



AGENDA

For a meeting of the
ENGAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

to be held on

THURSDAY, 21 SEPTEMBER 2006

at

2.30 PM

in

**COMMITTEE ROOM 3, COUNCIL OFFICES, ST. PETER'S HILL,
GRANTHAM**

Duncan Kerr, Chief Executive

Panel Members: Councillor Robert Conboy, Councillor John Hurst, Councillor Mano Nadarajah (Vice-Chairman), Councillor Norman Radley, Councillor Robert Murray Shorrock, Councillor Michael Taylor (Chairman), Councillor Thomas John Webster, Councillor John Wilks and Councillor Avril Williams

Scrutiny Officer: Paul Morrison 01476 406512 p.morrison@southkesteven.gov.uk
Scrutiny Support Officer: Rebecca Chadwick 01476 406297 r.chadwick@southkesteven.gov.uk

Members of the Panel are invited to attend the above meeting to consider the items of business listed below.

1. COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

To receive comments or views from members of the public at the Panel's discretion.

2. MEMBERSHIP

The Panel to be notified of any substitute members.

3. APOLOGIES

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members are asked to declare any interests in matters for consideration at the meeting.

5. ACTION NOTES

The notes of the meeting held on Thursday 6th July 2006 are attached for information.
(Enclosure)

- 6. UPDATES FROM LAST MEETING**
- 7. FEEDBACK FROM THE EXECUTIVE**
- 8. REPORTS FROM WORKING GROUPS**
 - Notes from the Access and Modernisation Working Group (Enclosures)
 - Final report from the Democratic Review Working Group (Enclosure)
- 9. UPDATE REPORT – FRONTFACING TELEPHONY AND CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS**
Report CSV44 by the Business Management Services Project Officer (Enclosure)
- 10. SCRUTINY OF COUNCIL DECISION RE MEMBER TRAINING**
 - Report CEX288 to council on 28th April 2005
 - Extract from council minutes – 28th April 2005
 - Extract from resources dsp minutes – 24th May 2005
 - Extract from cabinet minutes – 6th June 2005
 - Report CEX293 to council on 23rd June 2005
 - Extract from council minutes – 23rd June 2005
 - Extract from finance scrutiny working group report – July 2006 (Enclosures)
- 11. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS** (Enclosure)
- 12. WORK PROGRAMME** (Enclosure)
- 13. REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES**
Representatives on outside bodies to give update reports.
- 14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS, WHICH THE CHAIRMAN, BY REASONS OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, DECIDES IS URGENT.**

WORKING STYLE OF SCRUTINY

The Role Of Scrutiny

- To provide a “critical friend” challenge to the Executive as well as external authorities and agencies
- To reflect the voice and concerns of the public and its communities
- Scrutiny Members should take the lead and own the Scrutiny Process on behalf of the public
- Scrutiny should make an impact on the delivery of public services

Remember...

- Scrutiny should be member led
- Any conclusions must be backed up by evidence
- Meetings should adopt an inquisitorial rather than adversarial style of traditional local government committees



MEETING OF THE ENGAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY, 6 JULY 2006 2.30 PM

PANEL MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Conboy
Councillor Exton
Councillor Gibbins
Councillor Nadarajah (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor N Radley
Councillor M Taylor (Chairman)
Councillor Wilks
Councillor A Williams

OFFICERS

Scrutiny Officer
Customer Service Network Manager
Customer Services Manager
Team Leader Economic & Community
Development
Scrutiny Support Officer

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Paul Carpenter – Portfolio Holder
Access & Engagement

84. MEMBERSHIP

The panel was informed that for this meeting only, Councillor Gibbins was replacing Councillor John Hurst and Councillor Exton was replacing Councillor Craft.

85. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Shorrock.

86. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

87. ACTION NOTES

Noted.

88. UPDATES FROM LAST MEETING

The Scrutiny Officer reported that the panel's request regarding the presentation of Best Value Performance Indicators for people with colour blindness had been forwarded to the responsible officer and was being looked into.

89. FEEDBACK FROM THE EXECUTIVE

The Scrutiny Officer reported on cabinet's response to the panel's recommendations on Local Area Assemblies. The Chairman commented on the positive outcome that only two out of the ten recommendations were totally rejected: the chairmanship of the meetings and the allocation of funding. The portfolio holder present explained that cabinet had rejected the inclusion of "Area" in the new title for local forums because the acronym "LAF" might not always be appropriate; he had originally been sceptical about chairmanships been given to members from other areas but having seen the meetings in operation, he agreed that it was best to have an impartial chairman; the idea of a "soapbox" was already incorporated into the public open forum; and that no funding was available in the budget for allocating spending for each forum.

90. REPORTS FROM WORKING GROUPS

The panel considered the interim report of the Democratic Review Working Group. As the lead member, Councillor Shorrock, was not present at the meeting, Councillor Exton reported on the working group's progress. There had been very good turnout from a number of representatives from different organisations: county council, parish councils, businesses, schools etc. He explained the group's initial findings as included in the report.

The panel discussed the report and asked for the following points to be taken back to the group:

- Subtle interests such as debates for younger people would contribute to engagement.
- There is a danger of drowning the public with too many talking shops.
- What is needed is positive and concise messages.
- The council is an elected body who has to make decisions and whereas we want to engage with the public to hear what they want, we do not want to give excessive power to minority groups.

Conclusion:

Councillor Exton reports to the next meeting of the Democratic Review Working Group on the comments of the panel on its interim report.

RC to facilitate

The panel then considered the noted from the Access and Modernisation Working Group and approved its recommendations to the portfolio holder.

Conclusion:

(1) To recommend to Councillor Carpenter that the council meets the cost of broadband provision for members who

RC to facilitate

already have broadband up to the rate that the council would pay for the BT Business Broadband charge for members (currently £21.99 per month).

- (2) To recommend to Councillor Carpenter that he considers writing to members explaining that broadband is being rolled out and that it would be appreciated if members could indicate whether or not they intend standing at the 2007 local elections.**
- (3) To recommend to Councillor Carpenter that he considers a legal agreement between the council and those members provided with/reimbursed for broadband so that if that member no longer continues to serve on the council that member is held liable for the continued cost of the broadband provision.**

91. PROTOCOL FOR ANSWERING TELEPHONES

The Customer Service Network Manager presented his report on the council's telephone protocol. This was an amended version to that circulated with the agenda and had been requested by the panel following members' concerns about difficulty in contacting members of staff by telephone. The standard was that a telephone should be answered within ten rings and there was evidence that this was not being followed. The manager considered that there was an issue here of staff taking personal responsibility, and a general culture towards customer service. Customer service should be a working ethos and not treated as a separate section. His aim was to inspire rather than enforce a policy.

The panel discussed the report and their own experiences of contacting members of staff on the telephone. Those members who had experienced difficulty were concerned that members of the public would be experiencing the same problems. It was also commented that when members of the public could not contact the council successfully by telephone, it contributed to their disengagement. The public needed to feel that they had the council's full attention.

Members were also concerned that they had experienced problems in getting a response from officers to their emails. It was important that replying to emails was included in a telephone protocol, because all access points for customers should be covered.

The officers explained to the panel their performance monitoring arrangements. Email from members of the public, telephone call response times, responses to letters and appointments, had been monitored for eight months. Staff were averaging 98% responses to emails from the public within the customer service standard time. Responses to members were not currently monitored and the officers emphasised that too much monitoring would become meaningless. Only telephone calls to certain public-facing numbers were monitored as it

was a very costly exercise to monitor all telephone calls. Results from monitoring had shown that there was room for improvement, although it was found that 98% telephone calls to the switchboard were answered within time and this was far in excess of nearby local authorities. The officers stressed the importance to recognise the pockets of high performance in relation to customer service standards.

The panel discussed with the officers the type of monitoring information would be available to them.

Conclusion:

To keep this item as a high priority area on the panel's work programme and to receive monitoring information, initially on public-facing telephones, regularly until the panel is satisfied that standards are satisfactory.

To inform the Chief Executive that staff require further encouragement to meet the customer service standards

PM/RC to note for work programme.
JM/RD to provide information.
PM to forward comments

92. LOCAL AREA AGREEMENTS

The Economic and Community Development Team Leader gave a slide show presentation on the Local Area Agreement (LAA) for Lincolnshire with the following key points.

