

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT WORKING GROUP held at CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE - COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, ESSEX CB11 4ER, on THURSDAY, 13 SEPTEMBER 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 (Fixed Term Communications Manager), D French (Chief Executive) and A Mawson (Democratic Services Officer)

PWG1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were received from Cllr Felton. No declarations were made.

PWG2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 May 2018 were received and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

PWG3 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT WORKING GROUP REPORT

The Chairman referred to the importance of Member induction and the need for refresher training throughout a councillor's term of office. Members in the group cited differing experiences of their training.

In response to a question from the Chairman, The Assistant Director – Corporate Services referred to an online document called 'Be a Councillor' that provided information to people who were interested in standing as a councillor to ascertain what was involved. <https://beacouncillor.co.uk/resources/>

Members identified the following points as being beneficial to a Member's development, based on their own experiences and ideas;

- Being allocated a 'buddy officer' from the council.
- Being shown around the building during induction and then again a few weeks later.
- Guidance from other experienced Councillors was a valuable contribution.
- To encourage attendance of all Councillors at training sessions, both the new and re-elected, to ensure all were kept informed as things change.
- Ongoing training for specific committees.
- Commitment to a 4-year training programme.
- Meeting etiquette.

The group spoke about [National Democracy Week](#) and [European Local Democracy Week](#) and the role that Councillors played in educating the local children in schools, and local guiding groups, for example with school visits or having classes come to the council offices.

Councillor Light asked about the premise of Democracy Week and the group discussed that there was not a lot of information available and that this had somewhat been 'over taken' by '[Our Day](#)' and that there was merit in reinventing this next year. It was discussed that this would be the ideal time to get Councillors out to schools etc.

Discussion was had as to whether the responsibility lay with officers or Councillors to arrange for these visits.

Councillor Redfern said she thought that it was the responsibility of Councillors to arrange their own visits to schools, due to resource concerns if officers were to do this for them.

Councillor Fairhurst said that it was good to have the backing of the Council and the Chief Executive offered support where required.

Members discussed the implementation of an extensive public engagement campaign in the context of the approaching election in May 2019. As Members didn't want to commit the incoming council to a budgetary expenditure of £20,000, it was agreed that the correct approach would be for the campaign to be reconsidered in the municipal year of 2019/20, following the elections. It was felt that they should be focussing on appendix A – Current Engagement Methods, and work on doing things better rather than embarking on a new strategy at this point.

The Chief Executive said that the coming election would provide opportunities for much public engagement. It would be a great time to have an essential conversation regarding what the public wanted from their councillors and to feedback that information into a public engagement focus group.

Councillor Light suggested a pilot scheme.

The Chief Executive said that new Members would have new ideas which could shape the engagement programme and that this section highlighted a timing issue and should be revisited after May. A new programme was not recommended.

The Chairman said it was important not to lose sight of the programme and to ensure that it was brought back to the table.

Discussion took place about bringing the report to Full Council but stating that an extensive engagement campaign, while potentially having merit, should not be carried out for now. The other actions outlined in the report were considered of benefit and while not requiring a formal decision, should go to Full Council for information. Also discussed was the need to find examples of best practice to benchmark against.

Councillor Redfern asked for Members' training on the new council website.

The Chief Executive suggested adding website training at the next Members' briefing on 9 October.

Members discussed the Citizens Access programme and there was a concern that traditional engagement methods would be replaced as technology advanced. This would be a significant loss for those sections of the community that struggle with technology. The Assistant Director – Corporate Services emphasised that the purpose of the project was to make online services available to those who could use them, but that traditional contact channels would still be available to those who could not.

Councillor Redfern suggested a mobile app. The Assistant Director – Corporate Services said that there may already be one and he would look at that.

Councillor Fairhurst and Councillor Light left the meeting.

The Chairman congratulated the officers on the hard work for the report.

The Assistant Director – Corporate Services said the report was to be reworked for the October Council meeting.

The Chief Executive clarified that this report would be ongoing with this group, although emphasised that it was a task and finish group, and that recommendations would be going to Full Council at the next meeting. It was suggested that a further meeting be held in some months' time to discuss how the implementation of the actions had gone.

Members agreed that the Council should be working closely with the Citizen's Advice Bureau, charities and other organisations.

Councillor Redfern said she was frequently asked about funding and grants and The Communications Manager referred Councillor Redfern to a grant booklet called '[Funding Opportunities in Uttlesford](#)' which was on the website.

The meeting ended at 7.20pm.