



SCRUTINY PANEL B

Date: Thursday 19th November, 2015.
Venue: Committee Room, Council Offices,
Urban Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield at
6.30 p.m.

You are hereby requested to attend a meeting of the above Committee to be held at the time/place and on the date mentioned above for the purpose of transacting the business on the agenda set out below.

R. MITCHELL
Chief Executive

MEMBERSHIP

L. Anderson
C.J. Baron
A. Brown (Chairman)
H.J. Hollis
R.E. Madden
L.A. Mitchell (Vice
Chairman)
L.S. Morrison
S.R. Wilson
J.B. Zadrozny

AGENDA

1. To receive apologies for absence, if any.
2. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests.
3. To approve as a correct record the minutes of a meeting of the Panel held on 3rd September, 2015 (Pages 4 to 6).
4. Scrutiny Review of Communications (Pages 7 to 14).

If you require an adjustment to enable you to participate or access the meeting, please contact the Democratic Services team at least 48 hours before the meeting (Telephone 01623 457316 or e-mail j.robinson@ashfield-dc.gov.uk). This meeting may be subject to filming or audio recording. Members of the public have the right to request not to be filmed or audio recorded at any point during the proceedings.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There are two types of interests **Disclosable Pecuniary** and **Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests**.

Upon receipt of the attached agenda and reports you are urged to carefully read each item and determine whether you have an interest in any of them.

A standing item appears on every agenda in respect of interests and you should declare your interest at this stage in the proceedings. However, if you do not do so and it occurs to you during the discussion on the item that you should have declared an interest you must declare the matter as soon as it becomes apparent.

The following is a summary which has been prepared to assist you in deciding at the meeting whether you have an interest. It is not intended to be in substitution for the full provisions of the Code of Conduct which are contained in Part 5 of the Constitution.

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

A Disclosable Pecuniary Interest is an interest in relation to a Member if it is of a description specified in Regulations and either:-

(a) it is an interest of the Member's, or

(b) it is an interest of (i) the Member's spouse or civil partner, (ii) a person with whom a Member is living with as husband and wife, or (iii) a person with whom a Member is living with as if they were civil partners, and the Member is aware that that other person has the interest.

A schedule of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests defined by the Secretary of State is set out at the end of this document. Failure to register a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest is an offence under the Localism Act 2011 and could lead on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale or disqualification for a period of up to 5 years by a court dealing with such an offence.

Action to be taken – Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Where a matter arises at a meeting which relates to a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, the Member shall declare the interest and not participate in a discussion or vote on the matter and must withdraw from the meeting room or Chamber during the whole consideration of the item unless a dispensation has been sought and granted.

Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests

Where a matter arises at a meeting which relates to a Non Disclosable Pecuniary/ Other Interest, a Member should declare that interest to the meeting and having done so, is then free to remain, speak and vote on the matter under consideration.

SCHEDULE OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS Regulation 2

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Prescribed description</i>
Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain.
Sponsorship	Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the relevant authority) made or provided within the relevant period in respect of any expenses incurred by M in carrying out duties as a member, or towards the election expenses of M. This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992(1).
Contracts	Any contract which is made between the relevant person (or a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest) and the relevant authority— (a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and (b) which has not been fully discharged.
Land	Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the relevant authority.
Licences	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the relevant authority for a month or longer.
Corporate tenancies	Any tenancy where (to M's knowledge)— (a) the landlord is the relevant authority; and (b) the tenant is a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest.
Securities	Any beneficial interest in securities of a body where— (a) that body (to M's knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the relevant authority; and (b) either: (i) the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or (ii) if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.

If you are in any doubt you are urged to contact Ruth Dennis or the Democratic Services Team, preferably in advance of the meeting to discuss the matter. It would be even more helpful if details of your particular circumstances could be emailed so that a written response can be provided.

SCRUTINY PANEL B

**Meeting held in the Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road,
Kirkby-in-Ashfield,**

on Thursday, 3rd September, 2015 at 6.30 p.m.