- A Local Area Agreement (LAA) is a contractual agreement between partners to achieve added value outcomes through joint working.
- There is only going to be one LAA for Lincolnshire and the county council will be the accountable body. The issue is: what's local for Grantham is not necessarily local for Lincoln city, for example.
- LAAs were designed to deliver rationalisation of non-core funding streams, adding value, community leadership, freedom and flexibilities, priorities of community strategy.
- There are four cross-cutting "blocks", or work streams set by the government: safer & stronger communities; healthier communities and older people; children and young people; and economic development and enterprise.
- The LAA is the principal delivery vehicle for the sustainable community strategy for Lincolnshire and support for district community strategies.
- The framework of the LAA would ensure input from local level.
- Progress to date – Lincolnshire executive body and programme board had been established and block lead officers identified. Project plans for each block were being developed. Mandatory outcomes and funding streams had been identified. Most funding was from the government. Public service agreement outcomes were agreed.
- Local strategic partnerships were mapping community strategy priorities identifying areas of alignment.

- Key challenges included: the reconfiguration of primary care trusts; restructure of the county council; police authority restructure; voluntary sector infrastructure and capacity; aligning county and local priorities.
- The LAA would show Lincolnshire to be working cohesively, therefore increasing its reputation. The process is heavily evidence-based and had to ensure that value would be added.
- Some pilots had reported in professional press that they had not received as many freedoms and flexibilities as anticipated. However, it is up to Lincolnshire to make it work.

This was discussed by the panel and the following comments made.

- There was concern that Lincolnshire had not historically been applying for additional funds and who would decide on the funding for the LAA. It was clarified that the Government Office for the East Midlands allocated funding and had focussed towards deprived areas.
- There was a chance that the council could lose out on funding as national focus shifts towards the 2021 Olympic Games. Need to make sure that all our districts put the work in, then Lincolnshire, then the East Midlands. Need to be sensible and make sure that we allow the neediest areas get the funding.
- Town and parish councils should be feeding into the process to ensure their priorities are considered. This raised the issue that Grantham may be disadvantaged because it had no town council.
- There was also concern that there may be a lack of representation on the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). The officer clarified that to prevent the LSP becoming a talking shop, a two-tier approach had been created of aboard and then executive. Lincolnshire Association of Local Councils had representation at a higher level.
- Some members were concerned that town centre managers were not elected. The officer explained that the problem with local representation on the LSP was more that representatives were not reporting back to their organisations, not that they were necessarily under-represented. This was a problem for a number of bodies throughout the country.

93. LOCAL FORUMS

The notes from the last round of Local Area Assemblies (now called Local Forums) were noted. One member noted the declining public turnout at the Deepings meetings and asked that publicity be improved.

94. EQUALITIES

The minutes of the last Equalities and Diversity Steering Group were noted.

95. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Noted.

96. WORK PROGRAMME

Noted.

The issue of a closed-loop induction system in committee rooms was raised, as some members had difficulty hearing the debate.

Conclusion:

- (1) Review of Priorities to be removed from and Telephone/communications protocol to be added to the work programme.***
- (2) To ask the Chief Executive to consider the installation of a closed-loop induction system in the committee rooms.***

PM/RC to update programme and forward comments.

97. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 4.07p.m.

Agenda Item 8

ACCESS AND MODERNISATION PANEL – special meeting

Notes of Meeting: Tuesday 11th July 2006

Members Present: Councillor Kirkman
Councillor Nadarajah
Councillor Carpenter (observer)

Officers Present: Ian Pick
Rebecca Chadwick

Apologies Councillor Wilks
Councillor M Williams

1. BROADBAND FOR MEMBERS

This meeting had been arranged to discuss with the portfolio holder, the group's recommendations on broadband for members. The key issue had been those members who had their own broadband and did not want to change. These members should be reimbursed up to the amount paid for to other members, making the council responsible only for the routers. The payment to members would be through their allowance and tax implications recovered through the Inland Revenue telephone claim.

Ian Pick circulated a summary of methods councillors use to access systems and usage figures.

The following points were made during discussion:

- Members would have to actively claim for their broadband provision so they would need to be informed on this.
- A usage policy would need to be signed.
- Council equipment was not attached to a members' machine using their own computer and broadband for a business.
- Everyone had to be treated as a separate case but it was noted that the more private lines were installed, the less efficient the project was.
- The words "up to the end of the yearly contract" should be inserted at then end of recommendation (1).
- Routers were provided by BT with their package and so members should be able to keep these.
- December was considered a suitable cut-off time for the roll-out of broadband provision. This can be revisited in November.
- Next meeting of the panel should consider a recommendation to the portfolio holder to take to cabinet that from May 2007 onwards, all committee paperwork, save minimal legal requirements, was circulated electronically. For this to work effectively, power supplies for laptops would need to be installed in the committee rooms.

Councillor Carpenter accepted the recommendations, subject to the amendment noted above.

Action point: report back to next scheduled meeting of the panel.

ACCESS AND MODERNISATION WORKING GROUP

Notes of meeting: Wednesday 2nd August 2006

Members present: Councillor John Kirkman
Councillor John Wilks
Councillor Mike Williams
Councillor Carpenter (observer)

Officers present: Chris Sharp
Ray Davidson
Ian Pick
Marion Fox
Andy Nix
Rebecca Chadwick

Apologies: Councillor Nadarajah

1. NOTES FROM LAST MEETING

These were approved.

2. BROADBAND FOR MEMBERS

The notes from the special meeting on broadband were approved subject to the amendment of the last sentence of the first paragraph to: "The payment to members would be through their allowance and tax implications recovered through the telephone allowance as agreed by Inland Revenue."

Councillor Carpenter confirmed that he accepted the recommendations on broadband and he was thanked for doing so. Roll out of broadband for members would cease in December. A specific decision would be taken on this in November. Broadband would not be provided to members not intending to stand for re-election in 2007.

3. COUNCIL DECISION DATABASE

Councillor Kirkman had discussed with the scrutiny co-ordinating group the need for an A-Z database of council and cabinet decisions. This was so scrutiny members could identify and select decisions suitable for post-scrutiny.

Rebecca Chadwick had investigated what could be provided from the committee administration software, modern.gov. The only thing available was a decision list, which was similar to the weekly decision list already

produced by Democratic Services. The current search facility should provide a useful tool for finding decisions.

This, however, was not considered sufficient, as it did not isolate the decision part from the minutes. Andy Nix and Marion Fox explained that a separate database would be a duplication of work and that modern.gov should be used to provide this.

Action note: to investigate further how modern.gov can be used to provide a decision database. (AN/RC)

4. CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE UPDATE

Chris Sharp, with Ray Davidson and the other officers present, reported on the project plan and items outstanding. There had been a range of work streams that had been ongoing for some time leading up to the go-live of customer services.

Matters outstanding were:

- Payments – this was mostly completed. It was estimated that 10-15 payment transactions per day would need accommodating in the centre. Work focussed on how to ensure that the processes for this did not hinder modernisation or customer-focus.
- Staffing – the long restructuring process for customer services and the transfer staff was nearly complete. The appointments had been made internally but residual recruitment was still underway with selection imminent. Chris was asked about reception staff: corporate calls would be received separately but within the telephony centre. The knowledge of reception staff would be utilised in meet & greet, as this was one of the key areas of the customer service centre because it would start the process and it needed to ensure a smooth flow of customers. Meet & greet staff would also be able to guide customers on self-service equipment when appropriate. A detailed guide for relevant staff would be provided. Movement throughout the centre, empowerment, flexibility and using initiative would be encouraged. This was an important opportunity to address the council's image, including uniforms. The new uniform would be complementary to the new corporate identity. The officers were also asked about how information on a customer's query was passed onto the queuing system, stating how important it was that service was seen to be fair: every customer service assistant would be able to see the query queue although initially, not every assistant would be able to handle every query. Flexibility in the meet & greet function would help. Meet & greet would also be able to advise on estimated waiting times and provide flexible solutions to customers as appropriate.
- Building works – the snagging exercise was left to do, a health & safety audit and a disability audit also need to be carried out. Because building work had been completed in good time, there was plenty of time to carry out comprehensive testings and audits. An

under spend on building work would provide flexibility for any adaptations required from these audits. Every second booth would have induction loop systems.

- Signage – a lot of work was required to ensure signage throughout the building was up to date. Exit/entrance management to be worked on. Staff and members would be advised on which entrances they could use (i.e. not the customer service centre). Marion was working on a comprehensive review of all signage in the building. For customers, when the centre was opened, temporary signs could be placed to explain that the new customer entrance was open. Marion added that an officer would likely be situated at the current main entrance to initially direct customers to the centre.
- Transfer of planning services –ongoing.
- Corporate visitors – ongoing.
- Visitors for meetings – direction solutions were being addressed.
- Procedure for using private booths and viewing plans – work was ongoing.
- CSC and back office connection – need a type of service level agreement between the two so that all understood what was expected from each and that the service remained the focus. Members raised their concerns on contacting back office staff, especially on the telephone: this was currently being addressed by the DSP and the importance of the support of the back office was acknowledged.
- Communications – this was being addressed. Different types of communication and guidance/training for advisors would be provided.
- Official opening – it had been decided that a soft launch would be appropriate with a follow-up evening reception with interested parties, including the media.

