

**PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT WORKING GROUP held in the COMMITTEE ROOM  
- COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, ESSEX CB11  
4ER, on THURSDAY, 10 MAY 2018 at 6.00 pm**

Present: Councillor M Lemon (Chairman)  
Councillors P Fairhurst, B Light and J Redfern

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Assistant Director - Corporate Services), D Barden (Communications Manager) and B Ferguson (Democratic Services Officer)

**PWG24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Dawn French and Councillors Dean and Felton.

**PWG25 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 March 2018 were received and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**PWG26 SOCIAL MEDIA AND PRINTED MEDIA TRENDS**

The Communications Manager presented the report providing an overview of the social and printed media trends within the District.

According to the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC), circulation of printed media was in decline across the District, comparable with national trends. The Communications Manager said that whilst these figures were useful in determining the reach of local newspapers, they gave no indication of how widely read these publications were as they were primarily delivered for free, and therefore it was difficult to determine how effective printed media was in terms of engaging with the public.

Councillor Fairhurst said the value of a local press could not be measured in monetary terms alone, as they were an integral part of civil society and local community. He said the local press should be consulted with regards to public engagement, and could be invited to talk to the PEWG.

In response to a question from the Chairman, the Communications Manager said his team were in contact with the local press at least once a week.

Councillor Redfern said there had been an increase in parish publications and this could be an effective medium to communicate with residents. She said it would be a good idea to get a full list of these publications in the District and to send them a quarterly update on District Council news.

Councillor Light said the discussion was too focused on a one way communication flow, and not enough on dialogue and interaction with residents.

The Communications Manager said social media was a means to interact with the public, as well as an effective customer service tool. The Council could use it to form a dialogue with residents, assist with any queries they might have and keep them informed. He said the Council had 1,200 likes on Facebook.

Councillor Fairhurst said social media provided an opportunity to engage with the public and to increase the Council's profile. He said he would like the number of hits to be increased on Facebook, although he appreciated resources in the Communications team were limited.

The Chairman said engagement had to occur both ways and whilst the Council did a good job in sending information out to residents, work needed to be done to encourage meaningful feedback.

The Assistant Director – Corporate Services said public engagement was a problem for all councils. He presented research which suggested that the majority of people did not want to engage with their local authorities.

Members asked for the results of the New Local Government Network exercise/Campaign Group study put on the next agenda, so inferences could be made to inform the way forward in terms of public engagement methods.

## **PWG27 SCOPING EXERCISE**

The Assistant Director – Corporate Services asked Members to complete a scoping exercise relating to the Council's current public engagement methods. Each Member was asked to name three things they thought the Council was doing well in terms of public engagement; and three things they thought required improvement.

In summary, the following were noted and discussed as methods of engagement the Council was doing well:

- the general outward flow of information
- the reception desk and customer services
- housing road show
- audiominutes
- keeping the public informed on social media.

The following were noted and discussed as methods of engagement the council needed to improve on:

- the website
- public participation
- social media dialogue
- telephone waiting times
- Council's profile and visibility

- officer contact details
- lack of publicity regarding voluntary sector work
- Member training.

*Councillor Fairhurst left the meeting at 7.00pm.*

The Assistant Director – Corporate Services said Members had found broad areas of agreement and he could begin to draw together an action plan to progress the work of the group. He would then consult with Members by email and from there the terms of reference and scoping report would be drafted and brought back to the working group.

## **PWG28 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Assistant Director – Corporate Services said he was aware that the Council's Communities team engaged with the public on a regular basis and the Communities Manager would be invited to the next meeting.

Members discussed the timing of future meetings. The Assistant Director – Corporate Services said he would speak to Councillors Felton and Fairhurst, who had particular problems with the current 6.00pm start time, and future meeting dates would be arranged in due course.

The meeting ended at 7.30pm.