

Report of the Working Group on Communication issues within the Council

The working group was formed to look specifically at 'communication' within the Council and consider some issues raised by Members. The Group gave Members the opportunity to take part in the process either by attending meetings or communicating their point of view verbally or by email. We would like to place on record our thanks to all the Members and officers who contributed or participated in the review. We would also like to place on record our thanks to Sarah Lees for her very effective support and comprehensive minute taking.

The membership of the group was as follows: Cllrs, Alan Griffiths, Linda Holloway, Michael Lee, Jenny Roach, Kevin Wilson and Nikki Woollatt.

In presenting the report we would like to emphasise that the report obviously focusses on areas of concern, there are many areas where communication is effective.

The working group would like to make the following **RECOMMENDATIONS** to the Cabinet:

1. Access to information

Clarification is urgently needed in relation to the information that Councillors can have access to. When this has been obtained then there is a need to ensure that everyone within the organisation is familiar with the Councillors right to know.

2. Communication, internal

- a) All Members should receive notification of planned council house estate visits at the beginning of the calendar year. The Housing department to check with the Member Services meetings diary before doing this.
- b) Training to be provided to all Members who would like it on the effective use of Outlook to aid meeting management and email correspondence.
- c) Members to receive a response to an email query within 5 working days, if this is not achievable then an acknowledgement to be sent indicating how long it will take to provide a response.
- d) Investigations to be made into the possibility of acquiring the 'Doodle' system to help in setting up Member meetings.
- e) Management team to provide an update on a six monthly basis as to who is responsible for what in each service area.
- f) Group Leaders to be reminded that they need to feed back to their Group Members.
- g) Consideration to be given to replacing Group Leaders meetings with more regular meetings with the Chief Executive to include all Members.
- h) Cabinet Members must ensure that Ward Members are informed of significant events/meetings in their wards.

3. Communication, external

- a) More publicity is needed when meetings are held in other areas (e.g. the Cabinet meetings in Crediton and Cullompton).
- b) Members attending Outside Body meetings must provide feedback to the wider membership (e.g. the minutes of the meeting will suffice if necessary) even if those Outside Bodies are not meeting.
- c) Outside Body attendance figures to be reported before the allocation of seats at each Annual Meeting in May.
- d) Constitution Working Group to consider amending the Constitution to state that Public Questions should be answered during Public Question Time so that if the public want to ask a supplementary question they can.
- e) Members themselves should give consideration to the Council's reputation through their own behaviour and actions, particularly at meetings where the public are present e.g. Planning Committee.
- f) The Council must ensure that all public notices display up to date and accurate information.

4. General Issues

- a) There should be something on the front of an agenda to say when confidential information is attached.
- b) Confidential reports should be marked more clearly (consider water marking each page).
- c) The Constitution Working Group be asked to look at the problems associated with verbal reports and consider whether (except in extreme circumstances) all reports to committees and working groups should be in writing and issued with the agenda, in order to give Members time to consider the reports prior to any discussion.
- d) There should be a policy whereby incorrect statements in the press are always corrected.
- e) Queries from the press should be responded to in a timely fashion.
- f) Good news stories should be more proactively promoted.
- g) Consideration should be given to setting up a review of the how the Council interacts with the press.