



Kirklees Democracy Commission Cross Party Working Group

18 July 2018

Present: Councillor Cathy Scott
Councillor John Taylor
Councillor Rob Walker
Councillor John Lawson
Councillor Andrew Cooper

Apologies: Councillor Robert Light
Councillor David Sheard

In Attendance: Carl Whistlecraft – Head of Democracy Service
David Bundy – Policy Officer
Vina Randhawa - Area and Neighbourhood Action
Team Manager
Deborah Nicholson – Interim Councillor Support and
Development Manager
Phil Longworth – Health Policy Officer
Andy Simcox – Head of Policy, Strategic Partnerships and
Transformation

1 Chair of Working Group

Councillor Scott was nominated to chair the Working Group meeting in Councillor Sheard's absence.

2 Notes of Last Meeting

The notes of the meeting held on 26 June 2018 were agreed as a correct record.

3 Putting the Councillor at the Heart of the Organisation

The Head of Democracy presented a report setting out the emerging headline actions and priorities following the series of workshops involving officers and councillors.

The report explained that the final workshop session brought together 91 councillors and officers into 8 mixed workshop groups. Each group was asked to focus on the following questions and identify priority actions:

- How could we realistically keep councillors informed about what is happening in their Wards?
- How could we realistically develop stronger working relationships between councillors and staff across the organisation?
- How could we enable councillors to work closer with staff, particularly at a more operational level in their Wards?
- How could we help and support staff to work confidently with councillors?

The outcomes of the workshop discussions were attached as an appendix to the report. In consideration of the information the Working Group made the following comments and observations:

- The specific issues relating to Overview and Scrutiny (raised earlier in the engagement process) must not get lost or overlooked;
- It is crucial that there is a cultural change whereby staff at different levels throughout the organisation are given the permission and opportunities to work with councillors. This is how meaningful and effective relationships will develop;
- As part of such a culture change staff must be supported to have the knowledge, tools and confidence to work with councillors. We cannot expect them to have political awareness, exercise judgement and employ discretion without supporting them to develop such skills;
- Councillors have an important role in making that culture change work. Poor councillor behaviour damages the relationship and tars all councillors with the same brush. Current rules, processes and sanctions must be used to address such behaviours. Similarly poor officer behaviour should be addressed;
- Officers need to engage with councillors when they are working in their Wards. Councillors have invaluable knowledge and insight which can contribute to problem solving and redesigning services. This is not currently utilised;
- There needs to be more opportunities for councillors to meet officers and work with services;
- To facilitate change it will be important to capture and share stories. It helps to show what good looks like and supports learning in a safe and supportive way.

The above mentioned points were used as a basis for the Working Group considering specific actions that they would wish to see progressed. These are detailed in red in Appendix 1 to these notes.

The Working Group also asked that officers from the Programme Team also undertake a similar exercise to ensure that the priority actions were informed from both a councillor and officer perspective. These are detailed in blue in Appendix 1.

AGREED

- (1) That the priority actions to take this work forward (as set out at Appendix 1) be referred to Executive Team for consideration and response;
- (2) That the outcomes of the Executive Team discussion be reported back to the next meeting of the Working Group. Such feedback to include specific proposals as to how the priority actions will be progressed.

4 Progressing Priority RecommendationsDraft Citizen Engagement Framework

The Working Group received a paper setting out a strategic approach to citizen engagement which has regard to the findings of the Democracy Commission's final report.

The Commission had discovered from a wide range of sources that citizens are increasingly sceptical of consultation. They seek genuine engagement and dialogue which is designed in a way that takes citizens on an ongoing journey rather than picking them up and dropping them in the way that consultation is perceived as working.

The Commission, in advocating the notion of Active Citizen, acknowledged that local people are more likely to have a stake in the place that they live, work or visit if there is a more genuine approach to engagement and dialogue. The paper set out a framework for engagement which could be used as a basis for building a different dialogue with local people and create an environment where the notion of the Active Citizen can begin to develop and flourish. Specifically the paper set out a number of high level design principles to be used as a basis for developing future engagement and dialogue:

- Embracing local identity;
- Treating people as citizens not customers;
- Co-producing and changing behaviour;
- Placing Councillors at the heart;
- Acknowledging our staff as citizens;
- Deploying our staff as agents for change;
- Utilising new and existing networks;
- Widening our engagement reach;
- Using intelligence and citizen insight;
- Working in plain sight and telling stories.

The Working Group noted that work was currently underway to test these principles on a pilot basis using a tool called the Place Standard.

In consideration of the paper the Working Group made reference to the following:

- The central importance of moving towards a strategic culture of engagement and dialogue;
- The importance of the term citizen in this context as it implies rights and responsibilities;
- Key considerations to be borne in mind in seeing our staff as citizens, particularly in terms of the extent to which they are representative or typical of the wider populace;
- The wider opportunities to use such an engagement approach with a variety of stakeholders e.g. Chambers of Trade;
- The importance of ensuring that parish and town councils are considered as important stakeholders who should be borne in mind when developing different approaches to engagement and dialogue.