Chris Sharp expressed his thanks to the other officers involved in the project. They were meeting weekly to monitor progress and manage the process. The centre would open on a Wednesday (as this was generally a quieter day) with the anticipated date being 27th September.

Member were concerned on the number of power points provided in the centre and the need to have Perspex, or similar, covering any low level LCD screens in the centre.

Action notes:

- (1) To recommend to the Engagement DSP that members support the decision to soft-launch the customer service centre followed with an evening reception for interested parties.**
- (2) Officers to follow-up on issues raised by members as noted above.**

5. GO-LIVE/MODERNISATION PROJECT PLAN UPDATE

Andy Nix reported that waste service had gone live in July and as many calls as environment health had been received. Housing solutions scanning of documents was still ongoing and a tender was out for the back-scanning of planning documents. Andy confirmed that payment for half of this would be made from the planning grant. Paul Carpenter was to make a non-key decision on this shortly. The go-live for development and building control would coincide with the launch of the CSC. A central mail room would be provided, probably where the current staff rest room was. Officers clarified for the group that it was planned that the current reception area be converted to a rest area for staff. Consultants were working on the GIS mapping system and the database of assets was being worked on by an officer group.

After the CSC was launched, work would start on looking at budgets and milestone planning. A report on this would be made at the next meeting.

Officers were asked about testing the systems and whether a plan was in place. They explained that various testing would be undertaken.

Action notes:

- (1) To recommend to the Engagement DSP that members support the proposals to convert the current reception into a staff rest area.***
- (2) Andy Nix to report at the next meeting on budgets and milestone planning.***
- (3) Officers to report on testing the systems at the next meeting.***



DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT

A Working Group
Scrutiny Review

2006

Lead Member:

Councillor Shorrock

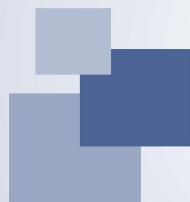
Members:

Councillor Exton
Councillor Jalili
Councillor Helstrip
Councillor Rose

Richard La-Vine
Martin Samson
Gary Kimber

Wade Rowlett
Cheryl Pidgeon

South Kesteven District Council
South Kesteven District Council
Lincolnshire County Council
Thurlby Parish Council, Local
Strategic Partnership
The King's School
The King's School
Grantham College Students'
Association
Grantham Business Club
GMB



"Promoting pride in our communities"

FOREWORD

The democratic review working group has worked hard to give a thorough consideration to a wide range of issues that may affect democratic engagement. It was timely that the Joseph Rowntree sponsored Power Inquiry was reporting at the same time and this provided a range of useful material for the group to work with.

The working group came from a diversity of roles and backgrounds that allowed a mixed range of views and ideas to flourish. It is credit to all the group members that they were willing to listen and work with a range of ideas and suggestions, many of which challenge received notions about democracy and representation. I thank them all for their open-minds and willingness to digest a lot of material.

The outcome is a report that has tried to tackle some big issues - engaging young people in democracy, developing new approaches to how council members and officers can work with citizens and developing approaches to rebuilding democratic action at neighbourhood levels. The working group makes no apology for this as it felt that the key issues were deeper than simply looking at ways to try and increase voter turnout. In fact, a strong theme that emerges from much of the evidence is a binding relationship between political knowledge, community cohesion and democratic participation. Where this is strong participation is vibrant.

The recommendations attempt to provide a springboard for practical action. This is a positive start in developing a genuine change in approach and thinking. They are based on a belief that citizens are not to blame for failing to engage with us, but that we need different approaches to engage with their aspirations, anxieties and concerns that are meaningful and relevant to their lives in the 21st century.

Finally, my thanks to the officers that provided support and advice to the working group, particularly Rebecca Chadwick and Malcolm Hall.

Rob Shorrock

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INTRODUCTION

In September 2005, the Engagement DSP identified the level of disengagement and apathy within the communication as demonstrated by the declining turn-out for elections in recent years, notably the turnouts at by-elections during that year, as a key item for its work programme.

In November 2005, the Engagement DSP consulted the council's Elections Manager to find out further details of voter turn-out at elections. He affirmed that although it was the officers' role to facilitate the electoral process, it was the politicians who should be encouraging voting and democratic engagement. The Electoral Commission had recently concluded that it was not just voter-apathy that was of concern, but a general low interest and disaffection with politics. This is supported by a number of other sources as we found out in our investigations.

It was clear that because this problem was much broader than election turn-out statistics and because the drive was required from politicians, rather than officers, member-led investigation was required and so this working group was established. The working group was as representative of interested parties as it could be, and co-opted members from each of the three tiers of local government, the voluntary sector, private sector and students.

Other Contributors

Rebecca Chadwick	Scrutiny Support Officer
Paul Morrison	Scrutiny Officer
Malcolm Hall	Elections Manager
Ellen Breur	Communications Manager
Councillor Paterson	Pointon and Sempringham Parish Council
Sonja Powell	Sure Start
Susan Swinburn	Voluntary Action
Kate Rose	ROL Solutions
Shelley Kingston	Area Youth Office

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The working group has investigated a number of different aspects of citizen engagement in the democratic process.

The group has found that people *are* interested in politics, especially political issues, but are often disengaged from the traditional processes. A major barrier is a lack of access (or a perceived lack of access) to knowledge about how to influence political issues of interest to them.

The group has studied disengagement suffered by young people and found that age did not affect a person's interest in political issues. The group found, however, that citizenship education within schools was not sufficient.

Although a pioneer in the field of online citizens juries, the council could make further use of technological innovations to enhance democratic engagement with certain groups of citizens.

Study of election turnout found that there is a significant link between turnout and community cohesiveness and has made recommendations relating to this issue, and the others noted above.

The group's recommendations are recorded from page 20 of this report.

EVIDENCE

The working group obtained various types of evidence during its investigation. Its membership was also constructed to include a number of different stakeholders and it met with the council's:

- Communications manager
- Elections and electoral registration manager
- Scrutiny officer

and interviewed:

- Kate Rose (rol)
- Shelley Kingston (Youth area manager – Lincolnshire Social Services)

It undertook desktop research and drew evidence from:

- 'Beyond the Soundbite: BBC research into public disillusion with politics' (British Broadcasting Corporation, February 2002)
- 'Report on means of improving voter turnout' (Borough of Pendle, Overview and Scrutiny Task Committee A, February 2003)
- 'Report and Comments by the Electoral Reform Society on the 2003 Local Elections in England', www.electoral-reform.org.uk/publications/briefings/pilotingalternativevotingmethods.html
- 'Measures to address low turnout' (House of Commons Parliament and Constitution Centre, August 2003)
- 'Does living in a small rural community affect turnout in a local election?' (Frances Brebner, 2004)
- 'Not all 'Second-Order' Contests are the Same' (Political Studies Association, 2005)
- 'Beyond the Ballot' (POWER Inquiry, May 2005)
- 'Non-voters Survey Summary' (POWER Inquiry, May 2005)
- 'Power to the People' (POWER Inquiry, March 2006)
- South Kesteven District Council Elections, Turnout Figures (2003 and 2005)

FINDINGS

Many interesting points have been found in the report of POWER, an independent inquiry conducted over eighteen months into what is happening to our democracy and why disengagement from formal politics is increasing. Power published a comprehensive 300+ page report. Some of the key themes that the working group found from this review are below.

"The disquiet is really about having no say. It is about feeling disconnected because voting once every four or five years does not feel like real engagement" (p.9).

There is a myth that the British public are becoming apathetic but that is not the case. The POWER inquiry found that there "is a great deal of research evidence to show that very large numbers of citizens are engaged in community and charity work outside of politics. There is also clear evidence that involvement in pressure politics...has been growing significantly for many years." The 2005 Home Office Citizenship Survey found that 50% of British adults volunteer formally or informally at least once a month. The POWER Inquiry found that 37% non-voters were active in a charity, community group, public body or campaigning organisation. Interest in political issues is high (see survey results of non-voters). It could be concluded that there really is no disengagement, just that it is not apparent in its traditional forms (p.16).

Problem is cross-national and not unique to Britain.

