

CABINET MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL – 20TH JULY 2009

Agenda Item 8(i)

CABINET MEMBER: Cllr Mrs Joanne Beavis**CABINET PORTFOLIO: Customers & Communication**

Portfolio covers:-

- Member Development
- Rural and Locality (Place Shaping) Development
- External Communications and Marketing Strategy
- Customer Access Strategy
- Democratic Support
- Corporate Consultation
- Customer Standards and Relationships

REPORT COVERS ACTIVITY DURING PERIOD COMMENCING 23RD JUNE 2009 AND ENDING 20TH JULY 2009**MEMBER DEVELOPMENT**

ICT (Information Communication Technology) has been embraced by a large number of Members over the past few years but at our recent meeting of the Local Government Reform Cabinet Sub-Group we agreed that Members must embrace some of the new processes available to us.

OWA (Outlook Web Access). Currently only 16 members use OWA. OWA allows Members to take control of their own Council email accounts and frees up time for our Law and Governance department. The training is simple and you can manage your Council email accounts from your own PC using a secure password.

The DWP (Department of Work and Pensions) requires us to comply with a number of new security measurements across the organisation, including new securities for Members. One of the security measures means that when using OWA Members will have to change their secure password on a monthly basis – again, I found the training helpful.

Member support for OWA will be starting at the end of July 2009 and it is hoped to have all Members transferred to the new system by 30th September 2009.

OWA will be promoted to all Members including those who currently do not have ICT skills.

MEMBER WEBSITE

A new website has been created for Members. The website will enable Members to improve their access to information and support us to perform our role as District Representatives.

A small working group has been established comprising of myself, as Cabinet Member, and a representative from each political group. The group will work with the Member Service Manager to launch the website and monitor its future development.

It is hoped that the amount of paper being distributed to Members could be reduced once the website and timely links have been established.

THE MEMBER DEVELOPMENT CHARTER MARK

The purpose of the Charter is to raise the profile of Member Development and to encourage Members to take up the development opportunities that are available to them. I am supportive of the process in attaining the Charter Mark and I will bring forward an update on how, together, we can achieve the Charter Mark. Members would need to be prepared to be active and involved in preparing for the assessment.

RURAL AND LOCALITY (PLACE SHAPING) DEVELOPMENT

LOCAL COMMITTEE CONSULTATION EVENT

By now all of the Local Committees would have discussed the Local Committee Consultation Event. This has been widely supported by you all. I believe that the event will offer the chance for our local residents, groups, partnerships and stakeholders to come together and discuss the issues that really do matter in our communities. Each Committee will, no doubt, come up with different priorities and action plans for 2010/11. I will look forward to watching this process and to working with your chosen Member Champion to bring forward these events. Cllr David Bebb will be heading up this project.

PARISH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANS

Community Led Planning has the potential to act as a powerful demonstration of community needs, opinions and involvement. It can also energise and mobilize people to get involved within their community and local authority. Braintree is leading the way in Essex with 29 plans started and 19 completed.

A step by step guide to developing Parish Plans will soon be produced and a programme for their creation, to help empower our communities, will be considered at all three Local committees. I have been impressed by the support that is being offered in respect of Parish and Neighbourhood Plans by Greenfields Community Housing. I am currently supporting a project in Castle Hedingham being led by Greenfields.

VILLAGE AGENTS

The Rural Community Council of Essex hosted the Village Agent's Conference at Towerlands on the 17th June. The Village Agents are for the rural areas only and will look after a cluster of villages. They will place a personal and friendly contact in the heart of rural communities principally to help, support and advise elderly and vulnerable people, particularly those who are isolated.

The Village Agents will work in partnership with partner agencies to inform rural residents of the appropriate agencies and statutory bodies to help them with general well being, access to services and will decrease social isolation.

THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES ACT

The Sustainable Communities Act became law in October 2007 with full cross party support. The Act provides a channel for local people to ask central government through their local council to take action on specific issues to promote the sustainability of their communities. I made a recommendation from Cabinet to debate this issue at the July Full Council Meeting. I believe the act is great news. For the first time we have an act that gives local government and local communities the power to drive central government actions and policy to help support local people and sustainable communities. I look forward to hearing your views. Google: The Sustainable Communities Act for more information on the act.

THE COMMUNITY ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS 2009/10

The awards are to celebrate those who have made an outstanding contribution to the community and to improving the quality of life for others by giving their time, support and care. So often these people are the unsung heroes of our communities who work tirelessly to bring about positive change and support others in his or her community. They are a source of inspiration and I will look forward to working through the applications.

Please do let me know about your Community Heroes.

THE CONTACT MAGAZINE

The “new look” Contact Magazine is out and I hope that you will agree it looks vibrant, interesting and is packed with a host of local stories and events as well as information about the council. Please do give me your feedback. It is valued and it will help us to shape future issues.

CORPORATE CONSULTATION

THE PLACE SURVEY RESULTS – 2008

The place survey was run for the first time between September and December 2008 to provide information on people’s perceptions of their local area and the local services that they receive. The survey collects information on 18 National Indicators (NI’s) which are used to measure local government performance.

2,900 surveys were sent out to district addresses and 1,355 completed surveys were returned. Some key findings:

(NI5) 85% of the people who responded were satisfied with their local area as a place to live.

(NI2) 60.9% felt that they belonged to their immediate local area.

(NI 138) Of those surveyed 86.2%, aged 65 or over, were satisfied with both their home and neighbourhood.

(NI4) 30.6% felt that they could influence decisions affecting their local area.

The above indicator is disappointing but, I believe, we are already addressing this issue with the creation of the Local Committees and in particular the September Local Committee Consultation Events. The Peoples Panel will also allow for an opportunity for local people to raise issues that affect their communities.

I will be bringing a detailed report of the Place Survey results to the September Cabinet.

THE PEOPLES PANEL

Recruitment has continued, focussing on filling the gaps in the composition of the group recruited to date. Further analysis is being undertaken to effect an appropriate distribution demographically and geographically across the district. In this respect, all Members are in a strong position to support this initiative to ensure that their wards are adequately represented. Proposal: Each Ward Member is asked to work, as appropriate with their town or parish council/local community, to recruit 6 ward constituents by September the 1st.

Full details of the Peoples Panel are available from Cllr David Bebb or the council’s website where you can download an application form.

FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE CONTENTS OF THIS REPORT CAN BE OBTAINED BY CONTACTING:

Cllr Mrs Jo Beavis on 01371 850710 or 07771984365. Email: jo.beavis@braintree.gov.uk

