



# MEETING OF THE ENGAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER 2005  
2.30 PM

---

## PANEL MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor John Hurst  
Councillor Kerr  
Councillor Nadarajah (Vice-Chairman)  
Councillor Mrs Radley

Councillor Shorrocks  
Councillor Stokes  
Councillor M Taylor (Chairman)  
Councillor Wilks

## OFFICERS

Scrutiny Officer  
Director of Operational Services  
Scrutiny Support Officer

## OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Carpenter

---

## 16. MEMBERSHIP

The Panel was informed that the Councillor Conboy was being replaced by Councillor Stokes and Councillor Radley by Councillor Mrs Radley for this meeting only and the late Councillor Burrows was being replaced by Councillor Wilks and Councillor M G Williams by Councillor Shorrocks until the next annual general meeting of the council.

## 17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none declared.

## 18. ACTION NOTES

Noted.

## 19. FEEDBACK FROM THE EXECUTIVE

Nothing to report.

## 20. BT PROPOSALS TO RE-ALIGN PAYPHONE PROVISION TO CUSTOMER DEMAND

The Panel welcomed Mr Turner and Mr Seaton from BT, who were at the meeting to discuss BT's proposals concerning re-alignment of payphone provision. This included the removal of four payphones and a number of

payphones being converted to cashless, subject to the outcome of Ofcom's Review of Universal Service later in the year. A letter from BT detailing the proposals had been circulated with the agenda. Mr Turner stated that BT had taken into consideration previous representations of the Council, hence the change in proposals. Payphones identified for cashless conversion had high maintenance costs mainly as a result of vandalism and theft. Those proposed for removal also incurred very high maintenance costs but with no identifiable reason.

The Panel was in general support of the proposals as it was considered that conversion to cashless payphones would contribute to a reduction in vandalism. Members did, however, have a few concerns about specific payphones and these were discussed with the BT representatives. There was particular concern about the Harrowby estate area in Grantham, given that only one payphone in the area could require people in need of a payphone to travel significant distance. This was an important issue given that the area was home to a number of vulnerable people. When questioned, the representatives stated that there were no plans to increase the number of payphones in that area. The Panel asked, however, that they give this consideration.

The Panel also queried a number of other issues such as consultation and the Ofcom review. The representatives gave explanation where necessary including details on the number of payment options at the cashless payphones (about which further information was requested) and confirmation that the emergency number 999 could still be dialled from any payphone without charge. They also stated that population per payphone was not a consideration in payphone provision.

The issue of mobile phone coverage was raised and it was suggested that there were still some 'black spot' areas with mobile phone signal, which could be very dangerous. Following discussion, it was considered that as BT was not responsible for mobile phone coverage, the service providers should be contacted regarding the Panel's concerns. The "other possibilities" for partnership working suggested in BT's proposals received general support from the Panel.

### **Conclusions:**

- (1) To request the Access & Engagement Portfolio Holder, in responding to BT's proposals, supports the removals and cashless conversions as an interim measure pending the outcome of Ofcom's Review of Universal Service. To request that the Portfolio Holder also requests BT to consider payphone provision in the Harrowby estate area in Grantham.**
- (2) Given the success of the visit from the BT representatives, to invite rail company representatives to a meeting to consider rail service provision.**

## **21. TRAVEL CONCESSIONS REVIEW**

The Chairman, under the agenda item Any Other Business, allowed consideration of a draft report on the Council's Travel Concessions Review. This item had been included on the recent Forward Plan and would be determined before the next scheduled meeting of the Panel.

A report by the Corporate Director of Operational Services was circulated. This set out the current concessions services and the changes necessary as a result of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget announcement to provide free local bus travel for people over the age of sixty and disabled people from April 2006. The report proposed various changes within the Council's existing policies and guidance.

Having considered the report, the Panel considered that good past performance of the travel concessions service provided confidence in the officer's recommendations. The recommendations appeared sound, especially as an increase in demand of bus services should improve business for the providers. Members did have a few specific concerns, however. These included the limitations of operating the service at district level, the County Council's responsibility for public transport and difficulties in providing cross-authority concessions.