"Disengagement is NOT caused by

- an apathetic and uninterested public with a weak sense of civic duty;
- a widespread economic and political contentment;
- the supposedly low calibre and probity of politicians;

- the lack of competitive elections;
- an overly negative news media;
- lack of time on the part of citizens.”(p.17)

Instead, it is interesting to note that the POWER Inquiry concluded that the reality was that:

- citizens do not feel that the processes of formal democracy offer them enough influence over political decisions – this includes party members who feel they have no say in policy-making and are increasingly disaffected;
- the main political parties are widely perceived to be too similar and lacking in principle – their policies are guided by the search for votes from the center-ground rather than deeply held values;
- the electoral system is widely perceived as leading to unequal and wasted votes;
- political parties and elections require citizens to commit to too broad a range of policies;
- many people feel they lack information or knowledge about formal politics;
- voting procedures are regarded by some as inconvenient and unattractive.

The Inquiry suggests that the key root cause of disengagement is that the political system still operates according to a now outmoded industrial society. Class systems and party loyalty are no longer applicable. Whereas there is, admittedly, little the council can do directly to solve this, there are a number of improvements it can make to help (see conclusions and recommendations).

The working group discussed this idea and considered that whereas it does have relevance, the group does not place the same amount of emphasis on this



issue as the Power Inquiry. These points, however, could be considered as some of the factors contributing to disengagement.

Frustration and alienation are also key factors identified by the Power Inquiry (p.58).

Political disengagement (pp.33-36) requires the council's focus because there are potential detrimental effects:

- loss of mandate and legitimacy
- loss of political equality
- loss of dialogue
- loss of effective political recruitment
- rise of undemocratic forces
- risk of quiet authoritarianism

Some have argued that some of these are already present in the political system.

Even though the calibre of politicians, national and local, has been attacked, the POWER Inquiry found no evidence to suggest that this had increased in recent years i.e. that it had no bearing on decreasing voter-turnout.

An interesting finding, however, (p.63) is that people's distrust of politicians decreased for people who had had actual dealings with a politician; better results were received from people asked about the competence of their local representative, rather than politicians generally. This shows that a better engagement from local politicians should increase public perception.

"The problem is systemic not personal. Disengagement has arisen because a disjunction now exists between the way formal democratic politics is

structured and conducted in Britain and the values, interests, expectations and lifestyles of the British people. The failure of politicians is not the way they behave in their professional lives but the fact that they have not yet developed a strategic and thoroughgoing response to this disjunction."

There is a contrast between "active citizens who could not see meaning in formal politics and formal politicians who could not see how they might offer that meaning to those active citizens" (p.259).

Although the POWER Inquiry was mainly directed at parliamentary politics, many of its recommendations are relevant to local government and have been considered by the group.

No	Recommendation	Details	Working Group Comments
12	A responsive electoral system should be introduced for elections to the House of Commons, House of Lords and local councils in England and Wales	A replacement is required for the first-past-the-post system.	The group has no consensual view on this but notes that it would be interesting to see how this progresses on a national level.
14	The system whereby candidates have to pay a deposit which is lost if their votes fall below a certain threshold should be replaced with a system where the candidate has to collect the signatures of a set number of supporters in order to appear on the ballot paper.	This will reduce a financial barrier to candidates standing for election. Evidence suggests that current system is a serious barrier to smaller parties and independents.	The group has some support for this but to be applied practically and effectively, a statistically significant number of signatures would be required.
16	Voting and candidacy age should be reduced to 16	POWER suggests that because "when young people are faced with a genuine opportunity to involve themselves in a meaningful process that offers them a real chance of influence, they do so with	The working group is not convinced that this would work because 16 year olds may not know enough about local politics to be interested in this formal process. Note: further evidence received from the Area Youth

		enthusiasm and with responsibility".	Office below showed that there was an interest.
17	The introduction of automatic, individual voter registration at 16. This can be done in tandem with the allocation of National Insurance numbers	POWER estimates that 4 million people of voting age fail to register and that this is increasing. Younger people, those on lower incomes, lower education or living in rented accommodation are more likely to fail to register.	The working group considers that there is good potential here to improve registration by removing the most basic barrier.
18	The citizenship curriculum should be shorter, more practical and result in a qualification.	This would improve levels of understanding from an early age. The POWER Inquiry found that several improvements to the curriculum were required.	Young people are generally ignorant of local politics. Citizenship education can be too burdensome and teachers may not always be confident enough to present an exciting and stimulating debate. Encouragement is required at this age as it is fundamental to people's future engagement in democracy.
21	Text voting or email voting should only be considered following other reform of our democratic arrangements.	POWER supports the further investigation of alternative procedures but should only be implemented when security is guaranteed.	This is very promising and should be investigated in further detail. Web-based voting also has considerable potential.
24	Citizens should be given the right to initiate legislative processes, public inquiries, hearings etc.	Citizens Initiatives have the potential to capture the political energy generated by single issues and make them a source of re-engagement with formal democratic processes.	This could be too costly and may remove authority from elected members. If implemented, there should be an appropriate balance. Danger is that everything could end up being decided by referendum.
30	'Democracy hubs' should be established – resources centres for information relating to democratic engagement	Will create a new sense of influence and communication.	May be a duplication of existing service and communication. Communication does need improving, however.

The POWER Inquiry identified broad responses to the problem of disengagement:

- The Executive has become more powerful at the expense of MPs
- Central government departments have also become more powerful at the expense of local government over the last two to three decades
- Appointed authorities – quangos – have gained extra powers, particularly at the expense of local councillors
- Supranational bodies and processes of international negotiation such as the European Union have gained extra powers and influence at the expense of nationally and locally elected representatives.

This has resulted in making political decision-making “more opaque, hidden and complex.” (p.126)

ELECTION TURNOUT

The working group examined a dissertation by a local resident, Frances Brebner, on “Does living in a small rural community affect turnout?” using Greatford as a case study, kindly donated to the group following initial publicity. This drew a potential relationship between the financial prosperity of a ward and turnout, there was little correlation between average age and turnout, peripheral issues such as weather had little effect, levels of education had some bearing on turnout, candidates living in the ward were more likely to be elected than those that did not. The major factor affecting election turnout in this study was the size of community: “community involvement and engagement increases in smaller, distinct communities” (p.36).

In response to this, the elections and electoral registration manager was asked to produce evidence relating to rural turnout and postal vote figures. It was found that the highest turnout in urban wards was equivalent to the lowest turnout in rural wards.

The working group also heard verbal evidence from the officer:

- District elections had seen a turnout below 50% in 1991 and this was declining.
- In 2003, 1/3 district seats had been unopposed. The figure had been higher for parish elections. A large number of parishes only had just enough members.
- 18-25 year olds were most disaffected.
- County and Parliamentary elections (Grantham & Stamford constituency) had seen above average turnout but was still declining. County Council elections were combined with Parliamentary to encourage turnout.
- There had been a dramatic increase in voter turnout at the 2004 European Parliament election. This had been an all-postal vote pilot and this could largely explain this increase.
- The group suggested that the postal pilot was only a solution to the problem of voting “convenience”, not a solution to any core apathy problems. Electronic pilots, however, may further increase the convenience of voting. A range of solutions for the broad spectrum of barriers to engagement was required.

The figures presented showed a general decline in voter engagement. The Elections Manager suggested that the main reason for this was that the public did not consider that their vote made a difference.

It was noted that “Quality Parish Council” status now required full membership with no co-optees. This had been increased from a requirement of 80% members.

It was suggested that a large number of people did not understand the difference in service provision of different tiers of local government. Even though this information was often provided in leaflets with Council tax bills, these were too lengthy and complicated.

Publication of meetings was poor. It was suggested that the Council should pay for advertising its meetings in local newspapers.

BEYOND THE BALLOT

The working group scrutinised the 57 Democratic Innovations from around the world to assess applicability to local government. Those with potential were:

- Postal ballots – saves time, improves access to voting, especially for rural areas. Security and education would need addressing.
- Electronic voting – use of internet and text messaging voting and local voting kiosks. This would increase younger turnout and could be more secure than polling cards or postal voting. There may only be a small increase in overall turnout.
- Public meetings e.g. LAAs should be developed further.
- “Deliberation Day” – national holiday two weeks prior to a major election allowing time to attend neighbourhood meetings and discussions on the central campaign issues.

YOUNG PEOPLE

There is no evidence to suggest that young people are less interested in politics and this is reflected by the membership of our group (30% members are young people). A number of surveys, studies and reports show this. P. Norris (p.59) explains that “in contemporary societies now engage in a repertoire of political activity which is wider than the traditional and formal modes of political participation...Young people may actually feel more comfortable using pressure rather than electoral activity. However, there is a gap between the numbers of young people who are interested in politics and the number who actually voted; the Electoral Commission found that the 59% of the population who expressed an interest in politics matched the 59% people who voted in 2001. For young people specifically, 53% were interested in politics yet only 39% voted.

