

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS
TASK AND FINISH GROUP

16 March 2006

Present:

Councillor C Malpas
Councillor A Simpson

Chair

Thomas Hall
Lindsey Ambrose

Corporate Manager
Area Partnerships and Forums
Co-Ordinator
Consortium

Margaret Martin

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Eldred, Hill, Roy and Glynane.

At this point, the Chair proposed that a Focus Group be held for members of the public and Parish Council representatives. Questions around the purpose of this Group would be put to the Focus Group: -

To be able to demonstrate that the Council consults and involves more residents and that the residents are satisfied with their levels of involvement.

All individuals and organisations on the Area Partnership and Forums distribution lists would be invited to attend. Parish Councillors and clerks would also be sent an invite. A poster would be produced promoting the Focus Groups, inviting attendees. Questionnaires would be sent out with the invitation.

The Focus Group would be held in the Great Hall on: -

Thursday 20th April 2006

6pm to 8pm and

Friday 21st April 2006

2pm to 4pm

The Group held a discussion about the possibility of utilising the Citizens' Panel instead of holding a Focus Group. The Citizens' Panel was relatively small but was fairly represented and could be used as a typical view of Northampton. A sample size was 800. BMG carried out the research using methods such as a telephone survey. A cost would be incurred if the Citizens' Panel was used.

Due to cost implications, the Group decided to hold the Focus Groups on 20th and 21st April rather than use the Citizens' Panel. At its next meeting, the format for the Focus Groups and the questionnaire would be finalised.

- Agreed:**
- (1) That the Focus Group be held on: -
Thursday 20th April 2006 6pm to 8pm and
Friday 21st April 2006 2pm to 4pm
 - (2) That all individuals and organisations on the Area Partnership and Forums distribution lists be invited to attend. Parish Councillors and clerks to be sent an invite. Questionnaires to be sent out with the invitation.
 - (3) That a poster be produced promoting the Focus Groups, inviting attendees. Questionnaires would be sent out with the invitation.

2 Declaration of Interest

There were none.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2006 were agreed as a true record.

4 Review of Desktop Research

Councillor Simpson confirmed that he had carried out desktop research on the City of Westminster Council. Although he perceived NBC's website to be very good, he felt that Westminster's navigation was better structured. NBC's website was still very departmentalised and consisted of jargon. Westminster published a questionnaire on its website '*what do you think of the Council and its website.*' It might be beneficial to ascertain how many hits the website got and how many questionnaires were completed. At the top of the homepage, different languages were detailed and the user could click on the link to be directed to the relevant language. Westminster had a one-city vision for the Council – branding Westminster as one city. Councillor Simpson supported the branding, commenting that it reinforced this Task and Finish Group's discussions on issues such as branding.

L Ambrose circulated information regarding Croydon's Neighbourhood Partnerships. The Council had a target to achieve an additional 5% attendance at its Neighbourhood Partnerships over the year.

5 Consultation Protocol

The consultation document – Consultation Guidance – A 'How to' Guide was circulated.

6 Visit to Best Practice Local Authority

A visit had been arranged to the London Borough of Haringey (Neighbourhood Management Services) on Tuesday 21 March at 11.00am. The Group suggested questions to be put to Haringey Council: -

- How do you ensure that ALL services are engaging with citizens/communities?
- How do you evaluate success of engagement/consultation initiatives?
- What gets done with the outputs of these exercises?
- How are other agencies involved?
- What resources do you put into these activities?
- How do you feed information about the results back to those involved/consulted?
- What arrangements do you have for locality-based or sector-based engagement (i.e. parallel to our partnerships and forums)?
- What steps did you take to become a Beacon Council – did you have a plan?
- How much consultation do you do and in what format?
- What do you see as the key consultation method?
- How do you measure citizen engagement?
- Do you have a separate budget for consultation?
- Do you have dedicated council staff for Community Involvement and does this cover consultation?
- What role do councillors play in this and how are they supported?
- How does the Communications Officer role work within the Council – is there a team of people undertaking this role?
- How do you ensure your consultation is representative of your community?
- How do you measure you are satisfied with the level of engagement?
- What do you consider the risks are to receiving good, effective engagement?
- What is the biggest consultation you have run and held?

Councillors suggested that the timescale of this Group be extended to include the results of the Focus Groups. It was envisaged that a further two meetings would be required. At the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Malpas would inform Councillors that the Group would endeavour to complete its findings, conclusions and recommendations by Annual Council with its final report to the first Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the new Municipal Year on 14 June 2006.

Action:

- (1) That two additional meetings be programmed into the Group's schedule of meetings.
- (2) That Councillor Malpas informs the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its next meeting that the Group had extended its timescale and would endeavour to complete its findings, conclusions and recommendations by Annual Council, with its final report to the first

Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the new Municipal
Year on 14 June 2006.

7 Next Meetings

The next meeting would be held on 30th March (Gallery Room) commencing at 6.15pm. The agenda would include:

- Feedback from the visit to the London Borough of Haringey
- Format and questionnaire for the Focus Group

27 April 2006 commencing at 6.15pm (Old Leader's Office). The agenda would include:

- Feedback from the Focus Group
- Consideration of the evidence for the Chair's report

4 May 2006 commencing at 6.15pm (Holding Room). The agenda would include: -

- Consideration of the Chair's draft report.

The meeting concluded at 7:20pm