



## **Kirklees Democracy Commission**

### **Summary Note from the meeting held on 16 November 2016**

#### **Present:**

Councillor Andrew Palfreeman  
Councillor Cathy Scott  
Councillor Eric Firth

#### **Witness: Nick Golding**

Nick Golding has been Local Government Chronicle editor for three years, having been a reporter and news editor on the title earlier in his career. Nick, who has been a journalist for 17 years, has a passion for local politics and the decentralisation of power. His editorship has seen LGC follow a more digital path which has seen its subscription level increase. Under his leadership, LGC has undertaken landmark research revealing the clearest picture so far of how councils are winning devolved power and launch new events including the Integration Summit, bringing together councils with NHS partners. He has previously worked on Health Service Journal, the social care title Community Care and local newspapers

#### **Summary of Discussion**

##### **Role of Press in Local Democracy**

- The discussion explored the role of the press in local democracy and the approaches that could be adopted by Councils in engaging more effectively with the press and Media. Commissioners explained that there was a perception that coverage of issues of local democracy and decision making received less coverage than had been the case in the past. Nick explained that this situation was mirrored across the country and that there were a number of factors that had contributed to this.
- The advent of the internet and the resulting ability to advertise online, often at no cost, had had an impact of the advertising revenue that could be generated by local newspapers. This had resulted in impacts both on the number of journalists employed and wage levels. This had meant that staff, who in some instances

were relatively inexperienced, had to cover a greater breadth of issues and had less time to focus on Council issues in general and local democracy specifically.

- There was a need for councils to be more creative in the way they get information and messages to members of the public. This should include the use of the internet, online forums and social media platforms. As there was a greater reliance on Website platforms for the local media to deliver stories, Councils should think about using more video communications, which are website friendly.
- There had to be an understanding that the press will report things from the perspective of the public. Therefore, in the case of the closure of a facility, the focus will be on how this will impact on the public in terms of service delivery. It was the responsibility of Councils and decision makers to provide contextual information on resource availability and the need to make savings.
- Nick felt that a useful approach would be for Councillors and Senior Officers to engage with newspaper editors and reporters in order to build up a relationship and to share information on key issues, Council priorities and vision.
- Nick also felt that the debate with the public should have more of an emphasis on overall outcomes rather than on individual decisions on service delivery as the public would have a better understanding of how this impacts on the individual, Communities and the public at large.

### **Role of Councils and Councillors as Community Leaders**

- He was of the view that there was public interest in the Leadership Councils showed on big issues such as health, social care and local development plans. Councils needed to be more upfront about the role they played in shaping policy and services in these key issues.
- Nick talked about the need for Councils at a strategic level and Councillors in relation to the area and communities to look at the overall needs and aspiration of the place. This involves the coordination of activity and services to ensure their collective offer is meeting the needs of the communities they represent. This principle is the same at a micro level – within a Councillors Ward – and at a macro level – a Council looking after its overall interests within its Region.
- He placed a particular emphasis on the role Councillors play at a local level with schools within their communities.
- Nick commented on the move towards the greater devolution of power, which was equally applicable both within Councils to Area/District Committees and at a regional level, where powers can be devolved from Governments or shared collectively from individual Councils to a regional Council partnership. His view was that powers should sit at the lowest level at which decision making is practical – the rule of subsidiarity.