

MINUTES of a meeting of the COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY TASK AND FINISH GROUP held in the Room 140, Council Offices, Coalville on WEDNESDAY, 19 NOVEMBER 2014

Present: Councillors D Everitt, V Richichi, S Sheahan and M Specht

Officers: Mrs M Meredith and Ms K Talbot

11. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Councillor S Sheahan suggested that, as the Task and Finish Group consisted of two Members from each party, the meeting be chaired in rotation.

It was therefore moved by Councillor S Sheahan, seconded by Councillor M Specht and

RESOLVED THAT:

Councillor D Everitt take the chair for the remainder of the meeting.

12. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence received.

13. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no interests declared.

14. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2014.

Councillor S Sheahan referred to the group discussion and requested that his comment be amended to read "the best results were achieved when the Council and communities were working side by side".

RESOLVED THAT:

Subject to the above amendment, the minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2014 be approved as a correct record.

15. DRAFT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Stronger and Safer Team Manager referred to the copies of the strategy document which had been circulated showing the changes which had been made. She sought comments from Members on the amendments and on how success could be measured more effectively.

Councillor S Sheahan asked the Stronger and Safer Team Manager to highlight where she had made changes.

The Stronger and Safer Team Manager highlighted the amendments as follows:

In section 3, reference to the Big Society had been removed, as the original strategy was written prior to the Localism Act, which superceded the concept of the Big Society. As this legislation had now been enacted, a paragraph had been added into the strategy to reflect this.

Chairman's initials

Councillor S Sheahan welcomed this amendment.

The section regarding the requirement for Social Landlords to consult tenants had been updated and this was a factual change.

The section entitled Local Ambition had been updated to include the Council's core values, as the original strategy predated the core values. As these were referenced in most of the Council's publications, the Stronger and Safer Team Manager felt that it was important that these be included in the strategy.

In section 4, the reference to Community Forums had been removed as they were no longer active.

Councillor S Sheahan sought clarification regarding the sentence which had been removed at 3.2, and asked if this had been removed as it was slightly negative and superfluous.

The Stronger and Safer Team Manager advised that the sentence had been removed as it referred to obstacles rather than opportunities.

In section 3.3 the sentence relating to increasing satisfaction levels had been removed, as engagement and satisfaction levels didn't always go hand in hand.

Reference to the Vision magazine had been removed as this no longer existed.

The Better Business for All section had been reworded to reflect the move towards Business Focus. It was felt that this demonstrated that the Council engaged with a broader range of local businesses.

Councillor S Sheahan sought clarification on why paragraph 5.11 had been deleted. The Stronger and Safer Team Manager advised that this had been removed as it referred to software which would be introduced. She added that the software referred to had now been implemented.

Councillor S Sheahan felt that this should still be referenced in the strategy and it should state that the Council would use this software.

Councillor S Sheahan sought clarification on the proposals for the measuring success section.

The Stronger and Safer Team Manager stated that going back to the Leisure department and asking them to clarify their survey results had helped with this. She wondered whether it would be more appropriate to report on the number and types of surveys, response rates and demographics. She added that outcomes should also be reported, for example, what the Council was doing differently as a result.

Councillor S Sheahan commented that this whole section had been removed so it would be useful to insert the proposed replacements so these could be compared.

Councillor S Sheahan felt that paragraph 3.3 should be retained. He agreed that any negative connotations should be avoided, but the reference to communities not feeling excluded should be retained. He felt that this section could just say we also need to take appropriate measures to ensure that communities do not feel excluded, and delete the preamble. He added that there was nothing worse than a consultation being spoiled by someone saying at the last minute that they didn't know anything about it.

The Stronger and Safer Team Manager advised that she would make the agreed amendments to the strategy and insert a section regarding measuring success so this could be looked at in more depth for the next meeting.

Councillor V Richichi commented that the strategy was a dry document. He asked how people would be encouraged to engage.

The Stronger and Safer Team Manager acknowledged that the strategy could be dry in content. She stressed the importance of officers utilising the tools available to them to engage people. She added that the Council was getting better at attracting people. She added that face to face interaction produced better results and the Community Focus Team were very skilled at engaging with people in this manner.

In response to a comment from Councillor V Richichi, the Stronger and Safer Team Manager acknowledged that you could only ever engage with a percentage of people, and it was their right not to engage with the Council if they chose not to.

The Stronger and Safer Team Manager stated that a refresh of the officer toolkit could be one of the actions arising from the Task and Finish Group. She added that it was hard to measure things that hadn't been consulted upon but she hoped that if the measure of success was less vague going forward, Members would get a better view of what the Council was doing and would have more substance to challenge officers on.

Councillor D Everitt commented that some areas did not have a tenants forum which would be a good way of engaging people. He added that the Snibston gala had a very interesting display on recycling.

Councillor V Richichi commented that the key was keeping it interesting. He added that he did not want officers to spend a vast amount of time pushing this with no return.

Councillor D Everitt commented that there was a great deal to be gained as lots of people saw the Council as not doing anything for them. He added that in some cases it was difficult to engage with those who would benefit the most.

The Stronger and Safer Team Manager stated that when commencing a consultation, she tried to consider what would engage her and encourage her to get involved. She added that it would be beneficial to remind officers to do the same.

