

ORGANISATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 16 JANUARY 2019

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ORGANISATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 16 JANUARY 2019

Present:

Councillor B Wright..... in the Chair
Councillor J Barry
“ B Ridgway
Councillor L Robinson
“ R Welton

Also Present

Councillor S Fritchley – Bolsover District Council (for Min No 479)
S Chambers – Communications and Marketing Manager (for Min No 479)
P Bramley – Derbyshire Times Editor (for Min No 479)
L Shaw – Managing Director – Rykneld Homes (for Min No 479)
S Veerman – Overview and Scrutiny Manager
A Maher – Governance Officer
D Stanton – Governance Officer

475 Appointment of Chair for the Meeting

RESOLVED – That Councillor B Wright be appointed Chair for the meeting.

476 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors T Mansbridge, D Skinner and A Dale.

477 Declarations of Interest

Members were requested to declare the existence and nature of any disclosable pecuniary interest and/or other interest, not already on their register of interests, in any item on the agenda and withdraw from the meeting at the appropriate time.

478 Minutes of Last Meeting

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of the Organisation Scrutiny Committee held on 7 November 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

479 Scrutiny Review – Communication and Marketing

Members were reminded that the purpose of the scrutiny review was to look into the communications and marketing policies of the Council, to ensure the service was effective.

The Committee heard from the Communications and Marketing Manager, and the Portfolio Holder for Communications at Bolsover District Council (BDC). They were followed by the editor of the Derbyshire Times, and then the Managing Director of Rykneld Homes. They were each asked to address a series of questions.

Communications and Marketing Manager / Portfolio Holder for Communications at Bolsover District Council

(1) What is your role in this area and how does it contribute to effective communications?

The Communications and Marketing Manager informed the Committee that the majority of communications came through him, and that included a variety of media including Council newspaper, websites and social media.

The Portfolio Holder for Communications at BDC recalled his previous experiences at local newspapers. Members noted that it was crucial to use time, energy and a variety of different media in order to get a message across and widen the audience. The Committee heard about the different methods used by BDC, including 'BDCTV', and the District Parish Gazette which had been well received.

(2) What methods do we use to communicate and which are the most effective?

Members were informed that investment into communications at BDC was significantly higher than that at North East Derbyshire District Council (NEDDC), and that the additional funding resulted in better communications. The Committee were given examples of media used at BDC, such as 'BDCTV' which was set to be launched in March, and would be based on external stories from the public. The Portfolio holder for Communications at Bolsover put forward a variety of ways in which external communications took place at BDC, and could be used at NEDDC.

Members discussed the various formats that could be used for internal and external communications in order to promote the District, and get people 'out and about' in the community.

- (3) How do we ensure the information provided is accessible, up to date, and accurate on our various methods both internally and externally?

It was stated that the best way to keep information up to date was by keeping on top of it all. Members noted that resourcing was higher at BDC, where there was additional full time staff. The Committee was informed that replicating this at NEDDC would be beneficial, but would require additional resourcing.

- (4) How effective do you think our communication to internal employees is?

The Communications and Marketing Manager advised Members that it was generally effective. However concerns were raised regarding information passed down from some officers at the last minute, which was resulting in little preparation time for the communications department.

Members discussed communications being a 'two-way street', and enquired about departments being aware of potential good stories that should be shared.

- (5) How do we measure performance?

Overall, performance was difficult to measure. Both the officer and Councillor agreed that communications needed to hit the right people, and that engaging with the local community by using media such as the District Parish Gazette, allowed officers to get a sense of whether or not the target audience was being hit. Members were informed about the praise the BDC team were receiving from local businesses and members of the public. The Committee also discussed how Councillors could play a role by inviting feedback from constituents.

- (6) How do we identify and understand what customers want from us?

The Communications and Marketing Manager stated that at BDC there was a clear plan in place to ensure customer needs were met, and that the right communications were sent out to hit the right people. The Portfolio Holder for Communications at BDC believed that by telling residents the Council provided a service, this in turn would help identify customer needs. Members noted that a Citizens Panel had also been previously used.

