



**Kirklees Democracy Commission Cross Party Working Group –
Wednesday 29 August 2018**

Opening up our meetings

Brief background

It is important for us to change the public meeting narrative in Kirklees. We need to make a positive statement that says “we’re open for business and you’re welcome”. Meetings provide an ideal opportunity for the council and councillors to engage, share and foster a wider understanding of how our local democracy works. Meetings should not be something that is hard to follow or engage with. They should be something that contributes to wider civic engagement and involvement for citizens.

As part of our ongoing work to improve our democratic content, officers have begun some focussed work around opening up our meetings, which will continue throughout the municipal year.

This work is contributing to two of the priority recommendations identified by the Democracy Commission Cross Party Working Group:

“Kirklees Council should develop online and off-line interpretive information for the public relating to all of our public meetings. Such information can be used at meetings but can also be part of wider civic awareness about the council and our democratic processes.”

“Kirklees Council should review our approach to creating and sharing democratic content. This should involve exploring different and innovative ways of developing content to facilitate dialogue and engagement before, during and after the formal decision-making process.”

Our approach

Our approach to developing content around meetings responds directly to what our citizens told the Kirklees Democracy Commission: “We can’t get involved if we don’t understand how things work”. With this in mind, we’re taking an iterative approach, testing our ideas as we go along. We’re breaking things down into bitesize information, with each item having a specific purpose.

We're aiming to:

- Make our meetings more open and easier to understand for our citizens.
- Develop new approaches to creating and sharing content.
- Consider and measure the impact of the work.

Types of content that we are developing include:

- Helping citizens to understand meetings:
how things work, what's happening and how to get involved.
- Sharing the experiences of councillors, citizens and staff.
- Explaining issues that we're making decisions about.

We have begun by looking at the format of Council meetings from the perspective of our citizens, thinking about all the elements of these meetings that citizens might not understand. We are then testing out approaches to explaining elements of these meetings. We began with a very broad video introduction to Council, describing the format of an agenda, who is in the room, and ways of participating in the meeting.

We shared this video via some of our social media channels in the week of the 11 July 2018 Full Council meeting, and it had a good level of response.



What happens at Full Council?

652 views Twitter – @kirkdemocracy

280 views Twitter – @KirkleesCouncil

668 views Facebook – @liveinkirklees

98 views YouTube – Kirklees Democracy

1,698 TOTAL VIEWS

We have mapped out ideas for future content about Council meetings, and have begun to look at other meetings such as Cabinet and Scrutiny. Over time, we will generate a collection of materials that can be shared as and when relevant (as well as being accessible online any time). Together these materials will help our citizens to understand how local decision making works and will encourage participation.

Content ideas include:

- **Five ways to participate in Council**
Include webcast tips, attending, deputations, questions, petitions.
- **Bitesize Council web page**
With a video explainer for each kind of agenda item.
- **An introduction to Scrutiny***
An explanatory video, ideally involving Scrutiny chairs.
- **Working with Scrutiny***
Video featuring officers and councillors.
- **Advice for councillors about webcasting**
Useful tips, including making sure you are heard clearly by citizens.
- **Advice for everyone about webcasting**
Step by step advice, including how to find a meeting, look at the archive, jump to a specific agenda item, use timestamps, download and share.

* These Scrutiny videos will also contribute to our “Putting Councillors at the heart of the organisation” campaign work.

Although we have begun with explanatory videos, we will test out other tools and techniques as the work develops. We will seek feedback from citizens and councillors throughout the work, and look for opportunities to contribute to and complement our other project activities.

Recommendation

The Cross Party Working Group are asked to:

- Consider and comment on our approach to opening up our meetings.

Report produced by Diane Sims.