

NOTES of the Meeting of the COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT WORKING GROUP held at the Council Chamber, Drake Road, Tavistock at 5.30pm on Monday 3rd February, 2025.

Present: Councillor Mrs A Johnson (Chair)
Councillors S Hipsey, P Ward

In attendance: Town Clerk, General Manager

1. INTRODUCTION

The Meeting noted and reviewed recent discussions at the Budget and Policy Committee in connection with the future of this, and another informal Working Group, arising from recent Government Announcements. In particular with regard to the anticipated reorganisation of local government in Devon.

In so doing it acknowledged the value attached to those communication related work strands reviewed at its prior meeting (July 2024), prospective organisational resourcing/capacity, and the extent to which this workstream could/should appropriately form an integral part of (and not be separated from) the demands of reorganisation/devolution in order to best represent, protect and benefit the town/community and ratepayer.

2 COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT – NEXT STEPS

Communication and engagement therefore represented a central strand within the reorganisation agenda, not only in communicating outcomes and progress, but also informing key aspects. Those might include the prioritisation of prospective activities, communication of opportunities and threats/community involvement in place shaping, and understanding of change.

It also underpinned aspects of work to be done with key local stakeholders – most especially the other tiers of local government, as well as linking to some of the anticipated milestones including, but not limited to:

- a) Asset mapping;
- b) Service mapping;
- c) Evaluation/due diligence;
- d) Prioritisation;
- e) Scheduling;
- f) Resourcing;
- g) Delivering/normalising.

It was further acknowledged that reorganisation not only presented potential new responsibilities ('additionality' – perhaps in the form of taking on new services or assets). It could also lead to a loss of existing functions, in particular

if partnership working opportunities were lost. An example given was the dependence of the Goose Fair operating model upon collaboration with the Borough Council for the use of its car parks. Similarly, there were various critical town infrastructure assets operated by other authorities which, if lost, could materially impact the Town - such as the Bus Station and off-street parking provision.

Experience of reorganisation in other parts of the Country did not suggest that a co-ordinated or consistent approach from successor authorities was likely. There was therefore an opportunity now, in collaboration with existing principal authorities, to seek agreement on what to do and how, working flexibly and at pace, to agree best outcomes for the Town in advance of a large new and likely less locally focussed unitary authority.

The communication/engagement aspects of this would be central to the activities of the Working Group established by Council to consider how best to proceed including how best to engage elected Members in the process. To help support internal capacity the Council was also trialling a support service from a sector-based company (Breakthrough Communications) with a focus on communications and information management, initially on a trial basis, then if adopted to be funded from the applicable budget head – 4034.

In conclusion the consensus of opinion amongst the Group was that in view of the criticality of communications/engagement, and to avoid duplication of effort, the work of this Communication and Engagement Group be absorbed into that of the Devolution/Reorganisation Working Group for the time-being and this approach be commended to the Budget and Policy Committee and Council for progression.

The Meeting closed at 6.45pm.