

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

10 October 2007

COMMUNICATIONS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

1. The Communications Overview and Scrutiny Committee has met once since the last full Council meeting.

In-depth topics

Engaging with Hard to Reach Groups

2. The Working Group on Engaging Hard to Reach Groups, led by Cllr Bill Hoult, has now concluded its work and the report was presented and approved by the Executive on 25 September 2007.
3. The driving force for this exercise was the recognition that everyone should have a voice in how services are shaped and delivered and that the Council needs to reach out and listen to the communities it serves. The objective was to identify those local people who, for a variety of reasons, have more difficulty in getting their voices heard. We were concerned that if their voices aren't heard by us, that this may result in their needs not being taken into account in the Council's policy development, service planning and delivery and decision making process.
4. The review looked at a number of groups including BME communities, migrant workers, vulnerable client groups, travellers, young people, disabled people, older people and people with mental health problems.
5. The Working Party were impressed with examples of good practice of engaging with hard to reach groups and felt that what is needed is a commitment and mechanism to share these examples. The review itself has helped to raise awareness of good practice and has encouraged wider implementation. However there is a lack of co-ordination which has led to some groups being over consulted whilst others were missed out. We anticipate that the consultation database which is under development will help, in part, to address this.
6. The Working Party has made a number of recommendations which include the further development of the voluntary and community sector as 'message takers' and exploring the potential of new communication methods to support the needs of hard to reach groups such as video conferencing be considered. The Working Party has also recommended that the widening provision of bilingual speakers to enable migrant workers to understand important information is explored and this supports the recommendations made by the Safe and Sustainable Overview and Scrutiny Committee on migrant workers. We will be monitoring the progress of these recommendations throughout the coming year.

Improving Communication with Elected members

7. At our last meeting, the Communications Strategy “Towards more effective communication” was presented by Ben Hayes and one of the key actions identified within this is to:
“Ensure high quality and effective communications are delivered in the most appropriate way for the target audience.”
8. This has highlighted the need to better define and segment both internal and external audiences and to undertake research into developing the most effective communication methods for each target group. This committee is ideally placed to undertake some of this research and a working group is currently being established to focus, in the first instance, on how to improve communication with elected members of the County Council.
9. The objectives of the review are:
 - i. To identify how communication with members can be made more effective
 - ii. To make recommendations on how communication can be improved to ensure better targeting and dissemination of information to members
 - iii. To apply the learning from this initial stage of this review to identify and research other target audiences.
10. We are in the process of planning how to conduct our research and would ask for the co-operation of all members with our research activities.

Overview and monitoring

11. At its meeting on 7 September the Committee considered a number of reports including:
Communications strategy – “Towards more effective communication”
12. Ben Hayes presented this and outlined the key priorities for action which included the work to define and segment internal and external audiences and the building of relationships with key editors and journalists. We were encouraged by this focused and pro-active approach which is being developed as part of this strategy and look forward to seeing this work progress.
Contact Centre Development
13. Members received an update from the Assistant Chief Executive Policy Performance and Partnerships on the progress of the contact centre. The use of an 030 phone number was explained as part of the future service was highlighted and members have asked to be kept informed on progress with acquiring 030 numbers.

**County Councillor Ron Haigh
Chairman – Communications Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

1st October 2007