

# **COUNCIL BUSINESS COMMITTEE**

## **Special Council Meeting 2009 15<sup>th</sup> January 2009**

### **Report of Head of Democratic Services**

#### **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To allow Members to consider the plans for a Special Council Meeting in 2009.

**This report is public**

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (1) That Members consider the options and should it be agreed to hold a Special Council meeting in 2009, authorise the Head of Democratic Services to commence arrangements and develop proposals for this year's event.**
- (2) That, subject to the decision in (1) above, a progress report be submitted to a future meeting of Council Business Committee setting out proposals for the event and any financial implications.**

#### **1.0 Report**

Members may recall that in October 2008, the Special Council meeting in Lancaster Town Hall was utilized to consult young people on the Children and Young People Engagement Strategy that is being created for the Council.

The day was based on the contents of the Lancashire Children and Young People's Charter which was adopted by the Council in January 2006. The Charter contains 13 points to enable engagement with children and young people to be effective and meaningful.

To begin the day, 'getting to know you' sessions were held as only 2/3 young people from each school attended. The young people were then split into small groups and undertook a skills audit to assess the strengths of the group. Each Group was then be given 2 or 3 of the themes of the Charter to consider and identify how each theme could be implemented locally. The groups then devised a method of how to communicate with Members in the afternoon session.

It was initially envisaged that Members would arrive at 3.00 pm and would be split into groups which would be facilitated by the young people. Members would then have considered the themes included in the Charter and how these relate specifically to Lancaster.

On the day the young people decided that they would rather present their findings to the Councillors in theatre style seating by way of a presentation.

### Survey of Members

(A copy of the results of the evaluation on last year's Special Council meeting can be found at Appendix A.)

A survey of Members to assess the success of the event was undertaken and the views of Members were mixed – 44% agreed the event was useful for the young people in terms of a consultation event, 25% thought not and 31% were unsure.

In terms of the event being useful as a Special Council meeting, 67% agreed that it was useful with 22% disagreeing.

Comparing the event with the previous years Special Council meeting, 50% of Members found the meeting more useful with 36% not agreeing.

With regard to the format of the event, 53% of Councillors felt it the format did not work with 40% agreeing it did.

It is clear from the evaluation that Members would have preferred to interact with the young people and would have felt the Special Council meeting would have been a greater success if this had been so. With the young people deciding on the day how to report back to Members on their work, this could not have been decided upon beforehand, but it is clear that Members would have preferred a more 'hands on' approach.

## **2.0 Proposal Details**

Members will recall that in March 2008 the Committee resolved :

*'That in future years the October meeting of Council shall be timetabled to be in Local Democracy Week and that meeting shall be pre-designated as the 'Special Council meeting'.*

The date for 2009 will therefore be 14<sup>th</sup> October, this will be taken into account in formulating the annual timetable.

As the meeting will take place in Local Democracy Week in October, the Committee is requested to consider a suitable theme for Special Council 2009 to enable the planning to commence as soon as possible.

Since the format of the previous years' Special Council meetings focusing on a consultation topic, have worked well in many respects, Members may wish to continue with an event in a similar format possibly at a venue such as the Platform which was felt to be ideal the previous year.

A theme could be determined by contacting Service Heads to obtain information on any topics for consultation later this year or suggestions for other items of particular interest to Council taxpayers. In choosing a topic Members should have in mind the Council's priorities for the forthcoming year and ensure that the Special meeting is relevant in that context.

### **3.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)**

- (1) To hold the Special Council meeting in October 2009, following a similar format to 2008 on a topic to be determined.
- (2) To hold the Special Council meeting in October 2009, experimenting with a different format in accordance with the Constitution, as set out below:
  - Consideration of a single topic
  - Hearing of an external speaker
  - Meeting in assembly or forum
  - Consideration of a local, regional or national issue
  - Or other purpose to be determined by the Council Business Committee
- (3) To cancel the annual Special Council meeting for 2009 as a cost-cutting exercise in view of the Council's current financial position.

