

Advisory Committees Review Members' Seminar – 2 February 2006

Attendance:

Councillors: C Williamson (Chair), E Berry, S Bolton, A MacDonald, P Chera, M Rawson, R Troup, D Roberts, H Dhamrait, P Willitts, H Jones, F Hussain.

Officers: Andrew Auld, Steve Dunning, Isabella Stone, Pam Thompson

- PC DPAC is good and gives views to Cabinet. Some members are unhappy with the paperwork and are unable to get views from their members. This results in limited consultation.
- RT On DPAC the representatives are not sure who are members and who are not members. The agenda is driven by Derby City Council. There needs to be a process where we find out what their agenda is too.
- CW We currently consult with women, minority ethnic communities and Disabled people, do we need to be consulting differently and widely with other groups? Should it be done more systematically?
- EB Consultation? We need to be careful in terms of asking 'what do you want and we'll deliver it?' When consulting we need to ask, are there any points we've missed? Are we being realistic, presenting what we can do? We need to be careful when we engage in broad and wider consultation, that we are not giving people false expectations. Is consulting the right way?
- PW Maybe consult is the wrong word, maybe we need to 'engage' and ask views on certain things. They want to ask questions and engage with the Council and it could be what they want is not being catered for.
- CW Are we consulting enough groups and the right groups?

AM We could be consulting gender groups. Information does go to Cabinet, as WAC has provided advice from fare ground, PCT, Police, and the Council and have been involved in broader issues and this has brought more out of WAC.

DR I have my own issues with MECAC. The agenda puts you off as it's too long and it would make anyone fall part. We need to focus on what we want more and this can be done by making the agenda more deliverable. If it is an Advisory Committee, then there's two things we need to consider – firstly the advice issues affecting the communities and secondly, the issue of Council items and community items. Regarding community items, George Mighty does but these on the agenda but not the others. We need to look at the process and how we do it. We need to sharpen the agenda and communicate with others. We invite communities to send their representatives and if we only invite one or two they will send who they want. MECAC is under-represented by women. DWICA has a good representation of women on MECAC. It does need a better focus. We need to keep MECAC separate as there are general issues not affecting the wider community. We need to keep a wider forum to get rid of the bitterness, as they would be talking in a more general prospect.

Can we pick up a wider group of LGBT and others? LGBT community is growing in Derby and there are other groups such as faith groups.

CW What about an Equality Forum with other interested group, how would the agenda work?

PW It would have to be disciplined. There would need to be two-way timing.

DR I'm not sure if I understand what we mean by faith groups? What would be the purpose?

EB They would be a representation of other faiths?

- DR What's their role? MECAC and WAC already have different faiths represented.
- AA Discrimination against faith groups has been defined and therefore religion is a specific dimension for equality.
- IS There is an independent forum of faith existing and it meets at the University.
- CW Could we talk about Equality Forums dealing with equality issues and representatives and feedback.
- IS Regarding all the Advisory Committees and the role of the Councillors, I'm unsure, is it the case that all Councillors present are there to represent the view of the Council?
- PW We could ask the question, 'why are we here?'
- DR Regarding one of the latest MECAC meetings, I had 17 questions from Maurice Burgess and 2 from community members. This is not what it's about. We tell them what information and they ask questions.
- AA Advisory Committee representatives stated that they wanted feedback from Committees and this is essential. The Councillors presence is highly valued and they stated that they wanted Councillors to play a 'champion' role for them.
- PC That is exactly what we do in DPAC.
- CW Is the general thrust that an Equalities Forum would subsume disability, race and gender – not having these?
- AM Could we have a sub group reporting these areas of women, disability and race, holding discussions using focus groups, therefore avoiding long agenda?
- MR We need to avoid duplication.
- CW Are we looking at holding this under the umbrella of an Equality Forum?