The working group has discussed in detail the delivery of citizenship education in schools. Political studies tended to be very structure-based and therefore uninspiring and bland. Teachers may not want to be so controversial and thought-provoking in an attempt to remain unbiased. One of the students present commented that General Studies 'A'-Level at 16-18 years was also focused on structures and procedures rather than the current political issues, which would be much more interesting to discuss. The structural side is already covered in lower years therefore for 16-18 year olds, citizenship-type education should be much more practical. It was also suggested that the district council could offer to help deliver this, perhaps with a local youth council.

The working group heard evidence from Shelley Kingston, Youth Area Manager, on youth engagement. There were many positive aspects such as the Lincolnshire Youth Cabinet, which was elected annually and allocated portfolios to members, but it was also recognised that there was difficulty in engaging with young people in the community who were not so easily reached. The Lincolnshire Youth Service did try to promote positive engagement in young people with democratic processes.

The working group also discussed interest that had been expressed from young people in co-options and youth councils. The Chairman of the group agreed to discuss the council's position with the portfolio holder.

UNDERSTANDING

The POWER Inquiry concluded (p.87) that "basic understanding of the system is low and that this leaves people unclear about how to get involved in politics

and intimidated about participating in a world they do not fully understand.” This was clearly supported by our initial discussions.

There is a clear need for the council to communicate better on its procedures for public involvement. The content on the website is satisfactory but many people are excluded from this form of communication so alternatives are required. The working group has developed a “Getting Involved” leaflet which it recommends for publication by the council.

OBSERVATIONS OF NON-VOTERS

The working group considered a non-voters survey and found the following points to be of interest:

1. Even though non-voters indicated that they were not interested in “politics”, they were interested in political issues such as the NHS, law and order, education, the environment and international affairs.
2. The connection between political issues and politics therefore needed communicating to the public.
3. The recent Stamford referendum had sparked local interest in politics. This reflected section 10 of the survey results, which listed a ‘yes/no’ referendum as one of the most likely methods of involvement in decision-making that would interest current non-voters.
4. Referenda usually related to tangible issues, and these issues were the most likely to be of interest to the public.
5. Referenda will only engage the public if they can trust that the majority result will be implemented by the local authority.
6. The NHS was the issue respondents were most interested in. It was noted that PCTs advertised their quarterly meetings, which were open to the public, in the local press. It was suggested that it should be the responsibility of the public to attend. The majority of members, however,

suggested that the adverts were too small to be noticed in the newspapers. Guidance was needed about how the public could get involved in these meetings. This could be produced by the council, and would reflect council's neighbourhood champion role.

BARRIERS TO INVOLVEMENT

1. Language was a barrier: different languages as well as the use of plain English.
2. If public sector organisations were having difficulty in engaging "easy to reach" groups, it is not going to engage with "hard to reach groups".
3. Organisations can find it difficult to get the information they need from organisations in the public sector, it must therefore be very difficult for an individual, with perhaps less knowledge and confidence, to obtain necessary information. Engagement needs to be understandable, accessible and audience-focused.
4. Documents produced in the public sector are often unnecessarily too lengthy, complicated, boring, specialist and sometimes irrelevant.
5. Face to face contact with politicians appears to be the most effective method of engagement and stimulating interest.
6. Influencing decision-making can be very technical with many different channels. Direct interface in the private sector was far less complicated. The mechanisms for engaging with the Council need communicating to the public.
7. Experience from canvassing shows that women tended to be interested in the political issues whereas men were more interested in the personality of the political leaders.
8. The lack of a district-wide newspaper was a disadvantage to engagement because coverage of stories was sporadic across the district so some people were left unaware of a particular story. The Council should pressure and encourage editors to print stories from press releases.

9. Citizenship education in schools was believed to be undertaken occasionally. This was only once a month at one school's sixth form. There was, however, very good potential for developing citizenship education at this age.
10. It was acknowledged that starting engagement at school ages was important but the Council had found it difficult to involve the schools.
11. It was suggested that events in school are most effective in encouraging engagement when speakers took a "chatty" but straightforward approach, talking about the sharp end of issues and not using patronizing niceties.
12. Work experience would be very useful for the sixth form, when students were considering university applications or starting a career. Work experience within the Council, even just for one day, would help students understand the workings of a local authority and prompt interest.
13. Use of local radio was considered one of the best methods of communication. Some people considered a newspaper a luxury, and some people could not read, so communication in writing should not always be relied upon by the Council.
14. Too much canvassing at election time could prompt apathy because of an overload of information.
15. People tended to be inspired by other individuals. Community champions, specifically a champion relating to politics, could therefore be investigated.
16. There had been no decline in the number of polling stations so this was not a cause of the decline in voter turnout.
17. Towns other than Grantham often felt disconnected from the Council. The Council should therefore do more to include the whole district.
18. Although assumptions should not be made about different age groups, it was suggested that a website would not engage older people and newsletters would not engage younger people. As mentioned previously, a broad spectrum of solutions was required.

19. Standard approaches to communication and engagement tended to be very blunt and lacking in creativity.
20. Different communication efforts such as SKToday and Skyline could be better coordinated. Information should be easily selectable because a lot of information is often channeled to the public.
21. Businesses could be targeted with promotional material to display or forward to staff.
22. Daytime meetings are a potential barrier to involvement.
23. Meetings in different locations throughout the district would benefit.
24. Meetings such as Local Forums (LAAs) need promoting in schools. These could even be hosted in schools, helping to engage with younger people and the community.
25. Millennium Volunteer Scheme could be investigated.
26. North Kesteven District Council's "speed-dating" pilot with local members and young people had revealed that while young people respected and valued the councillors, they would not considered becoming a member in the future because they were not salaried positions.
27. If the council chose to provide salaries to its members, this would have to be balanced with public perception. Similar problems existed at parish council level. For the larger parish and town councils, members had to volunteer a lot of their time, which was unpaid.
28. Prejudices also existed in the workplace against allowing elected members time off to attend council meetings.

LOCAL AREA ASSEMBLIES

During its investigations, the working group was asked by the Engagement DSP to carry out a short review of the council's local area assemblies (now called Local Forums). The group's report is attached at appendix A and was submitted to the Engagement DSP in April 2006, who used it to make its own report at the following cabinet meeting.

CITIZENS JURIES

The working group discussed the progress that the council had made with citizens juries, hearing evidence from Kate Rose from rol solutions, and Rebecca Chadwick, the council's lead project officer for citizens juries. The online juries were progressing with two completed at the time of this report. The third online jury to be held in the Autumn was planned to be run in a school.

The working group recommendation this initiative and would like to see this developed and extended.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is clearly a desire for citizens to be involved in local decision-making. This has been demonstrated most recently by the growing campaign against any diminution of services at Grantham Hospital. Also, the residents' survey carried out recently indicated a significant proportion of people that wanted to be involved. The group also identified that a key barrier to access was knowledge about processes and it is recommended that:

- 1. An annual publication should be produced about how citizens could influence the council and other decision making bodies including health trusts. The publication should also contain information about standing as a councillor, expectations and benefits and information about political groups.***
- 2. Online citizens jury should be fully evaluated and the concept developed and the process integrated into the annual review of priorities.***
- 3. The concept of citizens involvement in council working groups should be explored in developing policy and service areas.***
- 4. A citizens engagement fund should be established to cover expenses incurred by citizens actively involved in consultative exercises. This would cover travel, childcare etc.***

Evidence indicated that young people are particularly disengaged from traditional democratic and decision-making structures. However, the Youth Council and Parliament initiative co-ordinated by the Youth Service is something that the Council should link into and work in co-operation to develop arrangements that can genuinely include young people's voices on local issues. It is recommended that:

- 5. The council should engage in national initiatives, such as *I am a Councillor Get Me Out of Here* and *Democracy Day* on an annual basis and councillors are encouraged to be involved.**
- 6. A link to the council's webpages should be included on the Youth Parliament site and issues under discussion are provided to the parliament.**
- 7. Local Youth Councils should be able to feed issues into the engagement DSP and 6 monthly Youth Area Forums are held, facilitated by the council and the youth service.**
- 8. Local Youth Councils should be approached with their view on being able to nominate members for co-option onto the district and parish/town councils.**

Issues were raised about citizenship education and how effectively it was preparing young people for democratic engagement. Evidence indicated that it was not sufficient and that the focus should be on developing a sense of understanding on how to influence decision-makers to change things. It is recommended that:

- 9. A group of councillors should be trained to be able to go into schools to deliver and enhance the democracy and political engagement part of the curriculum.**
- 10. The council should offer placements for school students to gain experience about what the council does and how decisions are made.**
- 11. The council should explore a structured programme and internships to complement citizenship education.**
- 12. An annual school representative assembly should be held that will include student representatives from all secondary schools in the district to advise on youth priorities. The council sets aside a sum of money each year to be allocated to the priority agreed by the assembly.**

The working group felt that the concept of citizenship should be given a high value, particularly when people reached the age of 18. It was recommended that:

- 13. All citizens on reaching the age of 18 should be given a citizens pack that includes information about their democratic rights and what this means. Details should also be given of local councillors, MPs etc and how to contact them. A copy of the citizens publication should be included.**

Evidence indicates that there is a significant link between election turnout and community cohesiveness and empowerment. It is therefore crucial to use strategies to stimulate community involvement that establishes an understanding and benefits of working with democratic and other agencies.

