Kirklees Council
Kirklees Democracy Commission Cross Party Working Group

Wednesday 28 November 2018

Present: Councillor David Sheard (Chair)
                  Councillor Andrew Cooper
                  Councillor Cathy Scott
                  Councillor Robert Walker

In Attendance: Carl Whistlecraft – Head of Democracy Service
                  David Bundy – Corporate Policy Officer
                  Vina Randhawa – Manager, Area and Neighbourhood Action
                  Team
                  Diane Sims – Senior Communications Officer
                  Spencer Wilson – Group Support & Development Officer
                  Penny Bunker – Governance and Democratic Engagement
                  Manager

Apologies: Councillor John Lawson

1   Notes of Last Meeting
The notes of the meeting of the Working Group held on 24 October 2018 were agreed as a correct record.

2   Progressing Priority Recommendations

The Working Group considered the following project proposals in respect of the recommendations prioritised at the last meeting of the Group:

- Democratic content and citizen awareness
- Civic pathways for young citizens

The project proposals in respect of democratic content and citizen awareness focussed on how we present and communicate our local democratic content, including the explanations provided, the media and language used and how information is shared.

The proposed project areas were:

- To develop a set of democratic content standards based on citizens need;
- To pilot the use of video narratives in advance of a significant issue being discussed and decided, followed by similar narratives once a decision has been made;
- To prototype online and offline interpretive information for the public relating to one of our public meetings. Thereafter the learning to be used as a basis for wider roll out;
- To fully explore and implement the capacity of webcasting technology. This should be on a pilot basis.

The Working Group noted that work had already started to open up our meetings which included a video on "what happens at full Council" which had been shared through various social media channels in the week before the Council meeting in July 2018. There had been a total of 1698 views. The work was ongoing with the focus on a quick introduction to Scrutiny video to be published shortly followed by video discussion with scrutiny lead members.

The report identified the other aspects of the original mandate regarding accessible decision making that needed to be taken forward. The work included the following:

- Explanatory information that supports citizens trying to engage in the decision making process;
- Demystifying the language and process of decision making;
- Underpinning all of the above in how we use both online and offline information to open up decision making and make the process more citizen friendly.

The report proposed that two initial pilots, to test what works, focus on a specific area of governance. Scrutiny had emerged as an area highlighted by both Councillors and Officers which would benefit from clarification both internally and externally. The Working Group agreed that Scrutiny would be the initial pilot area of focus.

It was proposed that there would be two broad areas of work to progress the interpretive information development. The first area identified would produce cross cutting introductory online and offline information to support citizens to understand processes as they currently exist and how they can get involved. Included in this work would be benchmarking, working with a citizens group and other appropriate bodies such as young people and Huddersfield University, to gather ideas and insight about what is required and the appropriate language/approach to opening up our decision making processes. The initial product proposals would then be developed and following feedback, move to a piloting phase. The Democracy Commission Working Group would inform the final products prior to sign off and implementation.

The second piece of work would look in more depth at the process, approach and information supporting meetings and how that might be demystified and enhanced. This work would include analysis of benchmarking and research work to look at other organisational approaches: a range of engagement activity to gauge understanding on what is needed to open up our approach and

content to make it more citizen friendly and accessible: the development and piloting of possible meeting approaches and content, considering activity and information before, during and after a meeting.

In considering the report the Working Group agreed that people were frustrated with the language of reports and that reports did not provide a complete picture of what had been considered prior to the development of the proposal before the cabinet/committee.

It was agreed that the committee environment needed demystifying and there should be an immediate piece of work to look at interpretive information at meetings, including an interpretation board which says who the members are, what the process is, the items on the agenda etc. It was suggested that new technology could be further explored, for example links on YouTube, QR codes or the potential use of subtitles as part of webcasting.

The Working Group was keen to 'bust the jargon' and provide information in bite size pieces. It was considered that the Council website, the front door, was not helpful in trying to find decision making information. The public needed to be clear about what the purpose of a meeting is and how they can, or cannot, engage in a meeting.

It was suggested that the current approach to decision making, particularly in respect of large strategic items, was too 'top down'. It was felt that the Council needed to explore a more collaborative process to be able to involve people at an earlier stage and influence more democratic, inclusive content.

It was recognised that there may be some amendments to the Constitution required as a result of this work, although much of what could be achieved would not necessarily require a fundamental change to the council rules.

AGREED: -

(1) That the proposals set out within section 3 of the report concerning online and offline interpretative information for the public be agreed, subject to prioritising initial information for the public attending meetings.

(2) That the pilot area of focus is Scrutiny.

(3) That Councillor Sheard act as strategic lead for the working group in respect of this work.

