



Kirklees Council
Kirklees Democracy Commission Cross Party Working Group

2 March 2018

Present: Cllr David Sheard
 Cllr Cathy Scott
 Cllr John Taylor
 Cllr Andrew Marchington
 Cllr Rob Walker
 Cllr Andrew Cooper

Apologies: Cllr Robert Light

In Attendance: Carl Whistlecraft – Head of Democracy Service
 Penny Bunker – Governance and Democratic Engagement
 Manager

1. Chair of Working Group

The Working Group appointed Cllr Cathy Scott as Chair for the remainder of the 2017/18 municipal year.

2. Terms of Reference and Ways of Working

The Working Group considered a document setting out ways of working which suggested that their role should principally be:

- to prioritise and commission work
- to comment on, and inform, work as it develops
- to receive high level reporting in the context of the progress of the wider programme
- to be assured of progress and identify issues and risks for consideration

It was noted that the terms of reference continued the ways of working that were adopted by the Democracy Commission.

In discussing the report and proposed terms of reference the Working Group agreed that the proposed citizens groups should be a representative sample and not just self-selecting.

Agreed: That the terms of reference and proposed ways of working be approved.

3. Progress so Far

The Working Group considered a report, which set out details of work that had taken place so far to progress the Commission's recommendations.

It was noted that progress had largely focussed on the specific recommendations that could be taken forward by the Head of Democracy as part of ongoing service delivery. Other examples within the report related to work that took place as part of Local Democracy Week 2017. This had provided an opportunity to test different approaches and ideas. Appended to the report was a table setting out the Commission's recommendations with the actions undertaken to support delivery and the impacts.

Highlights of the work included a live and interactive Kirklees question time event and a day in the life of a Councillor video to help citizens understand different aspects of the council role. There had been extended use of webcasting technology for interactive public events, national partnership events and Q&A sessions for Kirklees staff. In respect of partnership working the network was growing, with 15 different partners delivering an extended programme of events for local Democracy Week. The Democracy Service was co-ordinating the Vote 100 in Kirklees networks, in collaboration with the University of Huddersfield.

From the evidence gathered the Democracy Service had continued to redesign its approach. Staff briefings had been developed and working in a political environment workshops were being provided to help staff understand the importance of the Councillor role and how it is a valuable asset as part of changing and redesigning services. A more focussed and streamlined Councillor Induction programme was being developed, following feedback from Councillors.

In considering the report, the Working Group welcomed that work had been continuing. The importance of pitching events at the right level for the audience was emphasised, for example not making information too theoretical for a school audience. In discussing the training that Councillors required it was suggested that chairing skills and digital awareness training for Councillors were 2 priority areas.

There followed a discussion on the question time event and some feedback on the number of Councillors and activists who asked questions. It was suggested that in future further consideration be given to audience participation. It was acknowledged that there was learning from the event and that the role of Chair was also an important consideration.

4. Prioritising Recommendations and Future Work

The Working Group considered the recommendations of the Commission with a view to prioritising actions. Some recommendations are more straightforward to progress and time limited in terms of deliverables and impact. Others, more strategic, complex and long term required the Working Group to identify priorities to inform the work that will be commissioned and planned.

As part of the report to Council on 15 November 2017 the recommendations had been grouped together in the following way:

- Requiring further strategic steer or discussion before progressing
- Requiring a Councillor-led approach which would be progressed through a cross party working group
- To be implemented by the Head of Democracy as part of operational service change

It was suggested that it might be helpful to consider the ways in which Councillors outside of the working group could be involved in focussed tasks and finish groups. It was felt that this would ensure that the working group itself was not wholly responsible for the delivery of the Commission's recommendations.

The Working Group identified the recommendations set out as an Appendix to these notes as the ones that should be prioritised in the first instance. In identifying the priorities the Working Group made reference to the following;

- In considering the active citizens theme there was discussion about the need to define the term and it was agreed that active citizenship should be a shared strategic priority and used as a basis for developing a new democratic relationship between Kirklees citizens and the state. The Working Group agreed that schools should play a central role as local democratic hubs, as part of the delivery of an Active Citizens Strategy;
- It was suggested that there was work to be undertaken with Councillors themselves to develop their understanding of their role and to put training in place to help develop the appropriate skills;
- The Working Group was keen to see that online and offline interpretive information was available for the public concerning public meetings. The information could be used as part of wider civic awareness of the council and its democratic process. It was suggested that for most members of the public the Councillors structures and processes were complex and difficult to understand, including how different parts of governance related to each other. It was acknowledged that there needed to be a greater transparency and more effective communication. There followed a discussion on the size of governance structures and the need to ensure that the council did not just continue to add further bodies to already complex structures;
- In considering regional devolution and local identity, members of the Working Group remained concerned at the low awareness of regional issues and the importance of local people having a voice. The Working Group supported the recommendations that were within the Council's power to move forward;
- The Working Group agreed that the councillors theme should also be a priority and focus on the role of Councillors and an understanding of the changing role. Members agreed that there should be support in developing skills and understanding the new role;

- It was recognised that the Council should support all Councillors to understand and embrace digital technology. Digital literacy should be a core area for Councillor development. The issue of training on general data protection regulations was highlighted as a priority for Councillors.

In considering the next steps, Mr Whistlecraft agreed to pull together the different sections of priorities identified by the working group for further consideration. It was agreed that other groups of members might be commissioned to carry forward some elements and existing groups may also be used.

5. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Working Group would take place on Tuesday 22 May 2018 at 1pm in the Town Hall, Huddersfield. (Following the meeting it was agreed that this date would be rearranged).