Councillor V Richichi commented that the easiest way to engage people was putting money back in their pockets.

Councillor D Everitt added that with recycling, the message there was that the more you recycle, the more you save.

Councillor V Richichi commented that the biggest problem could be linked back to planning applications, as people feel that the Council doesn't take any notice of what people say.

Councillor D Everitt noted that the development at Osgathorpe involving the pub was mentioned in the report. He stated that this issue came up at Planning Committee. He added that the development was opposed by the parish council and the villages, but it was still permitted.

Councillor V Richichi questioned how people could have faith in the Council. He added that we people needed to feel they were being listened to.

Councillor M Specht added that in respect of the Osgathorpe development, a survey was carried out and the majority of people in the village didn't respond, therefore the villagers opposing the application were in the minority. He added that people didn't want to put their head above the parapet and respond to surveys.

Councillor V Richichi commented that sometimes you cannot work on percentages.

Councillor D Everitt added that it was difficult to know whether you were backing something which was wanted by the community in any case.

Councillor S Sheahan felt that the planning system had a lot to answer for as it made consultation meaningless. He felt that attempts should be made to try and get this changed and ensure that people have realistic expectations of what the Council can do.

Councillor V Richichi commented that if the Council could get people more involved and let them feel they were contributing and were being listened to, this would achieve much greater engagement. He added that if people were to engage, the Council had to be seen to be listening to people. He added that at the moment, people feel that the Council never listens and always goes its own way. He felt that this was the core problem which needed to be addressed.

Councillor M Specht referred to the annual event held in Coleorton wood. He stated that the turnout was abysmal in the first year but had increased each year since. He added that the key was getting people to participate.

Councillor S Sheahan stated that in respect of planning, one complaint was that officers had too much time for developers prior to the application being considered by the Committee, and the local residents had the last opportunity to shape applications. He added that he found it very effective working with residents if they are knowledgeable. He felt that if this could be amplified through the planning process, it could be very effective in getting things resolved. In terms of percentages, he commented that sometimes you had to listen to the minority who were really affected. He also felt that a lot of the issue with the Council ignoring people was cultural. He added that good practice needed to be embraced and bad practice driven out.

Councillor D Everitt commented that this exercise would be worthwhile if more engagement could be achieved.

The Stronger and Safer Team Manager felt that the Council needed to advertise instances where what people have said have changed processes. She added that it should also be highlighted where views have been considered but not acted upon, and say why that was.

Councillor V Richichi commented that the point made earlier in respect of percentages was spot on as some people were more affected by an issue than others.

16. SURVEY RETURN RATES AND OUTCOMES

The Stronger and Safer Team Manager stated that in response to Councillor M Specht's request, clarity was sought from the Leisure team on the consultations they undertake. She highlighted the paper which had been circulated at the meeting.

Councillor V Richichi asked if the Council made a profit from Hermitage Leisure Centre. Councillor S Sheahan advised that it was subsidised however its performance was of an award winning level.

17. LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION

The Stronger and Safer Team Manager provided a summary of the Local Plan consultation process. She advised that the Local Plan Advisory Committee was a cross party group which gave Member recommendations on how the Council should proceed with the Local Plan. She advised that there was also the Local Plan Board which was an officer group.

Councillor S Sheahan advised that he was a Member of the Local Plan Advisory Committee and at the last meeting they had received a report regarding the Statement of Community Involvement. He asked that it be ensured that the two groups co-ordinate and make sure the two policies were aligned.

The Stronger and Safer Team Manager stated that the Statement of Community Involvement would be quite specific to the Local Plan.

Councillor S Sheahan agreed but felt that the general principles would be the same and the groups could learn from each other.

The Stronger and Safer Team Manager advised that the original consultation period ran from 20 June to 19 September and was undertaken on the Council's website. 200 posters informing residents about the consultation were distributed to libraries, health centres and Town/Parish Councils. A consultation leaflet had been prepared to explain the consultation, and copies were sent to parish councils and shared at events. The Community Focus officers promoted engagement at the Heart of the Forest Festival in June, Picnic in the Park in June, and Music in the Park in July. 77 responses were received from members of the public, parish councils, developers, landowners and statutory bodies. A report on the outcome was considered by Cabinet on 18 November. The next issue was the Limits to Development, and the consultation for this would close on 9 January 2015. Information would be going out to Parish Clerks about their villages, and Ashby and Coalville Town teams would receive information about town centre boundaries. This would comprise of a leaflet, map and links to an electronic map and website. Consultation questions would be online. There will also be 3 events for clerks and parish councillors to come and view the plans. Officers from Planning, Communications and Community Focus will be there to answer questions to enable them to engage with the consultation either on the night or after they leave. The Stronger and Safer Team Manager advised that these events were taking place on 10, 11 and 16 December.

Councillor M Specht made reference to the huge consultation that had been undertaken regarding Leicestershire County Council discharging its liability in respect of grass verges. He asked if any more was known about why this was off the table.

Councillor S Sheahan stated that he had heard a lot of parishes were not impressed with the rates proposed.

18. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 8 December at 6.30pm.

The meeting commenced at 6.31 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 7.24 pm

Chairman's signature