

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

10 APRIL 2017

Parish Liaison Working Group

Introduction – why we undertook this review

Cllr Rosamond raised an agenda item at a Scrutiny meeting on 19th August 2016 following a report from a Parish Council that they had not received important information which Parishes in East Devon had received. Other Members reported that they considered more information should be passed to Town and Parish Councils and in particular there had been a lack of information regarding Planning Enforcement.

The Committee agreed that information and contact with Town and Parish Councils had reduced over a period of time and it was **RESOLVED** that a working group be put in place to scope the extent of the issue.

Working Group

The Working Group consisted of Cllr F J Rosamond, Cllr Mrs G Doe and Cllr A R Berry. The Working Group was assisted by Sally Gabriel, Member Services Manager and Julia Stuckey, Parish Liaison Officer.

The first meeting of the Group took place on 23 November 2016 where it was agreed that Cllr Mrs G Doe would take the Chair.

The Member Services Manager provided some background, explaining that the officer that had undertaken Parish Liaison in the past had been moved to different projects a number of months previously and that her work regarding Towns and Parishes had not been covered. Coincidentally, at the time that the Scrutiny Committee had raised issues this work had been transferred to the Member Services Team and Julia Stuckey had taken over the role of Parish Liaison Officer.

In advance of the meeting the Parish Liaison Officer had provided a report which outlined the current situation and proposed improvements. The report identified a number of areas for improvement. (Attached Appendix 1)

Overall aims and objectives were agreed as follows:

- That communication become a two way thing;
- Communication should be at an appropriate level;
- That Member Services Officers better support Members in order that they can support their Town and Parish Councils
- That District Councillors became aware of the expectations on them to attend Town and Parish Meetings and to cascade information;
- That a precise´ of minutes of meetings be produced;

- That proposals within the report from the Parish Liaison Officer be implemented – such as a regular newsletter.

Following the first meeting of the Group it was agreed that a period of time be allowed for the Parish Liaison Officer to implement the recommendations within the report.

The Group met again on 14th March and the Parish Liaison Officer updated the Group on progress to date:

Parish Matters

A Town and Parish Newsletter had been published three times since the last meeting. (Example at Appendix 2)

The newsletter was issued to all clerks and to MDDC Members.

Two Members had emailed to say that they thought it was good and one Clerk had emailed to say it was useful. One clerk had submitted an item for 'What's Happening in the Parishes' and one Clerk had asked that an advert be included re her freelance work.

Members commented that the new newsletter contained more 'adult' content and that the links to press releases and Council meetings were useful.

WIS

Some items that had been in WIS had been shared with Town and Parish Councillors.

Website

The officer informed Members that pages on the website were now much more up to date. A series of emails were sent to clerks to ascertain their current membership and the Communications Team had assisted with updating the website to reflect this.

Currently there was a lot of 'double handling of data' – Clerks informed the Parish Liaison Officer who updated the main record, Communications then updated the webpage, the contact list had to be updated and various teams needed to be informed in order that their own systems (such as planning) held correct data. It was hoped that IT might be able to streamline some of those processes in future years.

Member Briefings

None had been held since the last meeting that would be of particular interest to Town and Parishes but this was something that could be progressed when appropriate.

Training

Training had been provided on Social Media and the use of iPads. Both of these training sessions were opened up to Town and Parish Councillors and Clerks and a

good number of places were taken up. Feedback from them was that this was gratefully received (although obviously location and timings could always be a barrier).

Town and Parish Clerks Annual Meeting

The Parish Meeting was well attended and well received. Following the meeting feedback was requested, including from those Town and Parishes that did not attend.

The Leader of Devon County Council attended and stated that it was the biggest gathering he had spoken to on his tour of the District. As it turned out the agenda was too long as the Leader spoke for an hour rather than 20 minutes he had requested but when giving feedback those that attended were generally happy with the content of the meeting.

Those that did not attend said in the main that the meeting either coincided with their own Parish Meeting (which will always be the case for some) and that December was a busy month with school events etc. so not a particularly good time of year to hold it. It was agreed that it would be held in November in future years. There was also very dense fog on the night.

Following discussion it was **AGREED** that:

- Parish Councils be asked to share 'good news' with other towns and parishes via the newsletter;
- Silverton Parish Council be asked to share information regarding their Neighbourhood Plan with others via the newsletter;
- Uffculme Parish Council be asked to share good news regarding their 'café in the square';
- A Parish Clerk be invited to write a 'profile of a clerk';
- A couple of Members had been identified as not attending or cascading information to their Parish Councils and the Member Services Manager would speak to them regarding this;
- An item be placed in WIS to remind all Members of the importance of liaising with towns and parishes;
- A report be put together for the Scrutiny Committee to update them.

The Group asked that the Parish Liaison Officer carry out the above tasks and agreed there was no need to set a date for a future meeting as they were happy that improvements were in hand.

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