The group recommends that:

- 14. The council should develop a democratic engagement team to work with neighbourhoods on community activities and to promote democratic engagement initiatives, potentially working with other agencies.**
- 15. The council should work with South Lincs CVS to support grassroots neighbourhood initiatives that create local empowerment networks of organisations and individuals effecting change in their communities. These should be recognised and integrated into consultative machinery for council.**
- 16. The council should link into pre-election awareness campaigns and develops resources that can be used by key stakeholder groups and organisations to raise awareness about the importance of voting in elections.**

There is a need for the council to extend the use of web based communications to enhance democratic engagement with groups of citizens that are already familiar and adept with this medium as well as providing support to individuals that would like to develop skills to use it. It is recommended that:

- 17. *The facility to poll other citizens on questions should be available for citizens to utilise via the council website.***
- 18. *On-line discussion forum via the portals should be used to create dialogue-based consultation on priority areas. Members and officers should be trained in effectively employing this approach as a key element of consultation.***
- 19. *Facility should be developed to allow council meetings to be media streamed on line and an archive of meetings be available on the website.***
- 20. *Public online question and answer facility should be made available for citizens to ask members questions and a record of the questions and answers should be maintained in a list archive.***

Mechanisms that allow members of the public direct democratic engagement need to be explored further. A key area of consideration is a trigger for referendums and whether the outcome is binding on the council. It is recommended that:

- 21. *There should be further exploration on the issues related to direct democracy (e.g. binding referendums) and this should be considered by the on-line jury and local forums.***

APPENDIX A

Local Area Assemblies

Review of Purpose and Structure

SKDC set up the Local Area Assemblies as member based consultative meetings of all County and District Councillors, town and parish councils, and tenants Compact representatives within the defined area. Each assembly can also co-opt up to 5 additional members from, for example, the business community, voluntary and community sector etc. There are five LAAs covering Stamford, Bourne, Grantham, Rural North and Rural. Proposals were also developed to launch youth versions of the assemblies, but this has not yet happened.

It was originally intended that meetings would be held at least twice a year and more often if there are issues in a particular area. This has already happened in Bourne for example where there have been three LAA meetings concerning the Bourne Town Centre redevelopment.

Although the District Council established these assemblies, it was intended that they will eventually be driven by the assembly members themselves. Hence, the need for this review.

Assembly meetings are open to members of the Public who are able to put written questions to the Assembly on any matter of local relevance or concern. Guidance to the chairperson was that these would be dealt with at the end of the meeting. However, more often than not, the public have been allowed to ask questions and put points on items under discussion throughout the course of the meeting.

Issues for consideration.

Local Area Assemblies have evolved in purpose as they have progressed. The original goal of inter-council dialogue has developed into a widespread view held

by officer, member and those that come to the assemblies themselves, that they are vehicle for the public to be consulted and to raise questions about council and other services in their communities. The insistence that the public must put questions in writing to the chair before the start of the meeting and have to wait to the end of the meeting to have them dealt with has in many LAA's has been replaced by a more open and flexible dialogue between members and the public.

Therefore, because the LAAs have evolved it is now important to redefine their purpose, structure and delivery. The advent of the new role of the local strategic partnership that brings together stakeholders from county, district, health, education and other parts of the community to shape and lead on an integrated community strategy means that the goal of dialogue and partnership is being worked on, but in a different place.

The important question we need to ask is are the LAA's simply about bringing together a cross-section of community groups, councillors and organisations, or are they designed to genuinely give the public a voice in matters that affect their lives and communities?

Models of delivery

There are possible three distinct models of delivery:

- 1) Open forums that allow the public to come together, raise questions, listen to presentations and make suggestions to council officers and members. (Spelthorne model)
- 2) The development of constitutional decision-making bodies at a local or area level, led by ward councillors with budgetary, and neighbourhood strategic planning powers. (South Ribble model)
- 3) The development of ward or neighbourhood based forums that are led by ward councillors who discuss issues with members of the public and lead on them within the council decision-making machinery. Possible some funding for ward based initiatives. (Blackpool model)

It would seem to me that option 2 is part of a root and branch restructuring of the council decision-making and as such may not be viable in our current structures.

Recommendation:

The democratic review group felt that we should be developing a version of option one and working on structures and proposals that make the assemblies accessible and meaningful to the public. A focus should be on ensuring that the public have a sense of ownership over the meetings so that the issues they raise are properly examined and discussed and they understand how ideas, concerns and recommendations will be fed into the Council machinery. The use of assemblies for statutory and other consultations should be carefully examined and limited, as these give the impression.

The use of the term local assembly should be replaced to avoid confusion with the arrival of local area agreements. It is proposed that the term Local Public Forum is used instead, although the engagement dsp may want to consider possible alternatives. To avoid confusion, we will use the term LAA for the rest of this paper.

The Purpose of Local Area Assemblies

Local Area Assemblies will:

- Provide a way for the public to raise their own views and concerns about the Council or local issues.
- Provide an opportunity for the public to make recommendations to the council in a democratic way.
- Strengthen local community networks and develop constructive and effective partnerships between local people and the Council.
- Work with local people to improve their quality of life
- Take action to tackle local issues.

- Influence plans and services for the area and make sure they are what people want
- Bring together all those who live and work in an area in a positive and active partnership.

Local Area Assemblies will be held in the 5 areas that are currently defined.

Local Area Assemblies are meetings of SKDC and will be supported and serviced by officers of SKDC.

The initial chairs of LAA's will be appointed by Council and will be non-executive members. LAAs will also seek to recruit an additional two or three deputy chairs from the assembly itself. All chairs will undergo training in chairing public meetings.

Local Area Assemblies will be held at least 5 times a year.

The Local Area Assemblies will be promoted to community stakeholders, including:

- Local residents
- County, district, town and parish councillors.
- Voluntary Sector and Community organizations
- Social, sporting and recreational clubs and societies
- Local businesses and business associations and networks.
- Statutory agencies and partners.
- Police
- PCT
- Schools and colleges.
- Trades Union branches.
- Local Strategic Partnership
- RDA

The agenda for the Local Area Assembly will include as core:

- Items from the Council on priorities and initiatives
- Items set by the assembly themselves.
- Issues and questions from members of the public.

Chairs will strive to ensure that an equal amount of time is allotted to each agenda theme area.

Powers of Assemblies

- To make recommendations to council.
- Each assembly can recruit two or three deputy chairs from the assembly itself. All chairs will undergo training in chairing public meetings.
- Each Local Area Assembly will elect a member to sit on the partnership board of the South Kesteven Local Strategic Partnership.
- Each assembly may choose to agree its own rules of conducting business, as long as these rules do not hinder the democratic principle and ensure access and inclusiveness. Issues and concerns about this will be determined by full council.
- Assemblies will have the power to request members of the executive and officers of the council to attend, and present or answer questions on issues. Assemblies can also request the attendance of representatives of other decision-making bodies and statutory partners

The issues raised, outcomes and recommendations will be reported to the relevant Cabinet member\portfolio holder, DSP or if applicable the Local Strategic Partnership. The outcomes will also be published on the SKDC website linked into the online portals.

A report on how the recommendations have been received and dealt with will be presented to the next LAA and also to full Council.

Details of all those that attend should be taken for communication and equal opportunity monitoring purposes.