- (7) What steps do we take to ensure people whose first language is not English and people with disabilities can access our communications?

The officer advised the Committee that the communications service works with the equalities officer in order to identify the four main global languages, and then provide a translation if requested to online content such as on the website or on YouTube. This was done by contacting the language line. There was also braille and higher font available for those who were visually impaired.

Members discussed the possibility of sign language being used on some of the online video content, and the officer agreed that whilst this would be beneficial, it is ultimately a matter of appropriate resourcing.

(8) *Do we share any work in this area with partners?*

The Portfolio Holder for Communications at BDC indicated that work with Parish Councils had increased significantly over the past few years. Members acknowledged that this work had proved highly beneficial, as information regarding events could be shared more easily. The Communications and Marketing Manager also exemplified some of the partnerships at BDC, such as the tourism partnership that helped the Council promote some of the Districts main attractions, and a partnership team that worked with the NHS.

The Councillor recalled an interview in the Dronfield Eye involving the Leader of the Council, Graham Baxter MBE, in regards to HS2. He commented that interviews and partnerships with the press can prove an effective form of communication with the public, and encouraged more Members to use those opportunities.

(9) *Have you any suggestions for how the service could be improved?*

Both the officer and Councillor reiterated that more resources would allow the communications department to become more effective.

The Committee discussed how building better relationships between Members and officers at NEDDC would prove beneficial and promote better communication. Contrasts were made with BDC, with particular attention being drawn to the 'open plan' layout of offices at the Arc, compared to the structured offices at Mill Lane. It was felt that this had potentially resulted in some Councillors being hesitant to ask for advice and guidance.

The officer and Councillor then left the meeting.

Editor of the Derbyshire Times

(1) *What do you want from our communication/relationship with your organisation?*

The Derbyshire Times Editor explained that he wanted a mutually beneficial relationship, and that effective communication is a 'two-way street'. Members were made aware of recent stories in the Derbyshire Times involving the Authority, and the Editor stated that the Council had missed a series of opportunities to respond to comments made by other individuals and organisations. Members acknowledged that the Derbyshire Times was Derbyshire's biggest media platform, and thus a better relationship would enhance the Council's communication with local residents.

(2) *Are we meeting this expectation, and if not how could we improve this?*

It was suggested to Members that there was room for improvement. The Committee discussed the possibility of pre-scheduled meetings between representatives of the Derbyshire Times and the communications department in order to discuss events on the horizon. It was agreed that this would be beneficial.

Members made enquiries in regards to the press releases of other Authorities. It was stated that the Derbyshire Times is apolitical, and as such treats all Council's equally regardless of the administration, and that they give all Authorities the opportunity to respond.

The Committee heard that organisations were attempting to 'do more with less', and that this was changing the nature of news. It was outlined that there was less specialisation, and the consequence of this is that some people aren't always available to comment. Members were informed that around 100,000 people buy a physical copy of the Derbyshire Times every week. However, there was over 1.3 million monthly hits online. It was stated that this had resulted in news being updated 24/7, rather than in the form of a weekly paper. The Derbyshire Times Editor indicated that he felt it was important the Council recognise this, so they could respond accordingly.

Members discussed the possibility of further training, so that the Council could communicate more effectively to the local press.

(3) *What do you think of the Councils communication with the public?*

It was suggested that the Council should embrace modern technologies as much as it could, such as social media as this tends to be updated 24/7. Particular attention was drawn to Facebook and the constant sharing of articles. The Derbyshire Times Editor explained that the majority of its website hits were channelled through Facebook.

(4) *Have you any suggestions for how the service could be improved?*

The Derbyshire Times Editor reiterated that he felt the Council should be responding to 'knocking stories' when approached by the Derbyshire Times, and that responding to comments could improve the Authority's image. He felt that owning up to mistakes often earned more points with the public.

The Derbyshire Times Editor repeated his previous suggestions of meetings between representatives of the Derbyshire Times and the communications department, and the benefits this could bring.