Present: Councillor A. Brown, in the Chair;
Councillors L.A. Mitchell and L.S. Morrison and
J.B. Zadrozny.

Apologies for Absence: Councillors L. Anderson, C.J. Baron, H. J. Hollis and
R.E. Madden.

Officers Present: M. Joy and J. Robinson.

In Attendance: Councillor P. Roberts.

SB.4 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

SB.5 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 18th June, 2015 be received and approved as a correct record.

SB.6 Scrutiny Review of Communications

The Chairman informed the Panel that as part of the Scrutiny work plan consultation Members had agreed that the issue of communications was an important area to consider.

This topic was therefore added to the work plan in order to ensure that the Council was making the best use of communication tools through all methods that it possibly can. The Chairman explained that this meeting was a scoping meeting whereby Members could discuss their own experiences and perceptions of Council communications and consider whether we are maximising our opportunities to communicate and engage with the wider community.

The Chairman informed the Panel that both the Communications Manager and the Performance Manager were keen to be involved in this review and meetings were to be held with both officers to discuss the Panels initial thoughts.

The Scrutiny Manager proceeded to address the Panel to provide some background on the possible scope and terms of reference considerations for the Scrutiny review. He emphasised that communications and the expectations of residents in finding out about the Council were fast pacing and it was important that the Council continue to communicate in the most effective and efficient way possible.

Members were informed that the Governments transparency agenda and increased development of other communication channels, such as social media and e-communication were increasingly being used by residents. This could be demonstrated by the introduction of the 'Waste and Environmental Services App' which allows residents to report problems such as fly tipping direct to the Council enabling the situations to be dealt with more rapidly.

The Scrutiny Manager suggested that Members may wish to consider the following as part of the review:-

- Best practice with regard to external communications with residents;
- Investigate and understand the effectiveness and value for money from the current methods of communication;
- Establish what members of the public think about the way the Council communicates and what they expect from the Council;
- Look at how the Council can communicate more effectively with the whole community;

The Scrutiny Manager highlighted the comments that were forthcoming from the LGA Peer Challenge in 2013 which stated that 'The Ashfield Way is a mind set of acceptance and not celebrating and communicating what's gone well'. The LGA also observed that the Council needs to undertake wider involvement and engagement with the public and partners.

The Council had consequently adopted a proactive approach to communication and the Scrutiny Manager outlined the wide range of methods that the Council currently use to communicate with Ashfield residents to promote its services which include:-

- Press statements, media releases and features;
- 'All About Ashfield' – residents newsletter;
- Service information;
- Ashfield District Council website;
- Citizens Panel;
- Social media (Facebook and Twitter);
- Face to face, telephone and email;
- Internal communications.

The Scrutiny Manager emphasised that effective communications could have a positive impact for the authority and provide an essential mechanism for consultation and feedback alike.

Members were then asked to put forward their views on how the Council could improve its methods of communication, what the perceived issues were and how communications may impact on residents.

Panel Members took the opportunity to discuss the following:-

- Residents Newsletter – does it provide value for money and is it still considered an effective tool in communicating with the community?
- Engagement with the local media;
- Current statistics relating to Facebook and Twitter followers;
- Development of the 'Connect Ashfield' App;
- Creation of residents database for email correspondence;
- The promotion of Ashfield;
- Level of communication between Officers and Councillors;
- Use of social space (libraries, community halls and notice boards);
- Scope of the Communications Team;
- Remit of the newly appointed Website Development Officer.

To conclude, the Scrutiny Manager informed the Panel that he would meet with both the Communications Manager and the Corporate Performance Manager to consider the most appropriate way of gathering community views on preferred methods of communication and in addition would circulate to Members information with regard to the public relations and communications practised by Nottinghamshire County Council and other neighbouring authorities as requested by Members.

