

Scrutiny briefing paper- Communications working group update March 2016

The last update on the recommendations from the communications working group was provided to Scrutiny in October 2015. Responses were provided to the items raised on:

- Access to information
- Internal communication
- External communication

The only issues taken forward are noted in the minute below.

Minute from the last update

Communications Working Group

Members indicated that they were still not receiving responses to some emails. The Head of Customer Services reminded them that the Chief Executive had asked that such instances be reported directly to him so that he could investigate.

Members also raised the issue that they were not always informed when an email that they had been sent had been acted upon. The Head of Customer Services would report this to Management Team.

[The Executive Assistant to the Chief Executive is not aware of any incidents provided to the Chief Executive in the past 6 months.](#)

With recent changes to staffing in Communications, and Stephen Walford joining the Council as the new Chief Executive, I would suggest that no further updates are provided in relation to this working group. The findings to date can be fed into any further discussions and help to inform any future changes.

Please continue to report any issues with internal communications to the relevant Head of Service or the Chief Executive.

In addition, regular monthly updates are now circulated to all Members detailing key issues being dealt with by the Council. These will continue to be circulated following each informal Cabinet/Management Team meeting for Members' information.

Liz Reeves

Head of Customer Services

Previous update provided.

Update October 2015.

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.

Members can have whatever they need for their job, but must have signed all relevant policies i.e data protection, information security etc.

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.

Done.

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.

Training is offered to all Members at induction – outlook calendars on the ipad

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.

The Chief Executive explained that receiving a response to an email from an Officer within 5 days was an aspiration but could not be guaranteed due to Officer work load. He informed the Committee that they should report specific incidents to him if they had a continued problem;

Only one issues reported to Kevin in this period.

d) Investigations to be made into the possibility of acquiring the 'Doodle' system to help in setting up Member meetings.

In place and used when necessary but only works if everyone responds (system for arranging bookings – allows Members to select meeting dates against their availability.

e) Management team to provide an update on a six monthly basis as to who is responsible for what in each service area.

This was done in WIS

f) Group Leaders to be reminded that they need to feed back to their Group Members.

Done

g) Consideration to be given to replacing Group Leaders meetings with more regular meetings with the Chief Executive to include all Members.

The Chief Executive now holds two annual Q & A sessions with Members and had agreed to meet Groups on further occasions if required;
This has been happening with the next briefing scheduled for 24 September

h) Cabinet Members must ensure that Ward Members are informed of significant events/meetings in their wards.

Reminded

3. Communication, external

a) More publicity is needed when meetings are held in other areas (e.g. the Cabinet meetings in Crediton and Cullompton).

Acknowledged we do need to do more publicity

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.

Members have been reminded

c) Outside Body attendance figures to be reported before the allocation of seats at each Annual Meeting in May.

This can only be done if we are given the information

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.

Up to the chairman of the meeting

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.

Not practical, best effort will be made, however if Members are aware of an issue we will deal with it

4. General Issues

a) There should be something on the front of an agenda to say when confidential information is attached.

This should be resolved now because of modern.gov, the agenda pack will say that it is private on the top, instead of public, and all of the pages will state that they are restricted in a clear watermark. The app only allows access to the private papers to those with a log-in.

b) Confidential reports should be marked more clearly (consider water marking each page).

This should be resolved now because of modern.gov. see above.

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.

There will be a need for verbal updates when appropriate, discussions are recorded in the minutes and no decisions are taken on these.

d) There should be a policy whereby incorrect statements in the press are always corrected.

This is not always possible or the best solution in all cases.

e) Queries from the press should be responded to in a timely fashion.

Contacts from the press are sent to the relevant service area as soon as they are received, responses are co-ordinated by Communications or Customer Services and responded to within deadlines whenever possible.

f) Good news stories should be more proactively promoted.

Discussed every week at Management team as a permanent item on the agenda.

g) Consideration should be given to setting up a review of the how the Council interacts with the press.

Patrick Phelvin to attend September SOF to explain his role and take questions.

The Chief Executive and the Leader had met with the editor of the Gazette. The Chief Executive considered that the Council had a good relationship with the local paper.