



Kirklees Council
Kirklees Democracy Commission Cross Party Working Group

Thursday 10 October 2019

- Present: Councillor Cathy Scott (Chair)
Councillor Michael Watson
Councillor Alison Munro
Councillor Will Simpson
- Apologies: Councillor John Taylor
Councillor Andrew Cooper
Councillor Yusra Hussain
- In Attendance: Carl Whistlecraft – Head of Democracy Service
David Bundy – Corporate Policy Office
Diane Sims – Senior Communications Officer

1. Notes of Previous Meeting

AGREED as a correct record.

2. Programme Update

David Bundy provided the working group with its first full programme update which highlighted areas of progress across the general themes whilst providing details of specific risks and instances where milestones had been missed.

In consideration of the report the working group made the following comments and observations:

- That the format and approach to reporting programme progress be welcomed;
- That the information with regards to regional working be welcomed and that an invitation be extended to Councillor Mather and Councillor McBride to attend a future meeting of the working group to provide wider context;

- That the additional work currently taking place to improving electoral registration be welcomed. In this context specific reference was made to the following:
 - The feasibility of linking electoral registration to school websites and school councils;
 - That all availability of data which would help the working group understand all breakdown of registration by particular age groups. For example do we have data which tells us the registration by the six distinct demographic groups? The working group were interested in the number of residents who can register, the number you have and those who have the number who actually vote;
 - it was agreed that Sharon Salvanos be invited to a future meeting of the working group in order for a more detailed discussion to take place with regards to electoral registration.
- That the programme of work which has been developed and progressed with regards to citizen engagement using the Place Standard tool be particularly welcomed

3. **Networked Councillors – Progress Report**

The working group received a report from Diane Sims provided an update on the work that is taking place to progress the Networked Councillors theme. The report provided a reminder of the two priority areas within this theme - Digital Skills Councillors and Democratic Content Standards.

Diane explained that the first phase of the work had involve gathering insight which had involved a survey of councillors in terms of the current level of digital confidence. Alongside that work Diane provided feedback with regards to a recent session with Democracy Seekers, the outcomes of which would be used as a basis to inform future work alongside the outcomes from the survey.

In consideration of the report the working group made the following comments and observations;

- That there generally needs to be more work taking place to foster a wider understanding of who councillors are and what they do;
- That it is important to realise that councillors are the salespeople for the Council and as such are more than just a postbox;
- That more work needs to take place to ensure that the information that councillors are provided with is in a format that can be easily shared with residents. Specific reference was made to the use of PDF documents which were particularly unhelpful in this context;
- That opportunities to share information about councillors as part of routine communication with residents (for example Council tax bills) should be explored in more detail;

- That more work needs to take place to ensure that casework is dealt with more effectively;
- That it be noted that work was currently taking place within the Democracy Service to offer a new and improved Council support model. This would be co-produced with councillors.

4. **Councillors at the Heart of the Organisation – Progress Report**

The working group received an update on work that had taken place to deliver the actions previously commissioned with regards to putting councillors at the heart of the organisation.

The working group was reminded that priority actions were grouped into the following specific areas:

- Contacting Officers;
- Meeting and working together;
- Information and support for Councillors;
- Learning and development.
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The report explained that a Communications and Engagement approach had been developed, identifying “what we’ll focus on”, what we’ll do” and what we’ll achieve, along with a timeline of activities. So far there had been two campaign bursts and campaign burst#3 would begin in October (as part of our Local Democracy Week programme).

The working group noted that a number of practical opportunities for Councillors and officers to work together and develop a shared understanding of their roles have been developed, including:

- A programme of Councillor/officer shadowing;
- New Councillor Induction and development sessions;
- Working in a political environment training, co-delivered with Councillors to 633 staff so far;
- Launch of the online Councillor Account;
- Placing Councillors at the heart of planning and delivering Place Based engagement;

In consideration of the report the working group made the following comments:

- The importance of the staff volunteering scheme linking with councillors in their wards in a way that struck a balance between developing relationships and taking staff away from their day job;
- The need for meetings and Council business to move away from central locations (for example town halls) and into wards. To send the working group agreed to undertake future meetings in electoral wards on a rotating basis;
- The importance of ensuring that councillor visits into particular services or planned effectively, having regard to the availability of councillors:

- Support for the proposal of a fresher's fair for councillors, which could be designed in a way that coincided with Council meetings thus maximising opportunities for awareness raising and contact

5. Growing a Stronger Youth Council - Update

The working group were reminded of the forthcoming launch of the growing a stronger youth Council report on 18 October. It was agreed that this should form a dedicated agenda item at the next meeting of the working group.

6. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Working Group will take place on

Monday 11 November 2019, 11.00 a.m. – 12.30 p.m., Leadership Conference Room, Civic Centre 3, Huddersfield.