

Present: Councillor Paul Gleeson (Chairman), Councillor Suzanne Welberry (Vice-Chairman), Councillors Joythi Arayambath, Richard Austin BEM, Anton Dani, Neil Drayton, Stuart Evans, Lina Savickiene and Barrie Pierpoint

Portfolio Holders: Councillors Anne Dorrian and Sandeep Ghosh

In attendance:

Assistant Director – General Fund Assets, Communications Manager, Head of Procurement and Democratic Services Officer.

63 APOLOGIES

Apologies were tabled for Councillor Patsie Marson with Councillor Lina Savickiene substituting and further apologies were tabled for Councillors Chris Mountain and Helen Staples.

64 MINUTES

With the agreed amendment to table Cllr Evans apologies to the last meeting the Chairman signed the minutes of the previous meeting.

65 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None tabled

66 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No questions

67 EAST LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCILS PARTNERSHIP COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

The Portfolio Holder presented the report confirming that when the South & East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership was formed in October 2021, the Partnership Business Case had identified opportunities to bring together strategy, policy and services across the three Councils, which had the aim of improving services, achieving savings and ensuring resilience.

One of the first service reviews to be concluded was for the 'Corporate' Directorate, and that included the creation of a single Partnership Communications Service. Whilst working together informally since the Partnership formed, the team formally came together as single service in November 2022, creating the opportunity to fully align the communications approach. In the 2023/24 Annual Delivery Plan, approved by Council in March, it was identified that a single Partnership Communications Strategy would be brought forward for consideration to provide a framework for how the Partnership communicates with internal and external audiences going forward. The report tabled the Strategy for input through the scrutiny process.

The Strategy was shaped on the CORE purpose communications model:
Change behaviour.

Operational effectiveness of Council services,

Reputation management

Explaining policies.

and it covered the four primary communications disciplines of Strategic Communications, External Communications, Internal Communications and Media Management.

The Portfolio Holder drew members' attention to their future media training needs and confirmed that members could request specific training and bespoke sessions would be convened. The strategy was a public facing document which would be on the website for public viewing and it would be subject to monthly evaluation reports. It was also the intent to work alongside the Partnerships Insights and Transformation team to conduct an annual residents' satisfaction survey which would be benchmarked against the LGA Standards. Moving forward it was intended to include the team in the decision making process and for them to be consulted from the inception of a project to help to shape how it would be represented. Furthermore, members needed to be aware of the importance of seeking briefing notes from the team, in advance of any media interview they intended to undertake. The team were working informally and had proved as much when the late Queen Elizabeth died and with the speed of media coverage it meant they were on call 24/7 for the Council at that time, for its civic responsibilities in place at such an event.

Committee deliberation followed which included:

Committee praised the quality of the Strategy and the fact that it was a forward facing document which would be evaluated monthly. There was agreement to the suggestion that the Councils' media plan be circulated to all members for their information. A suggestion was made that all press releases be issued to all members as some may have experience of the subject matter, but it was noted that it would not be practical with the number of members involved and also the sensitivity of timing issues. However, members were encouraged to contact the team direct to offer their support when they had either significant experience of something on the media plan or of media training during their careers.

Addressing the initial training a member noted that it would have been more viable to have asked members what they needed, as there were varying degrees of media experience across the membership, and a more individual focus would be preferable moving forward. Additional comments included the need for training in respect of handling hostile situations whereby members were confronted whilst out in the town, and put on the spot to answer questions. Concern was also noted at the misrepresentation of members' answers following interviews and statements and it was acknowledged that it was difficult to seek a redaction once printed.

Members were reminded of the offer to provide briefing notes for any type of media interview and encouraged to ask for them. All members had a role in their position as a Ward Member and were asked for comments or to accept an interview, and when an immediate response was asked for – to refuse and agree a time when a full response would be provided, allowing time for a briefing note to be provided. The Portfolio Holder advised that in their role as Leader of the Council they did not feel compelled to agree to all interviews especially those that did not serve the Borough or the Council and urged members to consider the same.

Caution was urged at the intention to hold an annual residents survey with concern that responses could often be misleading dependent on how the person was feeling when they filled it in. It was agreed that any survey needed to be structured and presented in a way that gave the resident an incentive to fill it in without bias, and on seeking the appropriateness of their offer to assist in the compilation of the survey due to their own depth of experience in producing them, a member was advised that their offer would be welcomed when the Council looked to start to draft it.

In conclusion the Chairman commended the report and noted his pleasure at the front facing document which would allow much more inclusivity and engagement with residents and questioned the possibility of the scope for a focus group to support the strategy.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Corporate and Community committee having considered the strategy, have provided comment to shape its further development.