RESOLVED that

- (a) the following terms of reference be agreed for the Scrutiny review of communications:-

“To undertake a review of effective communication tools and the expectations of residents in accessing information to ensure that the Council continues to communicate in the most effective and efficient way possible”;

- (b) the Scrutiny Manager be requested to undertake the following in readiness for the next meeting:-

- extend an invitation to the Communications Manager and the Performance Manager to attend the next meeting of the Panel to assist the Panel with the current procedures and practices for communication and identify any potential areas for improvement;
- establish a series of informal meetings to meet with expert witnesses including a representative from Nottinghamshire County Council to discuss their communication methods, the Website Development Officer and the Portfolio Holder with the remit for corporate communications.

The meeting closed at 7.37 p.m.

Chairman.

AGENDA ITEM: 4.

REPORT TO: SCRUTINY PANEL B DATE: 19TH NOVEMBER, 2015

HEADING: SCRUTINY REVIEW OF COMMUNICATIONS

**PORTFOLIO
HOLDER:**

KEY DECISION: NO SUBJECT TO CALL-IN: NO

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

Following the scoping meeting held by the Panel in September 2015, this report provides Members with a draft terms of reference and further information requested relating to improving communications and best practice.

As part of the information gathering process, initial meetings have been held with the Corporate Communications Manager, Corporate Performance Manager and the Web Development Officer. The topic was considered as an important issue to further investigate as communications and the expectations of residents in finding out about the Council are fast pacing and it is important that the Council continues to communicate in the most effective and efficient way possible.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

Members are requested to note the information contained within this report and consider further areas for discussion as part of the review process.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

Reviewing communications as a topic was suggested for review as part of the workplan consultation process. This item was suggested in order to ensure that the Council is ensuring that it communicates effectively both internally and externally.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED (with reasons why not adopted)

No alternative options have been considered as part of this review to date. All options considered will be detailed in a final report to Cabinet in due course.

5. INTRODUCTION

Following the first meeting of the Panel on this topic in September 2015, Members agreed that the terms of reference for the review should be the following;

“To undertake a review of effective communication tools and the expectations of residents in accessing information to ensure that the Council continues to communicate in the most effective and efficient way possible”;

To expand on this and set out clear objectives, a draft full terms of reference is attached as appendix A.

In considering this in further detail Members raised a number of areas for further exploration and information including the following

- Engagement with the local media;
- Current statistics relating to Facebook and Twitter followers;
- Scope of the Communications Team;
- Website development
- Residents Newsletter
- Creation of a residents database for email correspondence;
- The promotion of Ashfield;
- Level of communication between Officers and Councillors;
- Use of social space (libraries, community halls and notice boards);

Engagement With Local Media

The Council has an approved Media Protocol. As part of that Protocol, all media contact is channelled via the Communications Unit. Officers should not take unsolicited calls from the media, referring them instead to the Corporate Communications Unit.

The Communications Manager/Officer directs enquiries received to the relevant spokesperson and will gain a written or oral comment for the media as appropriate.

Media enquiries are given priority status – more than 95% of media calls are resolved within 24 hours. 100% of media calls are responded to within 24 hours with 48 hours being the target for response and resolution of media enquiries.

As a general rule, officers permitted to make statements directly to the press are restricted to the Chief Executive and Heads of Service. Statements can be made by officers if they are of a technical, factual nature – never opinion. Clearance must be sought by the appropriate Head of Service prior to this taking place.

Elected Members are sometimes contacted directly by the press – this scenario is not covered by the protocol. However, if contact is made via the Communications Unit, press statements can be made by, or attributed to, the Leader or Deputy Leader.

Local media has changed dramatically in recent years with advancing technology and a shift to digital/on-line content. Some of the challenges this has created include;

- Less emphasis on paper based news
- 24 hour industry, no established deadlines
- Social media – journalists increasingly have their own feeds on Facebook and Twitter as well as pages
- Public use social media to “break” stories
- Journalist resources dwindling.

With local media changing, the Council has also had to address how it interacts with the local press. This has included;

- Developing a more proactive approach to the news we generate and present as a Council.
- Greater planning and background research.
- All releases include a quote from the relevant Portfolio Holder and/or Leader/Deputy Leader
- A move away from being reactive
- Introducing a more strategic and “joined up” approach

- Identified spokespeople

Social Media

Two-thirds of councils are now using social media, with 77% saying it can lead to savings if used correctly according to a report published by published by BDO in 2014. The report also shows social media has reduced the time spent on other activities, with 63% of councils producing less paper leaflets and 40% seeing a drop in the need to telephone customers.

