

SCRUTINY PANEL A

**Meeting held in the Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield,
on Tuesday, 7th March, 2017 at 6.30 pm**

Present: Councillor Amanda Brown in the Chair;

Councillors Rachel Bissett, Ben Bradley,
Tony Brewer, Helen Hollis, Glenys Maxwell,
Lauren Mitchell and Helen-Ann Smith.

Officers Present: Craig Bonar, Lynn Cain, Joanne Froggatt and
Mike Joy.

In Attendance: Councillor Paul Roberts.

SA.13 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Non-Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

(During consideration of declarations of interests, Councillors Ben Bradley and
Lauren Mitchell entered the meeting at 6.34 p.m.)

SA.14 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 10th January, 2017, be
received and approved.

SA.15 Scrutiny Consideration of Community Engagement - Introduction from Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager

The Chairman introduced the item and reminded Members that the
Community Engagement item had been added to the Scrutiny Workplan in
2016 with an aim to considering how the Council and Councillors currently
engaged with local communities. Craig Bonar, Service Director for Corporate
Services and Transformation and Jo Froggatt, Corporate Performance and
Improvement Manager were also in attendance at the meeting to assist
Members with their discussions.

The Scrutiny Manager informed the Panel that there is a corporate review of engagement to be undertaken during 2017 which would be commencing shortly. To ensure there was no duplication of work, it was intended that the Panel's recommendations from the meeting would feed into the wider engagement review as appropriate.

It was acknowledged that local communities currently engaged with the Council and Councillors in a variety of ways. The democratic process allowed opportunities for the public to proactively engage in the decision making process and the Council were continually committed towards ensuring that engagement and consultation with the public was undertaken as widely and as often as possible.

The primary methods for active engagement and involvement with the community included:-

- community attendance and involvement at Area Committees, Planning Committee and Council meetings;
- community participation and involvement in the Scrutiny process;
- formal consultation exercises;
- specific projects (i.e. the New Cross Project);
- Locality Team support for community groups and organisations;
- submission of petitions (paper and e-petitions);
- Councillor surgeries;
- social media presence;
- introduction of new website – more accessible and user friendly;
- live twitter feeds from Council events.

For the purposes of the meeting, Members were requested to express their views in relation to the Council's current engagement methods, how effective they were, what worked well for them and what, if anything, could be done better. The Service Director, Corporate Services and Transformation commented about managing the expectations of the public in relation to engagement and ensuring that any methods utilised remained good value for money. It was also acknowledged that the Council needed to maximise its use of social media outlets in the future, recognising its effectiveness at reaching communities swiftly and in large numbers, at minimum cost.

The Council's Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager gave a presentation to the Panel entitled 'What is Engagement?'

Recognised levels of engagement were quoted as follows:-

Informing (*telling people something*)

Consulting (*asking people what they think*)

Involving (*bringing people together to talk about issues*)

Empowering (*enabling people to make decisions themselves*).

Members were advised of the benefits of good community engagement:-

1. it can create social connections between individuals and groups;
2. it can enhance the motivation and capacity to participate in decision-making, instead of being passive recipients;

3. it fosters a more open relationship with residents;
4. it generates capacity in the community, by building on assets, networks and local identity;
5. it helps residents understand and access the system more easily, interacting with the Council more.

The results of the Council's Place Survey, undertaken in 2016, had shown that the public's preferred method of contacting the Council was still via the telephone and also that they most preferred the Council to contact them via paper correspondence. The survey had captured information from a varied demographic range and had confirmed that the public's confidence in the Council acting on resident's concerns was increasing along with the public perceived ability to influence Council decisions. The Panel duly acknowledged this improvement.

At this point in the proceedings, the Panel undertook a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis regarding current Council engagement methods and how to create more opportunities for the future. The results were as follows:-

Strengths

- the Council engages the public in a large variety of ways;
- local public meetings are arranged for local issues as they arise;
- the Council provides good opportunities for face to face dialogue/contact;
- 'Member Enquiry' e-mail service through Democratic Services Team enables prompt signposting for prompt responses to queries;

Weaknesses

- Council and Committee meetings can be too formal;
- some Committees do not have enough decision making powers to encourage public to attend and contribute;
- older generations can be fearful of digital/social media channels and methods of communication;
- no tenant/resident representation on Area Committees;

Opportunities

- meeting dates could be more widely advertised;
- better/increased use of social media to reach wider audiences within quicker timescales;
- to consider the possibility of more interaction between the public and Members during consideration of planning applications;
- increase promotion of 'good news' stories thereby encouraging interest and public pride;

- introduce use of 'instant chat messaging' to enable prompt responses to public enquiries;
- increase awareness of Council plans and policies (i.e. Area Locality Plans) with information guides in plain English about their objectives and aspirations;
- offer more ongoing support to resident-led groups to encourage sustainable, effective local decision making;
- utilising Twitter to give real-time updates during Council meetings;
- consider scrapping traditional Councillor Surgeries thus enabling individual Councillors to utilise more modern methods for keeping in touch with their constituents;

Threats

- public expectations being too high in current climate of austerity;
- ongoing Government spending cuts and impact on local community services.

Following the SWOT exercise, Members considered various different types of engagement as outlined in the Local Government Association Guide to Engagement. These included:-

1. Getting Out There (Advice Surgeries, Mobile Surgeries, Community Events);
2. Keeping People in the Loop (Newsletters, Direct Mail, E-Newsletters and Text Messages);
3. Reaching Out (effective internal communication teams, working with other agencies, community networks);
4. Using the Media (Local newspapers, TV/Radio, blogs/online radio);
5. Going Digital (Google alerts, FixMyStreet, Facebook, Twitter, NextDoor Forums, Surveys/Polls/Petitions, Personal Websites and Blogs).

Following the presentation, the Panel debated the issues and methods of engagement asking questions of the officers in attendance and sharing anecdotal evidence of personal experiences in relation to their work with local communities.

RESOLVED

that the Council's Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager be requested to take on board the comments/views expressed by the Panel Members during the SWOT analysis exercise and consider them as part of the wider corporate engagement review being undertaken during 2017.

(During consideration of this item, Councillor Helen Hollis left the room at 7.46 p.m. and returned to the meeting at 7.48 p.m.)

The meeting closed at 7.50 pm

Chairman.