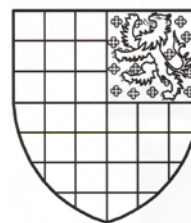


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**LEWES  
TOWN  
COUNCIL**

## ***MINUTES***

of the meeting of the **Working Party** formed to consider Communications & public engagement held on **Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2016**, in the **Yarrow Room, Town Hall**, Lewes at **7:00pm**.

**PRESENT** Cllrs A Ashby; S Catlin; W Elliott; I Makepeace (*Chairman*); S Murray; R O’Keeffe; E Watts and (*not appointed to the Working Party*) Cllr R Murray.

**In attendance:** S Brigden (*Town Clerk [TC]*) Mrs F Garth (*Asst TC/Civic Officer*)

### **ComWP2015/01 ELECTION of CHAIRMAN:**

Cllr Makepeace was elected as Chairman of the Working Party for the 2015/16 municipal year.

**ComWP2015/02 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** There were none

**ComWP2015/03 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:** There were none.

**ComWP2015/04 QUESTIONS:** There were none

### **ComWP2015/05 REMIT of the WORKING PARTY:**

The remit of the working party, as defined by Council was reviewed:

*Council meeting 17<sup>th</sup> December 2015 Minute ref FC2015/82*

Council considered a proposal (NOM 017/2015 – copy in minute book) for a working party to be set up to review the council’s public engagement. Its remit, it was suggested, should be to look at all forms of communication between the Council and the public, electronic communication and other forms of written and spoken communications.

The working group should seek advice from experts in the field of public communications where possible and should research examples of good practice from other local government bodies.

### **ComWP2015/06 BUSINESS OF THE MEETING:**

Cllr Catlin exhorted all Members to ensure they were familiar with the Council’s Communications Protocol (*copies distributed*). This had initially been drafted following the model promoted by Standards for England and updated in 2015 to reflect legislative changes in respect of defamation.

It was agreed that a practical approach to the group’s task was to focus upon elements one at a time, with the Council’s web site and Newsletter the initial focus.

The current website was extremely dated in appearance although functioned relatively efficiently. The underlying management software dated from the 1990’s and TC noted that it was very limited from a publisher/editor’s perspective, especially in the areas of graphics and photographs, and it had no capability for embedded sound or video as would be expected of a modern site. In its favour, it was acknowledged that Parish Councils rarely offered sophisticated websites and the content that the public would expect was relatively easy to find. Examples of more modern sites were screened, including one that had attracted an award from the National Association of Local Councils. It was generally agreed that modernization and a more attractive aspect was desirable, and a sub-group comprising Cllrs Catlin; Elliott; Makepeace; S Murray and O’Keeffe would conduct some research to establish the designer/publisher of sites which, in their opinion, appeared to offer appropriate features. This would enable a future meeting to conduct a more detailed assessment of the costs, and formulate proposals for change. There was extensive discussion contrasting content with functionality; the implications of links to social

media *etc*, and those features considered essential, such as high-ranking and multi-functional keyword search results. A secondary discussion followed on the practicalities of social media such as Twitter and Facebook, and how these could be usefully employed. A policy would be required, and the actual impact on resources would need to be assessed in detail. Individual members were at liberty to promote themselves in this way, although TC reminded of the need for care. This could be discussed alongside the evaluation of website designs.

The background to the Newsletter was reviewed, and it was apparent that the lack of a regular flow of editorial copy was a fundamental problem. In the previous administration a group of Members had undertaken to provide contributions for editing and this could be reinstated. Three editions of the newsletter had been printed in relatively low numbers and made available at a number of distribution points, with a larger fourth edition each year including an annual report and being professionally printed in greater numbers for direct delivery to all households in Lewes. TC would provide some dates for editorial deadlines, and Members of the Working Party undertook to produce regular copy.

The discussion moved into the area of the annual Town Meeting. TC explained the background to this, which was not a Council meeting but a vestige of the system which prevailed before the reorganization of local government in 1974. Where a Civil Parish had a separate parish Council, it was the responsibility of its chairman to call a public meeting of electors for the parish once each year according to a statutory regulated process. If attending the meeting, the Chairman/Mayor must preside, but the meeting itself was the province of the attending electors. There were sundry other controls and limitations to these meetings, and long-standing issues associated with them. Nationally they were considered to be an anachronism; actually being considered for abolition by the government in future legislation. In recent years the Lewes meeting had been associated with the Civic Awards, although this brought fresh problems of practicality. It was suggested that the sequence of events on the evening of the awards presentations for 2016 be amended, and the date (previously scheduled) be altered to the 19<sup>th</sup> April, and the Mayor agreed that she was amenable to this. Room availability was checked, and this was confirmed.

The matter of Councillors' Surgeries was briefly discussed, and TC reminded everyone that these were arranged simply to provide a convenient "fixed-point" for face-to-face contact between Members and constituents. The Council as an organization was accessible to the public via a number of routes, and (unlike many parish councils) had offices which were open to the public throughout the week. Individual Councillors interacted with their electorate in a number of ways, and the monthly Surgeries scheduled within the weekly indoor market in the Corn Exchange were simply to provide an environment for meetings that avoided the need to allow public access to Members' homes or other premises. It was for Councillors to utilize this facility if they wished. This gave cause to note the issue of potential individual responsibility to register as a data controller under the Data Protection Act to cover "everyday" work related to the electoral Ward.

**ComWP2015/07 CONCLUSIONS:**

The Working Party reminds all Members of the importance of adherence to the adopted Communications Protocol. Working Party members each undertook individual tasks in preparation for a future meeting, notably research of details of website designers, and would address the need for copy for the Newsletter. The Mayor agreed to call the Town Meeting for 2016 on 19<sup>th</sup> April and to start it at 6:30pm with the Civic Awards following.

**ComWP2015/08** There being no further business, the Chairman declared the meeting closed, and thanked everyone for their attendance. *The meeting closed at 8:45pm*

Signed ..... date .....