Another advantage of social media is that it can help to improve the relationships that local authorities have with their service users, if used correctly.

Ashfield District Council currently have 1,310 twitter followers. Snapshot data from 2015 show that 2,645 people have engaged in Ashfield District Council's Facebook Page, with 1,986 page likes and Post Reach of 16,013.

Case Study – Walsall 24

In 2011, Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council undertook a social media project called Walsall 24. This saw the Council using Twitter to show residents exactly what the local authority does over a 24-hour period. The project was run alongside Walsall 24 on the local radio station whereby Listeners heard a pre-recorded interview teams from across the Council with the DJ reading out various tweets throughout the day.

The local newspaper also came on board and created a widget where people could follow the tweets without even being on Twitter. Meanwhile the web team took a sample of what was being posted and put it up on the website throughout the day

Each update was a snippet. Opening up car parks, school crossing patrols, a trading standards operation with police and moving a woodpecker's hide were all tackled. Each one on its could be seen as irrelevant but knitted together they created a pattern of what local government actually does every day.

Following the project, Walsall Council saw their twitter followers rise by 10%, succeeded in communicating what the Council does on a daily basis in an innovative and imaginative way, worked closely with local media outlets such as radio and the local newspaper and also promoted the benefits of social media to different service areas across the Council.

Scope of Ashfield District Council's Communications Team

The Corporate Communication Teams overall purpose is to Promote the Council's activities and to protect and enhance its reputation. Component elements of the service are;

- Media Management
- Social and Digital Media Management
- Reputation Management
- Sponsorship
- Consultation and engagement
- Web Content Management
- Brand Management
- Event Promotion and Support
- Internal Communications
- Partnership Communications
- Crisis Management

- Promotional Campaigns

The team is currently made up of;

- Corporate Communications Manager 1xf/t
- Corporate Communications Officer 1xf/t (currently on 6 month secondment)
- Senior Business Partner p/t (three days a week)

Ashfield District Council Website

The Council website was re-launched in 2014 following a complete overhaul. The website was designed to improve access to information and services and is used for a wide variety of communications. The website <http://www.ashfield-dc.gov.uk/> contains information on the Council and its services as well as latest news and events. Copies of all press releases issued by the Corporate Communications Team are also posted on the site, as well as copies of All About Ashfield, the twice yearly residents newsletter.

It also provides a number of on-line transactional services, allowing those who live, work-in and visit the District to ‘pay for it’, ‘report it’, apply for it’ or ‘find it’. In addition to allowing people to contact the council with their enquiries, suggestions and complaints, the website is also where details of Council meetings, agendas and papers are posted.

The Council has recently appointed a Website Development Officer who is currently reviewing the website with a view to making it easier to navigate around, improve access and ensuring that it is accessible for mobile devices, which currently account for over 60% of Council website interactions.

Residents Newsletter

All About Ashfield was launched in Spring 2014. It is edited in-house by the Corporate Communications Team, designed and printed externally and is delivered to every household in the district twice a year.



All About Ashfield’s USP is that its the only publication which covers ALL of Ashfield. It costs approximately 13p per copy to produce. This compares favourably to our neighbouring local authorities respective newsletters, With All About Ashfield being one of the most economic to produce, with prices ranging for cost per copy in our neighbouring authorities from 16p per copy to

34p per copy.

All about Ashfield also offsets its overall production costs with advertising revenue, which is approximately £2000 per issue. Increasing advertising revenue is an area that could be explored further subject to resource availability.

National Research

The Local Government Knowledge Navigator was a two-year initiative funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), and steered by ESRC, Local Government Association and Society of Local Authority Chief Executives. It was launched in January 2013 with the aim of helping local government to make better use of existing national research derived knowledge and evidence, and to influence future research agendas, programmes and investment.