### **4.0 Officer Preferred Option**

Should Members wish to hold a Special Council meeting in 2009, following the relative success of the event in 2008 the officer preferred option is Option 1, subject to a suitable topic being identified which is relevant in the context of the Council's priorities. This would enable the event to be run on similar lines but with improvements in light of lessons learnt in 2008.

### **5.0 Conclusion**

Work will need to be done to ensure that the event is sufficiently focussed and relates to the Corporate Plan.

#### **CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

**(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)**

Whilst there are no implications arising directly from this report, there are clearly issues relating to diversity, sustainability and rural proofing that will need to be addressed in both planning the event and the topic under consideration.

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

At this conceptual stage costings have not been obtained. Subject to a decision at this meeting to hold a 2009 event and an indication of the preferred format, officers will fully cost the event, however it is expected that the event as envisaged will be achieved from within existing budgets.

Whilst the cost of the Special Council meetings have been contained within existing budgets since their inception in 2006, there has been a cost of up to £700 from the Democratic Representation budget and in the past 2 years there has also been a cost to the Service utilising the event as part of their consultation process. Not holding the event in 2009 would therefore provide an opportunity for savings to the Council's budget as a whole.

**SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

**LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

The Council's Constitution sets out the options for Council Business Committee to designate a Special Council meeting of Council in Council Procedure Rule 4.

**MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

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## **Feedback from Councillors on Special Council Meeting October 2008**

(1) *Do you think the young people found the event useful in terms of a consultation event ?*

- I don't know as there was no feedback from them
- Yes
- Not sure what they made of Councillors' contribution.
- I thought the event was well played out, and they had obviously put a lot of thought into their reports.
- Can't answer for the young people.
- Yes - There was an air of mild frustration among some of the young people I felt, perhaps especially towards the end of the meeting – perhaps this is because some assume we will only pay lip service to acting on their views- clearly it's down to the Council to prove we are serious about consulting them and acting on what we hear. The meeting agenda mentioned that at the meeting open Councillors would sit in small groups to discuss the Charter with the young people – this didn't happen and seems to have been a wasted opportunity for Cllrs to hear 'straight from the horses mouth'. Was there a particular reason for the change of plan?
- Yes
- Difficult to say. I suspect that they enjoyed presenting their stuff to councillors.
- Probably the kids felt the views of the most vocal kids in the chamber were listened to.
- the majority of the day was great well done to Linda and her team. However, the councillors were poorly behaved and did not give a good impression of themselves. A question should be a question and not a speech about what they think. Having said they did not like be patronised I think many councillors did just that.
- No
- Not sure about the consultation side they made a presentation we said thank you.
- As I, and I presume all other councillors were not involved with the young people whilst they held their consultation, I have no idea whether they found it useful, what help, guidance or other input they had from whoever facilitated or were otherwise involved in the event, or even if all or any of those advisors/facilitators have/had any knowledge or experience of local government and elected members. I was surprised to find that the young people asked for more knowledge and information about councillors and how they make decisions and yet many were elected onto the Youth Council and or their school councils! Much of what they asked for should be being addressed through their school curriculum, youth workers, Youth Council etc.
- Yes
- Think so
- it appeared not to be a consultation but a series of demands

(2) *Did you find the event useful as a Special Council meeting?*

- No, very disappointing as our instructions were that we would sit at the tables to discuss the outcomes
- Yes
- Yes
- I thought it made a change, from the usual sitting around tables, and it was most interesting listening to the points made that they felt they had no teeth to get their views over.
- The event was O.K. but could have been better if we had talked to them in groups
- Yes both in being reminded again of what a hugely valuable asset our District's young people are and in there being an opportunity for Cllr's with many different views and agenda to hear directly from young people about their wishes.
- Yes
- Yes
- I think it could be very useful
- very - it opened my eyes to the positive attitude of many young people and the appalling reaction they get from their elders.
- Yes
- Yes
- No
- It made for a finish but we did not interact with our guests
- No. There was no debate, either amongst the councillors or with the young people, no opportunity for constructive answers to councillors' questions, no direct involvement between the young people and councillors (see above), no explanation of how and where funding comes from and how it is allocated. It's OK for any one group to say they want what they think they should have but all policies and funding have to be balanced with regard to all sectors of the community and take in certain responsibilities as well.
- Not much
- Yes
- No