Civic Pathways for Young Citizens

The Working Group was reminded that the Democracy Commission had looked at active citizens in civic society, in particular the responsibility to develop an environment and culture that nurtures our young citizen's interest in local democracy. In light of the evidence submitted to the commission the following recommendations had been made:

- Kirklees Council should ensure that schools play a central role in local democratic hubs as part of the delivery of an Active Citizens Strategy. This should involve designing (and putting into practice) a range of approaches which will create pathways for young citizens to become involved in civic society, including raising awareness about being a Councillor;
- Working with key providers, Kirklees Council should develop a democratic digital literacy pilot as part of a wider civic education programme for young citizens.

The Working Group noted that some work had already taken place to look at the ways in areas of work could be developed. This had included testing as part of local democracy week in 2017 with the learning from that work informing future approaches.

Other work taking place included, My Country My Vote, National Citizenship Service Programme, Kirklees Youth Council and Voice of the Child work.

The report continued to set out the suggested approach to the following areas:

(1) Local democracy resources;
(2) Working together to support our young citizens;
(3) Developing and strengthening our pathways.

In respect of local democracy resources, a clear need for learning resources had been identified and there was a need for these to be easily accessible to more of our citizens. The proposal was to work with young citizens to develop the resources and test out ways of sharing them, whilst also creating something that is useful for citizens of all ages.

In respect of working to be able to support young citizens, there was a need to work more closely with partners to recognise the valuable work that was already happening and to create a shared vision for the future. Key activities would include:

- Bringing together a network;
- Recognising the key roles of schools and making sure the work is open to others;
- Mapping current approaches;
- Creating a coherent approach that different partners understand their role within;
- Storytelling to improve understanding and encourage participation;
- Evaluating what works well so that future focus and activities will meet the needs of young citizens;

In respect of developing and strengthening pathways it was recognised that current activities provided a strong starting point and included:

- School surgeries with Councillors;
- NCS mentoring scheme;
- Young councillors apprenticeship scheme;
- Structured approach to work placement;

- Mentoring scheme between Kirklees Councillors and Kirklees Youth Councillors.

The aim was to work with partners to pilot, evaluate and develop each of these activities. It was asked that the working group prioritise the pathway options and share ideas for practical pilots.

In considering the proposals, the working group acknowledged the need to open up democracy for young people and encourage them to come and meet with Councillors. It was suggested that a structured resource was needed that Councillors could deliver at different levels within communities. There was a need to record engagement to avoid duplication and ensure resources are used effectively and targeted. Councillors needed to be empowered to be able to talk to young people and breakdown natural reservations.

It was noted that every school did things slightly differently and it was important that there was a dialogue with schools to agree what was appropriate when providing information or having a dialogue with young people. Linkages were already being made with community hubs and meetings had been arranged. It was suggested that there was a reluctance to engage in political debate for fear of misinterpretation. It was felt that there needed to be a way to have important discussions with young people and not leave a vacuum for misinformation.

The Working Group agreed that the initial focus should be on the development of local democracy resources. Councillor Rob Walker agreed to be the strategic lead for this work on behalf of the working group.

The working group noted that Dr Andy Mycock of the University of Huddersfield was keen to partner with the working group in developing local democratic education pilots. It was suggested that he be invited to attend a meeting of the working group.

AGREED: –

(1) That the proposed approach set out within the report be agreed and that item 1, local democracy resources, be the first area of focus;
(2) That key officers (including Dr Andy Mycock) be invited to the next meeting of the working group to set out in more detail current activity and future aspirations.

3   **Innovation and Democracy Programme**
Carl Whistlecraft provided a verbal update on a recently announced Innovation in Democracy Programme. The initiative from the DCMS and MHCLG, was looking for expressions of interest from local authorities to take part in a project, using a Citizen Assembly approach, which would;

- Increase the capability of local people to have greater say over decisions which affect their communities and their everyday lives;
- Encourage new relationships and build trust between citizens and local authorities;

- Strengthen local civic society by encouraging participation in local institutions.

In considering the opportunity, the working group agreed it was appropriate to submit an expression of interest pending further information from the government.

AGREED: –

(1) That an expression of interest in the Innovation and Democracy Programme be submitted to the DCMS;
(2) That Carl Whistlecraft circulate the detailed information to all members of the working group.

4   Date of Next Meeting/Forward Agenda
Councillor Cooper advised that the UK was remaining within the Council of Europe and there was a european charter of local self-governance which set out how local government should operate. It was suggested this would be appropriate for the working group to consider and reflect on areas of learning.

It was noted that the next meeting of the working group would take place on Wednesday 16 January 2019 at 10am in Civic Centre 3, Huddersfield.

AGREED:–

(1) That a copy of the European charter of local self-governance be circulated;
(2) That the item be scheduled for discussion at the meeting after next;
(3) That arrangements for the next meeting of the working group be noted.