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CENTRAL AREA COMMUNITY FORUM

Notes of the Central Area Community Forum held on 22 July 2014 at 7.00pm in St Joseph's Church Hall, Matlock

PRESENT

**Derbyshire Dales
District Council**

Councillor Ann Elliott (in the Chair), Sue Burfoot, Councillor Bob Cartwright, Lewis Rose OBE, Andrew Statham, Geoff Stevens MBE and Barrie Tipping

Dorcas Bunton (Chief Executive) and Sandra Lamb (Head of Corporate Services)

**Derbyshire
Constabulary**

Sergeant Nick Reason

**Derbyshire County
Council**

Paul Jameson (Local Area Forum Liaison Officer)

Members of the Public

Matlock Bath Parish Council – Councillor Michael Wilderspin
Mr and Mrs J Brears, Kathleen Camm, Paul Gibbons, Patricia A Leake, A J Mumby, Vicki Raynes and Mrs Ann Roe (9 in total)

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Councillor Ann Elliott introduced Members and Officers from the participating authorities and welcomed everyone to the Forum.

DERBYSHIRE DALES DISTRICT COUNCIL – INTRODUCING INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION (IER)

Sandra Lamb, Head of Corporate Services gave a presentation introducing Individual Electoral Registration, which became effective from the 10th June 2014.

IER is a system which replaces the current household system of electoral registration and places responsibility on individuals to ensure that their details are entered on the register of electors. The main drivers for change were to combat electoral fraud and to make it easier to become registered through the provision of an on-line facility.

Under the new system, anyone that is currently not on the register of electors can make an on-line application at www.gov.uk/register tovot e. This will require electors to provide their date of birth and National Insurance number. In order to assist electors who may not have use of their own IT equipment, the District Council was providing self-serve pc's at Ashbourne and Matlock and customers will have the option of contacting the Election Helpline by telephone. The Helpline staff were trained to answer questions and to help facilitate the on-line registration process. At the beginning of August everyone who was currently on the Derbyshire Dales Electoral Register would either receive a letter to say that they have been automatically confirmed on the new system or would receive a letter requesting additional information advising them to Register.

In moving forward, it was quite possible that someone that had been on the register of electors for 20 years or more and had returned their canvas form every year would not be matched. Equally some family members may be matched while others were not. The District Council expected that this would result in high call volumes and staff were being trained to deal with the situations and on how to advise residents on the best course of action open to them. Ultimately anyone who remained unconfirmed would be removed from the register of electors, however, this would not happen until December 2015 following the UK Parliamentary, District and Parish Council's elections in May 2015. Members of the public were then offered the opportunity to ask questions.

- Mr Brears asked why the system had to change. Sandra responded that the main driver was to combat Electoral fraud and everyone who sought to register was properly validated.
- Councillor Wilderspin enquired if there was a fine for non-registration. Sandra replied that currently on summary conviction none completion of a household enquiry form was £5,000 and not responding to register under the new system would be £80.
- Mrs Dakin enquired whether there was any possibility to fraudulently use a National Insurance Number for example by inventing one. Sandra responded that the National Insurance Number in comparison with the date of birth was based on an algorithm owned by the Department for Work and Pensions and fraudulent use of a National Insurance Number was therefore significantly reduced.
- Vicki Raynes asked what information was available in Parishes and whether there were any leaflets going on display. Sandra informed the group that Parish Clerks had been forwarded information on 7th July and those Parishes with websites were encouraged to include information.
- Mr Jameson asked who was paying for the change. Sandra responded that the Cabinet Office had fully funded the change in data collection.
- Councillor Bob Cartwright asked how overseas voters were being transferred to the new system. Sandra replied that the same rules applied to overseas voters and that they were all being required to register individually.
- Mr Mumby asked under what circumstances the Council sold information on the Register. Sandra responded that all Electoral Registration Officers were able to pass on data contained within the Electoral Register at a price to cover their costs. Those Electors who had 'opted out' were not passed on to marketing organisations.