(3) *Did you find the event to be more useful than the previous year?*

- No
- Equally
- YES - this was the best special meeting that we have had
- I thought the setting was better, so they did not feel isolated as we faced each other across the room.
- Slightly better than last year.
- Yes
- Yes
- Yes
- No
- Not a lot of difference still very formal.
- No I found it a waste of time, resources and expectations
- Yes
- Yes
- No

(4) *Do you feel the format worked?*

- Not the part where councillors were involved
- Yes
- Would have liked to have had time to talk informally with the young people
- I also thought the format worked better as they had their say first, and were not made to feel intimidated as we kept a low profile, until the question period.
- Yes
- Yes
- The written briefing for the meeting said that one councillor would be on one table with a few kids. That way, we would have been able to get the views of the shy, less vocal kids, as well as the two or three who spoke up. It would have broken the ice, and, if you then have the final 15 minutes or so as a session with one group facing off against the other
- No - don't let councillors make speeches
- I thought the format was o.k. but I would have liked to be with them when they were having their discussions during the day so I could have had more interaction with them.
- No
- I am not sure the young people thought us very relevant.[we trooped in made some general statements and left!]
- No
- yes with possibly the councillors mingling with the young people
- yes- but needed better question /answer session - councillors did not help with this.
- No

(5) *Any other comments?*

- Why was the format changed and by whom?
- The young people threw up all sorts of criticism and say they want to be 'in' on decision making, why were they therefore not seeking information in order to do this. Leaflet drops to all houses in ward – not 1 young person contacts or comes to residents meetings. Should we be entering schools like police and other services on a regular basis?
- I was quite surprised that only one Hand and went up, about knowing Who your Local Councillor was. Do you think it is because their Parents don't vote? I felt when they spoke about not being taken notice of was surely down to the parents not explaining how the council works not literally, but in simple terms, and also they were not aware of the Post of Cabinet Member for children and young people. I was surprised that the schools would not have done a bit of research first, knowing this was coming up in the Town Hall.
- Also it showed that their parent were probably not explaining how important it is to vote, with them not knowing who their local councillors were, I believe it showed a slight lack of communication within the family.
- The hard work and contributions of all the officers involved in this event and recent Local Democracy Week events has been excellent. Well done and thank you.
- I found that by listening to the young people on the day that they came across very well in expressing their ideas and suggestions to the council.
- Why was the format changed?
- I am sure a lot of good work went on before we arrived which was useful We [elected members] did not interact. It may be useful to meet in less formal surroundings where we can actually discuss and argue over concerns.
- I think young people would learn a lot more, and find it more useful for their understanding of democracy and how it works, if the format was more like the one at Morecambe Town Hall. I'm also surprised that the youth workers and other facilitators/advisors haven't asked for more direct input from their local councillors at school events, youth meetings etc.
- if we came across as a caring council then that would have achieved something. I think the young people felt that they were valued because they had been given a chance to speak, which they seemed to enjoy! I feel it would have been difficult to criticise anybody or anything for fear of offending. Maybe later in smaller groups more scrutiny of their objectives and wishes could be addressed still it was a good pr exercise.
- hopefully through the young persons cabinet liaison group we can forward some of the messages that the young people wishes to address.
- We were given a list of requirements with no indication of any responsibility. And I find that sitting being talked to without any ability to question the propositions unworkable. To allow questions after the event is unworkable as you cannot question the speaker[s] directly, the question has to be given to the whole group. I also was surprised that certain councillors were able to offer to help set up forums etc without being censured. Also when are other interest groups to be invited to put their requirements before Council? ie pensioners, council tenants, town [city or village] residents, employed, unemployed, employers:- the list is endless!