- RT DPAC functions well, filling room 96. It is valuable. MECAC does well too. We just need a third group that sweeps up all the others.
- AA The Advisory Committees need further representatives due to the low numbers of organisation representatives. The Committees may need to get bigger before we have a single big group.
- CW Assuming we need these groups?
- HD Faith groups need to be set up, all faiths together. For Sikhs 5,000 attend their Sunday gathering and there are equal numbers for Muslim gatherings. There needs to be a similar set up to MECAC as they can't participate in MECAC.
- EB The committees have the political Chairs, then other Councillors should be left off unless they attend as individual. Councillors should then apply to be part of the Committees or be observers.
- DR There are many things taken to MECAC and DPAC – is it possible to put on our website an Advisory page – advice for discrete groups of the 6 dimensions and AGM to make views on specific issues to reduce meeting times. A set up under an umbrella group including LGBT, faith groups and any others other than DPAC and MECAC.
- CW That's possibly the way forward.
- PW We could have the minority ethnic communities such as Indian, Bosnian, African having 2 men and 2 women representatives.
- DR That could be a problem, if we force them, we would need to encourage them, as we would like to see this.
- FH Encouraging women would be difficult.
- EB I personally know of Asian females that have applied and not been allowed to go on MECAC.

IS There could be a mix of formal consultation forums and dialogues, we don't have to solve the problem by having women on MECAC?

At this point DR and SB left the meeting.

CW We need to improve our consultation, we need to identify if we are giving information or consulting. We also need to look at if our processes allow us to get back to people regarding the decisions made.

AA There's two things here...
1. How to improve the formal Advisory Committees?
2. How to improve the general consultation outside of these groups?

PC We also have the wider community via the Area Panels.

CW Area Panels are effective but rather than Area Panels, Neighbourhood Panels could be used to consult. Not strategic using Area Panels.

IS We are reviewing the Area Panels. We've stopped Officers using the Area Panels as token consultation. The agreement is that unless the item is requested by the community, it wouldn't go. Maybe, we should restrict how officers use the Advisory Committee. That may cut down the agenda.

EB Derby Evening Telegraph has a section Have Your Say? maybe we could do something like that, that links to documentation or consultation forum.

CW Yes, good idea. However, we need not to exclude those that don't have internet access.

PW We need to have wider consultation, so we could decide the numbers that we want to engage in consultation, considering the general public not just Pointer Panel.

AA A recent survey carried out showed that 71% consider themselves to have internet access. We are currently

working on how we present consultation on line in an accessible way.

- CW We don't want a tick box exercise. We must be honest when we are giving information or seeking information.
- EB I get quite annoyed when constituents say they feel have not been consulted or contacted. They elected me because they want me to make decisions on their behalf. There are two roles – information and consultation. We could ask the question, why are we here if? if we keep going too far down the consultation route.
- CW Do we need to consult on the relationship with residents?
- SD Is there a way to link the points made? Is committee the most effective mechanisms to consult? It's formal, in 21 Century Derby, is it now the right way to consult. It may be best not to use Committees, too bureaucratic.
- IS The format of reports could be changed even if the Advisory Committees are kept.
- EB There are concerns regarding the Neighbourhood Agenda, administration and budgets.
- CW They will be done on an ad hoc basis, there will be additional costs. Residents have been engaging.
- MR Consultation works well at Area Panels, when issues are raised feedback is provided at the next meeting.
- CW We need a model adopted from the Area Panels – a clear methodology for feeding back.
- AA Theoretically, feedback needs to address points raised, showing action taken with reasons.
- CW If this is to be done systematically and meaningfully, we need to think about the areas genuinely to consult and feedback.

- AA The things to remember is not to be over promising, be clear about what is being asked and information being given.
- PW Regarding the subject matter, it's about what's Derby City Council putting across, taking into consideration the issue, length of discussion and the type of meeting.
- CW Meetings should be 2 hours max, no longer, to focus the mind.
- FH The media issue needs addressing. A single forum, meeting less often, 2 or 3 times annually. Invites to wider community and encourage participation with strategic direction. For day to day issues, use Neighbourhood Panels.
- CW What next?
- AA The review process has seen consultation with Pointer Panel, desk research with other local authorities, focus groups with Committee representatives and finally with Councillors. We will present the conclusion and proposals with what might work initially with the Advisory Committees and then through the formal process.