### **Conclusion:**

#### **To support the recommendations concerning travel concessions:**

- (1) Due to the cost and the current categorisation of the service, it is recommended that the service is introduced within the Council's existing policies and guidance.**
- (2) The free bus pass should be introduced from April 2006. Customers will be written to informing them that the bus pass will be half fare from January to March and free from April to December. Those customers wishing to change from vouchers to a bus pass will need to change from January.**
- (3) The additional funding required to introduce the free bus pass be allocated.**
- (4) Travel vouchers should be ordered.**
- (5) There should be no time restrictions imposed, except where the bus operator had indicated that this would impact negatively on particular service routes, which may then result in significant additional expenditure for the Council. All services will be included from the minimum 9.30a.m. start time. It is recommended that the Corporate Director of Operational Services should be allowed discretion to negotiate these expectations with operators.**
- (6) Authority should be given to the Corporate Director of Operational Services to assess and agree generation factors with respect to individual bus routes with operators.**
- (7) Reimbursement arrangements with operators should be agreed in conjunction with the portfolio holder.**

- (8) Current recipients of travel vouchers should receive future voucher issues via the post upon receipt of a valid application form.**

## **22. REPORTS FROM WORKING GROUPS**

### Fire Services Working Group

The Chairman reported on the meeting of the working group. It had been considered that a scrutiny review was not required as the decision had already been taken by the Government. Instead, a letter had been written to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on behalf of the DSP. A copy had been circulated with the agenda. Unfortunately, although this letter had been written over a month ago, no response had been received. This was very disappointing to the Panel. Members also recounted that no response had been received from the Ambulance Control Centre in Lincoln regarding the invitation to visit their premises.

#### **Conclusions:**

- (1) To write again to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister insisting on a response to the original letter on the basis that in a democratic society, elected members should not be ignored.**
- (2) To write to the Lincoln Ambulance Control Centre following up the invite to visit the premises. *[Afternote: This is now within the remit of the Healthy Environment DSP].***

### E-Government Working Group

Notes of the working group meetings of 20<sup>th</sup> July 2005 and 25<sup>th</sup> August 2005 had been circulated with the agenda. The Corporate Director of Operational Services gave additional information at the meeting. He explained that this issue had been very well scrutinised and supported by the working group who had concentrated on improving customer service by the customer services centre. Successes and lessons learnt from the initial stages of this project were shared.

The working group had also been active in looking at reducing cash payments at Council Offices to support a sustainable service with enhanced customer focus. Two key areas under investigation were the introduction of "All Pay" sites for Council payments at local outlets and increasing the offer of direct debit payment days. The Council's website and the Best Value Performance Indicator for on-line services were also discussed. A member of the newly-formed Members' IT working group informed the Panel that the group had held its first meeting that morning. A report would be submitted at the next meeting of the DSP.

**Conclusion:**

**To support the work and recommendations of the E-Government Working Group.**

**23. MINUTES FROM LOCAL AREA ASSEMBLIES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Rural North Local Area Assembly meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> July 200 were circulated. All other minutes of the last round of meetings had been circulated with the agenda. The Scrutiny Officer informed the Panel that the Chairman and himself were soon to visit one of Spelthorne Borough Council's Area Forums. Contact had also been made with South Ribble Borough Council.

**24. DRAFT SCRUTINY HANDBOOK**

Members considered the draft Scrutiny Handbook as circulated with the agenda. The Scrutiny Officer stated that reference to the call-in process on page seventeen would be clarified.

**Conclusion:**

**To support the draft Scrutiny Handbook.**

**25. WORK PROGRAMME**

Noted.

**26. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

Members were informed that the only 'red' indicator, number 157, had risen from 74% to 83% since publication. This was noted.

**27. VOTER TURNOUT**

The Chairman, following recent district council by-elections, had become very concerned at the level of apathy amongst voters. He asked for this to be considered by the DSP. It had been agreed with the Chief Executive that provision could be made within the district council's newsletter to include a questionnaire on resident's opinion of voting.

The Scrutiny Support Officer had undertaken initial research on other authorities' scrutiny reviews and academic work on the same issue. Members thought it was very important to look into this and it was agreed that more research was required. It was suggested that a local college student may wish to assist in this research as part of coursework or work experience.

The Panel also discussed the important of parish newsletters. Some of these had sections on district council issues and it was agreed that this should be encouraged.

**Conclusions:**

- (1) To include this issue on the agenda for the next meeting and to invite the newly appointed Communications Manager to the meeting.**
- (2) To request the appropriate Portfolio Holder gives approval to the DSP to make enquiries into offering a place of work experience to a local college student in the assistance of research into voter apathy.**

**28. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 4.35p.m.