- Mr Gibbons asked on what basis the Register was compiled to ensure correct postal addresses. Sandra responded to say that the Elector Registration database and DWP used the Local Property Gazetteer, which used a unique property registration number to ensure consistency.
- Mrs Camm asked what steps the Council was taking to help those who may have literacy problems or no computer. Sandra responded to say that the Election Helpdesk would be trained to answer queries as comprehensively as possible and that the use of tablet technology was currently being considered to assist individuals to register within their homes.
- Mr Brears asked whether other Councils were involved in a similar process. Sandra said that the new regime applied to every Local Authority in England and Wales.
- Mrs Dakin enquired what the Council will be doing to assist those in rural areas. Sandra responded that following the initial mail out, reminders would be sent and doorstep visits made to maximise registration.
- Councillor Mrs Burfoot asked whether an individual's carer would be able to volunteer information on behalf of their charge. Sandra replied that currently thoughts on how to enable carers to register was still in its infancy, but would take the matter back for further investigation.
- Mr Gibbons asked what happened when people died and how was that information used to update the Register. Sandra responded that the District Council was part of the 'Tell Us Once' campaign, which linked information from the Local Registrar service.

QUESTION TIME

Questions and comments were then invited from the floor and issues were raised as follows:-

Derbyshire County and Derbyshire Dales District Councils' resource issues

- Mr Brears asked whether the recently announced cuts to Derbyshire County Council's budget would have an effect on the District Council given the relative stability of the local economy. Dorcas Bunton replied that discussions were on-going to identify areas where they may have a knock on effect in the District Council. Councillor Stevens felt that the budget cuts announced were to help clear the national deficit. Paul Jameson directed members of the public to the challenge webpage on Derbyshire County Council's website. Many of the cuts being proposed by the County Council will be subject to consultation and more information could be found on the webpage; including links to relevant Cabinet reports.
- Councillor Bob Cartwright enquired about the recent announcement that Derbyshire County Council planned to sell off County Hall and asked whether a purpose built building for all Local Authorities in the area could be accommodated within Cawdor Quarry. Dorcas replied that from the District Council's point of view, Derbyshire Dales was open to creative use of its own building and had for example recently been able to accommodate the Citizens Advice Bureau and Rural Action Derbyshire. As far as she was aware, County Hall was not on the market.

Highways issues

- Vicki Raynes enquired about the speed cameras on the A615 to Tansley and enquired whether any data was available to help support Tansley Parish Council's request for traffic calming measures. Sergeant Nick Reason responded that enforcement was not a long term solution for speeding problems and that speeding hotspots needed to be designed out. Police data was available, however, to enable Derbyshire County Council's Highways Authority to act upon accident statistics.
- Mrs Dakin also raised the issue of traffic on the A615 at the junction with Church Street, where vehicles parked were causing difficulty for motorists and pedestrians. It was suggested that yellow lining would solve the problem. Paul Jameson undertook to take this matter back, but outlined the criteria applied to requests for waiting restrictions, which ensures that the available funds are appropriately prioritised.
- Reference was also made to signage that had been erected in Tansley; it was felt this was unnecessary and the funds could have been better spent elsewhere. Paul Jameson explained that the Department for Transport has instructed all Highway Authorities to reduce street clutter. As such, there has to be very good justification on grounds of road safety to erect additional signs in the highway.
- Councillor Wilderspin asked why, in times of austerity, the bridge at Ambergate was being removed, and which in turn had a knock on effect in requiring other bridges along the line to be height adjusted. Paul from Derbyshire County Council responded that the bridge in question was in Amber Valley Borough Council's area and that Rail Track were responsible for its removal.

Antisocial behaviour

- Ann Roe resident of Pope Carr Road, Matlock raised an issue regarding her experience of intolerable antisocial behaviour from a neighbouring property. Mrs Roe informed the Forum how she had sought help from the 101 service only to find out that her incident had not been reported. She had since received a letter from the Call Centre Operations Manager apologising for the error. Mrs Roe was very disappointed with the apparent lack of enforcement activity by the Police. She had however reported the matter to the Environmental Health team within Derbyshire Dales. Sergeant Reason explained that he was aware of the situation and was unable to comment on operational matters in a public arena, but assured Mrs Roe that he would work alongside partner Agencies including Derbyshire Dales Community Safety Officer and Environmental Health Officers to fully investigate the matter. Dorcas Bunton also assured Mrs Roe that she would take the matter back to the District Council and to assist in a partnership approach to solving the problem.

Verge mowing

- Vicki Raynes raised the issue of verge mowing and the difficulties in some parts of Tansley and finding safe sight lines at road junctions. Dorcas undertook to find out the answer to the problem and report back.

CONCLUSION AND THANKS

Councillor Elliott thanked everyone for their participation and advised that the next Central Forum would take place 29 October 2014, venue to be determined.

Meeting closed at 8.25pm