- (5) *Is there anything else you would like to tell us?*

He concluded that he was happy to have more dialogue with the Council on improving communication between the two parties. Members discussed the importance of trust when it came to sharing important pieces of information, and the Committee reaffirmed its desire to conduct further training.

The Derbyshire Times Editor then left the meeting.

Managing Director – Rykneld Homes

- (1) *What is your role in this area and how does it contribute to effective communications?*

The officer stated that communications was a part of everything Rykneld Homes did. The Committee heard that staff were fully conscious about its importance, and that effective communication helped Rykneld Homes achieve its corporate plan.

- (2) *What methods do we use to communicate and which are the most effective?*

The Managing Director listed a variety of media including magazines, websites, customer portals, text messaging and consultations. She felt that face-to-face communication tended to be most effective, especially when dealing with sensitive issues.

The importance of using a variety of media was discussed, in order to effectively target different audiences. The Committee heard about YouTube videos that younger people tended to use if there was 'quick-fix' issues. It was stated that this had saved resources. Members noted that there had been over 138,000 hits on the website last year.

- (3) *How do we ensure the information provided is accessible, up to date, and accurate on our various methods both internally and externally?*

Members noted that Rykneld Homes regularly updated both its internal and external information, such as Rykneld Homes' business plan that was updated every year, an annual customer report and review, and also a monthly performance report.

The officer explained that the best way to ensure that information was up to date was by updating it constantly and in real time. It was outlined to the Committee that all mobile housing management staff would be online from February, so that they could update on the go.

- (4) *How effective do you think our communication to internal employees is?*

Overall, communications to internal employees was good. The officer referred to the 'Rykneld Times' that was published every quarter. This

publication was available to all staff, and provided information about other employees, the various support available, and general health and wellbeing matters.

(5) *How do we measure performance?*

The Managing Director stated that Rykneld Homes uses standard performance indicators, which were all on target. There was also an employee satisfaction survey used which hit a 90% response rate. The Committee heard that the team had recently won a 'customer excellence award'.

(6) *How do we identify and understand what customers want from us?*

The officer explained that Rykneld Homes used a tenant scrutiny panel, which provided critical feedback to the management team. There was also tenant groups, resident groups, and regular consultation with Councillors, communities and residents.

(7) *What steps do we take to ensure people whose first language is not English and people with disabilities can access our communications?*

The Committee heard that there was a translation service for residents who do not speak English. Members noted that this service was rarely used due to the small number of foreign nationals who lived in the District.

There was also braille and higher font available for those who were visually impaired.

(8) *Do we share any work in this area with partners?*

The officer advised that due to the joint partnership, Rykneld Homes worked very closely with NEDDC. The Housing Overview Group allowed key information to be shared and was highly productive. She also detailed other close partners such as Derbyshire County Council, Derbyshire Homes, and Nottingham City Homes.

(9) *Have you any suggestions for how the service could be improved?*

The officer reiterated that the partnership worked well at the top of the organisation, and that significant improvements had been made at Rykneld Homes to focus on effective communications. She felt that perhaps the processes were embedded more at Rykneld Homes than NEDDC.

(10) *Is there anything else you would like to tell us?*

The officer concluded by reaffirming Rykneld's commitment to provide an excellent customer service, and that the excellent communications it demonstrated was the result of a long term plan in place.

The officer then left the meeting.

480 List of Key Decisions – Issue No 81

The Committee considered Issue No 81 of the List of Key Decisions which set out the major decisions being taken over the next few months.

RESOLVED – That the list of Key Decisions, Issue No 81, be noted.

481 Work Programme

The Committee considered the Work Programme for the Organisation Scrutiny Committee 2018/19, which set out the items that the Committee would consider over the forthcoming year.

RESOLVED – That the Committee noted its work programme for the 2018/19 municipal year.

482 Additional Urgent Items

There were no additional urgent items for discussion at this meeting.

483 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next scheduled meeting of the Organisation Scrutiny Committee is 6 March 2019.