With regards to the last point the Working Group discussed its role in the context of the Council's relationship with parish and town councils and the extent to which Kirklees was minded to undertake a community governance review. The Working Group were reminded that the Democracy Commission had made no specific recommendations covering this specific issue although there was an acknowledgement that this should form the basis of a more detailed discussion at the next meeting.

AGREED

- (1) That the principles set out in the paper be endorsed and be used as a basis for developing and embedding a strategic approach to citizen engagement;
- (2) That the paper be amended to make reference specific to parish and town councils in the context of engagement;
- (3) That the Head of Democracy share details of the evidence considered by the Democracy Commission with regards to parish and town council;
- (4) That an item be included on the agenda for a future meeting of the Working Group exploring the intentions of the Council in terms of its relationship with parish and town councils.

5 Progressing Other Commission Recommendations

(a) Improving Electoral Registration

The Working Group received a paper produced by the Electoral Service Manager setting out proposals and current work designed to address the following recommendations made by the Democracy Commission;

- Kirklees Council should work collaboratively with schools to develop an optional, local approach to registering young people at the age of 16;
- Kirklees Council should work with the University of Huddersfield and local colleges to integrate electoral registration as part of the existing student registration process.

The Working Group noted that since the recommendations were agreed by Council officers have undertaken work to begin to consider how to progress them. In so doing officers propose that the project should seek to create products and approaches which will achieve the following objectives:

- To pilot a local approach to registering young people at the age of 16;
- To work with the University of Huddersfield and local colleges to integrate electoral registration as part of the existing student registration process.

The paper set out an approach to deliver these objectives which would involve the following:

Schools/colleges

June to July 2018 & September to December 2018

Attendance at relevant meetings with secondary school head teachers, college principals and University Registrars and Students accommodation providers - to discuss the benefits of registration to the young person in terms of life skills (there are a number of benefits of being on the electoral register), the school in terms of their responsibility for encouraging democracy (Citizenship Education), as to how automated registration can be realised.

The approach will need to be adapted in each school/college to align with their internal procedures and resources available. There are over thirty schools in the Kirklees area and three 6th form colleges.

Huddersfield University and associated stakeholders

June to September 2018

The Working Party noted that the final acceptance and registration of students at Huddersfield University takes place in August, the likelihood is that details of accommodation (required for registration) will not be confirmed until mid to late September. HUDLET are responsible for overseeing student accommodation (Halls of Residence and those landlords registered with HUDLET).

The paper explained that it will be important to understand the administrative processes described above in order to identify the most appropriate stage and how best to incorporate electoral registration. If a similar model to the approach used in Sheffield is used, the student would apply through the University course registration portal, the registration application is sited at the end of the course application process at this stage the data then becomes the property of the Electoral Registration Officer, in terms of GDPR compliance, consent is integrated into this part of the student application process. Data provided by the University would be used to submit electoral registration application data onto the system.

Consultation with student accommodation providers will need to take place to discuss provision of information which complies with GDPR. Inter-Agency Data Sharing Protocols will need to be developed to support the provision of information from all accommodation providers in the absence of applications via the University registration portal and to support applications, where necessary. Information provided by student accommodation providers is essential so that precise address details can be verified (historically the provision of accurate and/or incomplete student addresses has been identified as a major barrier in processing electoral registration applications).

Once the abovementioned pieces of work have taken place with schools, colleges and the university respectively, evaluation will be carried out. This will be submitted to the Working Group before commissioning further work

In consideration of the paper the Working Group made the following points:

- The extent to which progress had been made in incorporating voter registration as part of the work taking place to develop the Citizen Account;
- The breadth of engagement with schools and an indication of those who have expressed an interest in being part of a pilot project.

AGREED

- (1) That the objectives and proposed approach for undertaking this project as set out in the paper be approved;
- (2) That details of the project evaluation be reported to a future meeting of the Working Group;
- (3) That the Electoral Services Manager provide an update on the specific issues detailed above.

(b) Commission Recommendations Relating to External Bodies

The Working Group received a paper explaining that during the course of its work the Democracy Commission made a number of recommendations that are not in the gift of the Council to progress directly. These span a range of themes covered by the Commission.

The Working Group recognised the importance of ensuring that such recommendations were considered and a way forward agreed, details of which should be shared on the Democracy Commission website.

In consideration of the respective recommendations the Working Group made the following points:

- Where possible recommendations should be “chunked” together in a thematic way;
- Any responses should fully explain the wider context which led to the Commission reaching its conclusions;
- Where we have representatives on some of the bodies (e.g. the LGA) their input should be sought;

AGREED

- (1) That the Head of Democracy should pull together a series of appropriate responses to the specific recommendations. These should be considered and signed off at the next meeting of the Working Group.

6 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Working Group would take place on Wednesday 29 August 2018 at 10.00am in Civic Centre 3, Huddersfield.