68 PROPOSED PROCUREMENT STRATEGY

The Portfolio Holder presented the report confirming that in March 2023, Council had approved its Annual Delivery Plan 23/24, which included a specific action to bring forward a Procurement Strategy for adoption. That had also been a key strand of the South & East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership Business Case, recognising that through joint procurement the Councils could deliver significant savings.

The Strategy was particularly important at the current time, given the scale of projects the Council has underway through the Towns' Fund and Levelling Up Agendas; and the associated joint procurement opportunities with its partner Councils. The combined spend of the Partnership Councils on capital projects in the coming years would be in excess of £100million.

The purpose of this report was to present to the Committee the Procurement Strategy for the period 2023 – 2026. The Council had not had a Procurement Strategy in place for a number of years. By having this strategy formally in place, it provided a clear strategy for Procurement throughout the following 3 years. In April 2023, it had been formerly approved that the Procurement & Contracts service would be provided by Public Sector Partnership Services Limited (PSPSL). It had also been agreed within the SELCP Annual Delivery Plan. As part of that, a review noted that there was currently no Procurement Strategy in place.

The proposed Strategy focused on three key themes, being "Showing Leadership", "Behaving Commercially", and "Achieving Community Benefits". The proposed Procurement Strategy also linked in with the National Procurement Strategy that was reviewed in 2022.

As part of the newly formed PPS Procurement & Contracts service, a review of all organisations spend data and Contracts Register would be undertaken, to identify any opportunities for collaborative procurement. The strategy to improve this would seek collaborative procurement opportunities between the three client Councils which would be enabled by regularly reviewing spend data, as well as keeping the Contracts Registers up to date which would assist the team to forward plan.

It would also educate the Procurement & Contracts team, as well as service users, to question whether there was a possibility for joint working on a project from the outset and it would review the possibility of setting up a Countywide Procurement group, that invited all Public Sector Organisations within Lincolnshire, to discuss procurement projects that could be done collaboratively, as well as sharing knowledge in general. Committee were also reassured that the Strategy included supporting where possible, the Local Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) who played a major role locally in creating jobs and generating income. They would be provided with efficient and effective information to allow those who were interested, to submit quotations / apply for tendering opportunities, ensuring the process would be simple to follow.

Committee deliberation followed which included:

Addressing concerns in respect of the potential of suppliers becoming a 'clique' with a regular base of providers or approved supplier list, the Head of Procurement and Contracts confirmed that there was no approved suppliers list in use. There was a data base of contractors (on the e-Tendering System used) where any supplier could register. The system included a coding system that suppliers needed to submit based on the service/works that they provided. When an opportunity arose for a requirement that a supplier had coded themselves to, they were automatically contacted to offer the chance to quote / tender. The strategy would also ensure a more pro-active approach by maintaining a contract register, enabling triggers to be set in advance to highlight renewals of contract. The implementation of a risk register for higher value projects would enable mitigations to be put in place early on.

There would be closer day to day working with the contract managers to provide a more efficient and improved performance with KPI's and SLA's in place.

Supporting the use of local suppliers a member questioned what measures were in place to assist them in understanding the complex application process, with many potentially being put off by requirements relating to health and safety, diversity and other pre-requisite information. The Head of Procurement and Contract confirmed that direct support was available with members of the team offering to visit their premises to explain the support they could offer to enable them to tender and the actual application document had been significantly condensed to simply the process and also split down into categories allowing the businesses to identify who within their organisation would need to complete the various sections. Furthermore business breakfasts were a further option to allow a presentation of how to supply to the Council.

On questioning the possibility of a points scoring mechanism to assist local suppliers to be competitive, a member was advised that whilst there was nothing omitting any business from tendering, the Council had a duty to the tax payer to ensure the best value for money contract was sourced and they could not just base their decision on locality they needed to consider the wider picture.

Clarifying the difference between the Strategy for the Council's and the once for PSPS, members were advised that the Strategy for the Council would be agreed by the Councillors whilst the one for PSPS would be decided by the PSPS Board and had already been approved.

Responding to concern in respect of the exemption rule for decision making and a question on the level of influence of the team in respect of decision making, the Head of Procurement and Contracts confirmed that the requirements for an exemption decision sign-off had changed and a significantly more robust process was now in place requiring sign-off by a number of officers and members.

The level of influence of the team was increasing as trust between the parties improved and they were a professional team, working for the Council whose advice was requested when any application was submitted for sign-off.

Members further praised the quality of the strategy tabled, noting that feedback reporting would be appreciated to monitor its outcomes.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Corporate and Community committee having considered the strategy, provided comment to shape its further development.

69 WORK PROGRAMME

Members were advised that an appointment would be scheduled within the following two weeks for the workshop to be hosted by the Chairman, to look at structuring the long term work programme.

The Meeting Closed at 8.10 pm