Rob Shorrock

On behalf of the Democratic Review Working Group

Agenda Item 9

REPORT TO ENGAGEMENT DSP

REPORT OF: BMS PROJECT OFFICER

REPORT NO.: CSV44

DATE: 6th September 2006

TITLE:	UPDATE REPORT – FRONTFACING TELEPHONY AND CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS
FORWARD PLAN ITEM:	n/a
DATE WHEN FIRST APPEARED IN FORWARD PLAN:	n/a
KEY DECISION OR POLICY FRAMEWORK PROPOSAL:	n/a

COUNCIL AIMS/PORTFOLIO HOLDER NAME AND DESIGNATION:	Access Cllr Paul Carpenter, Access and Engagement Portfolio	
CORPORATE PRIORITY:	Access and Communication	
CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS:	n/a	
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT IMPLICATIONS:	n/a	
INITIAL EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT	Carried out and appended to report? Not Applicable	Full impact assessment required? No
BACKGROUND PAPERS:	Report to Engagement DSP 14 th June 2006 – “Talk to Me” Protocol Customer Service Standards	

TEMPLATE FOR REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

The Engagement DSP asked that they be kept updated on telephony response performance for frontfacing extensions and corporate performance on responses to letters, e-mails and appointments.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Engagement DSP continue to be apprised of the monitoring results.

3. DETAILS OF REPORT

Annex A to this report shows the frontfacing telephony statistics for July and August, together with Corporate performance against Customer Service Standards for 06/07.

Corporate performance against Customer Service Standards is now available on the intranet in the Customer Services section.

Service Managers will receive a monthly e-mailed telephony report for their front-facing telephone numbers.

The “Talk to Me” protocol has been approved by the management board, and will be released to all managers at strategic director level. The Communications Manager has included handy tips for contactability in SKOOP on a monthly basis. Easy guides for phone and e-mail are currently being put into corporate format. Once this is complete, they will be published on the intranet. This means they are accessible to all managers and staff who have access to the intranet, and can be distributed by managers to any new starters and staff who are unable to access.

4. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND ASSESSED

Not applicable

5. COMMENTS OF SECTION 151 OFFICER

Not applicable

6. COMMENTS OF MONITORING OFFICER

Not applicable

7. COMMENTS OF OTHER RELEVANT SERVICE MANAGER

Not applicable

8. CONCLUSION/SUMMARY

There has been a dip in telephone answering performance during August. Overall, the percentage of answered calls is still below performance, as is the percentage of those calls answered within 10 rings.

Performance for e-mails and appointments is within target.

Performance for letters is improving monthly.

9. CONTACT OFFICER

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ANNEX A TO
CSV 44

CORPORATE PERFORMANCE - CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS

Month	Answered (%) Telephone (frontfacing)	Within Target (%)			
		Appointment	e-Mail	Letter	
Apr-06		55.82	99.33	97.94	73.75
May-06		51.81	99.50	98.62	83.78
Jun-06	71.29	51.78	99.36	96.45	94.99
Jul-06	73.52	53.66	98.76	96.08	95.09
Aug-06	69.86	50.64			
Sep-06					
Oct-06					
Nov-06					
Dec-06					
Jan-07					
Feb-07					
Mar-07					
CUMULATIVE%	71.56	52.74	99.24	97.27	86.90

REPORT TO COUNCIL

REPORT OF: Chief Executive

REPORT NO. CEX 288

DATE: 28th April 2005

TITLE:	Issues for South Kesteven District Council arising out of a review of the Corporate Governance Report on Lincolnshire County Council.
KEY DECISION OR POLICY FRAMEWORK PROPOSAL:	No
COUNCIL AIMS/PORTFOLIO HOLDER NAME AND DESIGNATION:	Corporate Governance
CORPORATE PRIORITY:	N/A
CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS:	N/A
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT IMPLICATIONS:	N/A

Introduction

In March the Audit Commission published its Corporate Governance Inspection report on Lincolnshire County Council, a copy of which is available on the Audit Commission web site.

It is stated that one of the major factors that led to the Corporate Governance inspection was the Council's failure to improve and the extent to which this was attributable to problems with leadership, culture, and community focus. As the local environment within which the County Council operates has many similarities to that of the District Council there are several learning lessons that the District can infer from these elements of the published report. This report identifies these lessons and makes recommendations for improvement.

There were other, more widely reported, factors that also contributed to the inspection. Fortunately the District has not suffered from any similar experiences so these elements have not been considered in this report.

Background

The County Council accepted in full the report and in their accompanying press release referred to it as a wake-up call. From South Kesteven's perspective it gives us an opportunity to develop a more informed understanding of the precise standards and expectations of inspection agencies such as the Audit Commission. This understanding, and the initiation of subsequent action in response to it, is vital if the Council is to achieve what the County has failed to do, and progress from "Fair" towards "Excellent".

The report does not make comfortable reading and challenges several long held assumptions and beliefs. Whilst no report can compel anyone to change their view or approach, the report does make it evident that any Council will pay a high price indeed if it cannot demonstrate appropriate standards of corporate governance. The report also makes clear that it is a responsibility of the Chief Executive to provide strong and unambiguous advice to the Council on the actions needed to demonstrate improvement and this report is written with this in mind.

Leadership, Culture and Standards of Conduct

Partnership Working

The report states that LCC are seen externally as weak because of their limited and reactive engagement with Local Strategic Partnership (LSPs) (para 31). Although SKDC has played a more leading role, there is still only a minority of members who have attended LSP meetings or become actively involved. The current review by the LSP of the Community Strategy provides an ideal opportunity for both executive and non-executive members to become more actively involved in this important partnership. The Council has recognised this in making the improvement of the LSP and the Community Strategy one of its "Category B" priorities. Sound understanding and support from all members to the LSP is essential but because of the number of organisations represented on the partnership, it is not possible for all 58 members of the SKDC to play an active role. Therefore the Council will need to assist the LSP in developing a consultation process that will improve knowledge, understanding and involvement between the LSP and Council members

Recommendation 1: That all groups make a clear statement of support and commitment to partnership working through the LSP.

Overview and Scrutiny Committees

The report welcomes the recent sharing of scrutiny chairs by LCC (para 34), which is seen as an example of a more open and transparent approach to business. South Kesteven had also embarked on a similar process this time last year. Since then the number Chairmanships held by non-administration members has reduced from two to one with the number of vice-chairmanships remaining at three. Whatever the reasons for this change, it is likely that an inspection would consider it to be a retrograde step.

Recommendation 2 : That the Chairs and Vice-Chairmanships of DSPs are shared between the major groups in a way that reflects the overall political balance of the Council.

Standards Committee

The report identified the key role of the Standards Committee in inspiring public confidence is the willingness of the Council to change. I have no evidence that these problems have affected the District Council's Standards Committee. However given the importance of this Committee it could be dangerous to rely solely on such an assumption.

Recommendation 3 : That the Chairman of the Standards Committee be invited to report to the Council on the extent to which he feels that the members of the authority understand and support the role of the Standards Committee and any proposals he may have for improving the work of the Standards Committee.

Member Training and Development

One key theme of the report is the importance of member training and development. Paragraph 30 for example draws a sharp contrast between the introduction of a competency framework for senior managers and the lack of any similar approach for members. Similarly paragraph 39 states that the leader has failed to champion the need for councillor training and reports reluctance by members to use external training agencies, and the partial take-up of the limited training that is available.

The recommendation of the report (at the foot of page 5) is to implement a comprehensive training and mentoring programme "ensuring that mandatory elements are identified and all Councillors attend".

Members of the County Council will know that the County member-training programme that is described as "limited" in the report is a more comprehensive programme that is currently being implemented in South Kesteven. Furthermore although approved by the Cabinet, there was strong opposition from some members of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee to the proposal to make it compulsory.

In the light of this I have asked the Monitoring Officer to clarify whether the Council does have the power to amend its constitution to require all members of the DSPs and Executive to attend specified training courses within twelve

months of being appointed. He has sought the opinion of a barrister on this point to ensure members have authoritative advice on the issue.

The Barrister's advice is to the effect that it is feasible to include in the Council's Constitution and specifically within the Local Members' Code of Conduct a suitable provision.

That provision is to the effect that any member who does not complete the scheme of training would render themselves in breach of the Code and therefore subject to a referral to the Standards Board for England.

It is likely that, for the future, such a referral would eventually be determined by this Council's Standards Committee who will have the power to approve a sanction on such a member of up to 3 months suspension from office.

Before implementing any scheme of compulsory training the Council will need to determine what are the essential requirements for members and what is the best format for providing this training. The resolution of these important issues will take a time and as we are currently in the middle of the Council term, it is recommended that the implementation of mandatory training elements for all members be effective from the 1st May 2007. After this date members would then have twelve months to attend the course appropriate to the Committees they serve on. The delivery of the discretionary, desirable competencies would then follow.

Recommendation 4 : That in view of the increasing importance of members training the Corporate Manager of Human Resources undertakes a review of the resources required to support a more comprehensive member training and development programme at South Kesteven using external expertise where appropriate.

