

Council Meeting
26th July 2023

Motion submitted by Councillor Blagbrough under Council Procedure Rule 14

The Council's Communications Policy Creates Information Inequalities

This Council notes:

- The hard work of Communication officers and praises their determination to provide information to the residents of Calderdale.
- That the unacceptable performance of Calderdale Council's Planning Department triggered an intervention from the Government, addressed to Calderdale's Chief Executive (CEO), warning that unless corrective actions were taken, the Council would be subject to Special Measures.
- That Council Leadership delayed their notification of the letter that contained the warning from the Government and its contents from residents and Councillors for over four weeks.
- They delayed their notification of an Appeal against the Judicial Review decision to refuse the Environmental Permit for an Incinerator near Sowerby Bridge by four months.

This Council acknowledges:

- The Special Measures threatened by Government were due to unacceptable performance (decision time) by the Planning Department, and that the letter added "this is indicative of a very poor-quality service to local residents and a significant deterrent to investment in your housing market and the wider economy."
- That delaying notification of the letter sent by the Government and its contents from Councillors and residents breached constitutional norms and the guardrails of a transparent and civil local democracy.
- That the failure to inform local objectors and Councillors in opposition to the incinerator about the Appeal produced an unfair advantage as it provided more time for the Council to refine their case against the refusal of permission.
- That in consequence, local objectors and Councillors in opposition to the incinerator were denied the same opportunity to build their legal arguments and to repudiate the case for granting the permit.
- That there were no communications to Councillors regarding the development of North Bridge Leisure Centre before the announcement by Cabinet in July, which advised the project is back on track following the project being on pause for 9 months.

This Council accepts:

- That they are failing to meet the priority of "reducing inequalities" because delaying information to residents and Councillors creates information

inequalities across the Borough that can potentially create false impressions of the Council and its efficiency.

- That information inequalities relate to the siloing of information within the Leadership of the Council, so the Public is unaware of information about the Council which may impact their perception of the Council.
- That information inequalities are equally as important as other inequalities and that they should be considered in their efforts to combat inequalities because the accessibility of information and the plurality of ideas is what separates democratic and authoritarian systems of governance, with the former being most successful at providing higher living standards and ensuring the protection of civil and individual rights.
- That they are failing to meet the priority of “strong, thriving towns and places” because the sanctioning of information has created silos within the Council that are detrimental to effective and efficient Council services.
- That a new Communications Strategy based upon transparency and expeditious publication of information which is in the public interest is paramount to resolving information inequality.

This Council resolves to:

- Publish a new Communications Strategy, which will involve transparent and expeditious publication of information, including communications from the Government.
- To ensure information equality is a core tenet of the Council’s new Communication Strategy, so residents and Councillors in Calderdale are fully informed.
- To include information equality in its Equality & Community Cohesion Impact Assessments (EIA).
- Take full responsibility for the lack of communication over the letter sent by the Government and the delayed notification of the Appeal through an open letter to the residents of Calderdale which will apologise and explain the Council’s new Communications Strategy.
- Improve internal communications in the new Strategy through a halt to the siloing of information within Departments and Groups of the Council and immediately call a Group Leaders meeting when information is not suitable for release to the Public - this will, in turn, ensure effective local services and a functional local democracy for residents in Calderdale.

Motion seconded by Councillor Robinson