The research paper, Local Government in the Digital Age, summarises and signposts available research and evidence of good practice that has relevance to inform local government policy and practice in relation to supporting Local Government in the Digital Age, which is currently playing a key role in how local authorities communicate with their communities. It explores the potential benefits for local government of greater use of technology and digital information. Digital technologies and the internet have the potential to:

- a) Reduce costs, increase efficiency and deliver better outcomes
- b) Stimulate and enable innovation and new ways of working
- c) Re-shape the relationship between citizens, communities and local government
- d) Improve communications and partnership working across the public services
- e) Access and exploit a wealth of available data.

Ways in Which the Council Communicates

In order that communities know about the services that Ashfield District Council offers and for the Council to ensure that those services meet – and continue to meet – the needs of local people, the Council has adopted a proactive approach to communication. Communications are delivered by a wide range of methods, these include;

- Face-to-face
- Email
- Telephone
- Document
- Internet/
- Social Media
- Post
- Meeting
- Newsletter

Different forms of communication will appeal to different ages, social groups, and demographics, so it is important to ensure that within reason, all options for increasing and improving communication are considered in order to communicate effectively with everyone.

Why is Communication Important?

Local government communications have, over the past few years, increasingly focused on reputation. The Local Government Association state that Many Councils have in the past failed to

effectively communicate who they are and what they do, furthermore, they comment that the less people know about an organisation, the less likely they are to rate it highly.

Good communications enable a Council to;

- better understand the needs of the community
- raise residents satisfaction, trust and confidence
- raise the profile of Ashfield
- attract businesses and employment to the area
- make best use of technology to innovate and engage with hard to reach groups such as young people
- proactively challenge inaccuracies and misrepresentations that might undermine the brand or integrity of the Council

Next Steps?

In order to progress this review Members of the Panel should consider what further information is required to meet the objectives of the investigation. There are a number of key areas to consider and key officers to engage with.

Some further areas for Members to consider include;

- What do we do well?
- What needs improving?
- Current improvement activity (website / Social Media)
- Residents feedback on improving communications
- Internal communications (Councillor/Officer)

In attendance at this meeting will be the Corporate Communications Manager. Further interviews for Members currently being planned include;

- Portfolio Holder
- Web Development Officer
- Corporate Performance Manager
- Equality and Diversity Officer

Members are asked to consider further expert witnesses or interviews to help progress this review.

6. IMPLICATIONS

Corporate Plan:

The report reflects the following principles in the Corporate Plan:

- A dynamic, productive, competitive and rewarding local economy
- Community responsibility for an attractive and safe environment
- Stronger and more resilient communities where people want to live, work, play and be involved
- Ashfield District Council is an enabler of local leadership in Ashfield

Legal:

There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report. Any such implications discussed as part of the review process will be informed by legal advice and involvement.

Financial:

There are no immediate financial implications arising from this report. Any financial implications discussed as part of the review process will be informed by Finance advice and involvement.

Health and Well-Being / Environmental Management and Sustainability:

There are no Health and Well-Being / Environmental Management and Sustainability implications contained in this report

Human Resources:

There are no immediate human resource implications arising from this report.

Diversity/Equality:

Equality / Diversity issues relating to this review will be considered as part of any work undertaken.

Community Safety:

There are no community Safety implications contained in this report

Other Implications:

There are no immediate Unison implications contained within this report.

REPORT AUTHOR AND CONTACT OFFICER

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Ruth Dennis,

ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (GOVERNANCE) & MONITORING OFFICER

Appendix A – Draft Terms of Reference

Scrutiny Review

To undertake a review of effective communication tools and the expectations of residents in accessing information to ensure that the Council continues to communicate in the most effective and efficient way possible.

Objective

To gain an understanding of current communication methods used by the Council, examine what works well and consider any areas for improvement.

Methodology

- **Interviews**

Corporate Communications Manager
Corporate Performance Manager
Web Development Officer
Portfolio Holder
Residents

- **Research**

Current methods for Communication
Current communication statistics
National research / best practice

Timescale

3 formal meetings of Panel - September 2015 – January 2016
Informal interviews – November – December 2015

Further Comments