was stressed that everyone was different and the level of training should be designed accordingly, from those Members who had a wealth of knowledge to novices. It was acknowledged

that each Member would have a different level of knowledge and this would be detailed within the training especially for years 2 – 4. One Member mentioned the inclusion of staff within training sessions and it was agreed that some training sessions may be relevant for staff. Further discussion followed including the use of internal or external trainers. The use of the word training was also discussed and Members of the PDG felt that perhaps information and personal development would be a better heading.

Before the close of the meeting the PDG sent their best wishes to the Chairman.

The meeting closed at 11.45am.