

Scrutiny briefing paper- Communications working group update March 2017

The last update on the recommendations from the communications working group was provided to Scrutiny in March 2016.

Discussion took place regarding the fact that the Chief Executive had shown some concerns regarding communication and it was RESOLVED that this matter be left with him to move forward.

It was AGREED that an agenda item be added for 12 months' time in order that Members could assess progress from a Members perspective.

Communications working group

The Communications working group looked at issues with communication between officers and members in particular in relations to

- Access to information
- Internal communication
- External communication

The only issue taken forward in 2015 was in relation to officer's failure to respond to emails from members. It was agreed that any issues with communication should be referred to the Executive Assistant to the Chief Executive.

Communication with members is provided via WIS, member briefings and officers respond to individual member enquires.

The restructure and realignment of resources to meet our corporate priorities is still in progress, and at present resource for communications remains as it did in 2016.

Communications Service general update

Since the redundancy of the Communications and Reputations Manager, dedicated resource to communications work has reduced. A member of staff who was working part time in communications is now full time but the role includes website and digital communications. This post is supported by customer service staff who are responsible for the day to day administration needed to log media enquiries and post press releases on our website.

Service managers and members were provided with media training and service managers are now responsible for their own media responses and communications plans.

Despite this reduction in staff the statistics below provide details on the work undertaken in the past 11 months and represent a significant increase in social media communication.

April to February 2017

Facebook posts 873

Tweets 980

Press releases 98

Media enquiries 133

In addition to this services have updated information on the website, and run various campaigns to inform customers of changes to service provision.

Cabinet and ward members are advised of any media enquiries that relate to them.

Liz Reeves Head of Customer Services and ICT

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.