Recommendation 5 : That the Constitution and Accounts Committee design an amendment to the Constitution so that with effect from the 1st May 2007, the desirable and essential competencies required of both Cabinet and DSP members are defined with all members being required to attend designated sessions for the essential competencies within twelve months of their appointment.

Effectiveness and team ethos of the Cabinet and CMT

In a number of places the report refers to ineffectual working of both the County Executive and the CMT both individually and when they meet together. This is little evidence to suggest that this is a problem at South Kesteven, however given the importance of these relationships it would be worth repeating the staff survey conducted by the Audit Commission in South Kesteven to ascertain staff perceptions on these issues. As we have just completed one survey, the best time for another survey would be in the autumn. This would also enable the results to be compared with the outcomes from the 360 degree appraisals currently being undertaken by members of the Executive

Recommendation 6: That in the autumn of this year, staff of South Kesteven are asked to complete the survey used by the Audit Commission to inform the Corporate Governance report so that results can be compared.

Attitude of the Council to Consultation

Paragraph 45 of the report states that the County Council is seen by outside agencies as parochial with old-fashioned ideas about its relationship to communities. The introduction of Local Area Assemblies and the Annual Stakeholder Conference has demonstrated that South Kesteven is willing to contemplate new modern forms of public consultation. If these are to be successful it is vital that all members fully support these assemblies and use them as an opportunity to engage in genuine dialogue with our residents.

Recommendation 7: That the Council re-affirms its commitment to the concept of Local Area Assemblies and pledges to work with local people to make these meeting effective forums for wider community engagement.

Community Focus

Vision

The report found that the County did not have a clear concept of its vision for the area. The District has invested a considerable amount of time in developing its vision of “pride” articulated by the five steps and supported by our ambitions and priorities. One of the member development sessions has been designed to ensure that members appreciate the ramifications of our approach and how it reflects the priorities of local residents.

Unlike the County Council the District has a clear consultation strategy, which includes consultation with hard to reach groups through initiatives such as the “Yells”. However like the County we do not currently have a strategy for social inclusion even though we have a category B priority for vulnerable people.

Recommendation 8: That under our priority for vulnerable people the Director of Community Services prepares a strategy for Social Inclusion by December 2005.

Structures and Processes

Speed of progress

Like SKDC, the County Council originally received a CPA rating of “fair” and this was confirmed at a re-inspection last year. Similarly our CPA re-fresh also confirmed a score of “Fair”. The governance report clearly states that the speed of improvement is not sufficient to match that achieved by other authorities, and from a relative standing the Council may be slipping backwards. Recent reports to the District Council on the strategic housing services demonstrates that we also have a risk of not making rapid enough strides for improvement. Changes is not always easy or comfortable but if the

Council is serious about progression members of the Council will need to be willing to accept a faster pace of change than has been experienced to-date. There will be some issues for staff during these periods of change, but as we can see from the County Council report if we don't make quick progress the consequences for both the Council and its staff are even graver.

Commitment to modern local government

Paragraphs 71 infers that the new scrutiny arrangements at the County have not resulted in members being any clearer about the roles of scrutiny, policy development and the executive. This is another topic that is being covered in our own member development programme. The report goes on to infer that the County scrutiny structure may have been unduly influenced by a preference expressed by some members for the old committee system.

Recently members of this Council endorsed a motion that called for a review of the system introduced by the Local Government Act 2000 and this would probably be seen by an external inspection agency as evidence of a similar preference. If the Council is to succeed in its journey towards improvement it will need to be able to convince these inspections that these views all members of the Council are committed to making a full and active contribution to the Council through the mechanisms set-out in the Council's constitution.

Recommendation 9: That those members who may have concerns about the current system, or indeed a preference for the previous Committee system consider how they will be able to demonstrate to an external assessor that these views have not deterred them from playing a full and active part in the Council's decision making and scrutiny processes as set-out in the constitution.

Internal Control

Staff appraisals

The report identified problems with the consistency of staff appraisal and the setting of objectives for Directors. At SKDC objectives have been set for all Directors and an appraisal system has been in operation for several years. However recent evidence from the staffs survey indicates that there may be problems in its application.

Recommendation 10 : That the Corporate Manager Human Resources investigates the level of compliance with the Council's policies regarding staff appraisals and the effectiveness of the appraisals that have been undertaken.

**Duncan Kerr,
Chief Executive**

EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING ON 28TH APRIL 2006

11. ISSUES FOR SOUTH KESTEVEN DISTRICT COUNCIL ARISING OUT OF A REVIEW OF THE CORPORATE GOVERNANCE REPORT ON LINCOLNSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

DECISION: That the contents of the Corporate Governance report on Lincolnshire County Council and the issues this raises for South Kesteven DC be referred to the relevant Development and Scrutiny Panel for detailed discussion and then to the Cabinet for conclusion and recommendation.

Members had before them the Chief Executive's report number CEX288 which summarised key aspects arising from the Audit Commission's report on the County Council from which he suggested a number of important lessons could be learnt by this authority. He acknowledged that the report did not make comfortable reading and challenged several long held assumptions and beliefs.

It was proposed and seconded that the report be referred to the relevant DSP and the Cabinet before the Council reaches any firm conclusions and recommendations for action. A member expressed concern that he did not see why this document should not be discussed at this meeting. He suggested it raised issues of fundamental importance, not just about Council policy but about democracy. The Council had two options; either to learn lessons in good spirit and good time or not to do that which would lead the community in painful struggle. He moved that the report be discussed at this meeting but the motion failed to find a seconder. After a member had commented on the training issues referred to in the report, a vote was taken on the motion to refer the matter to the DSP and Cabinet.

EXTRACT FROM THE NOTES OF THE RESOURCES DSP ON 24TH MAY 2005

4. ISSUES FOR SOUTH KESTEVEN DISTRICT COUNCIL ARISING OUT OF A REVIEW OF THE CORPORATE GOVERNANCE REPORT ON LINCOLNSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

The Chief Executive presented report CEX288, which had been referred to the DSP from full Council on 28th April 2005. It set out a number of learning lessons and recommendations arising from the Audit Commission's Corporate Governance Report on Lincolnshire County Council.

- Recommendation 1 – this was agreed.
- Recommendation 2 – this was considered inappropriate by the majority because it was thought that the best person for the job should be appointed as a Chair or Vice-Chair regardless of political allegiance. It was commented that officers should not be involved in assessing the suitability of members.
- Recommendation 3 – this was agreed as it was considered an important safeguard. It was noted that this Council had established a Standards Committee prior to statutory requirement.
- Recommendation 4 – this was agreed.
- Recommendation 5 – this was agreed in principle but the DSP considered that to undertake training within a shorter period of six months would be more effective. Members considered external and internal training and the consequences of members failing to undertake the “essential” training.
- Recommendation 6 – this was agreed.
- Recommendation 7 – although one member expressed concern about one particular Local Area Assembly (LAA), it was considered generally that the LAAs were effective and should continue.
- Recommendation 8 – this was agreed.
- Recommendation 9 – this was agreed, given its relevance to the Comprehensive Performance Assessment and the support the scrutiny system had from other local authorities.
- Recommendation 10 – this was agreed.

Conclusion:

To recommend to Cabinet that,

- (1) All groups make a clear statement of support and commitment to partnership working through the LSP.
- (2) The Chairs and Vice-Chairmanships of DSPs be appointed according to the suitability and merit of members. *[There was a minority view expressed that appointments should be politically balanced with nominations from each group leader accordingly].*
- (3) The Chairman of the Standards Committee be invited to report to the Council on the extent to which he feels that the members of the authority understand and support the role of the Standards Committee and any proposals he may have for improving the work of the Standards Committee.

- (4) In view of the increasing importance of member training, the Corporate Manager of Human Resources to undertake a review of the resources required to support a more comprehensive member training and development programme at South Kesteven using external expertise where appropriate.
- (5) The Constitution and Accounts Committee design an amendment to the Constitution so that with effect from the 1st May 2007, the desirable and essential competencies required of both Cabinet and DSP members are defined with all members being required to attend designated sessions for the essential competencies within six months of their appointment.
- (6) In autumn 2005, staff of South Kesteven be asked to complete the survey used by the Audit Commission to inform the Corporate Governance report so that results can be compared.
- (7) The Council reaffirms its commitment to the concept of Local Area Assemblies and pledges to work with local people to make these meetings effective forums for wider community engagement.
- (8) Under the Council's priority for vulnerable people, the Director of Community Services prepares a strategy for Social Inclusion by December 2005.
- (9) Those members who may have concerns about the current system, or indeed a preference for the previous Committee system, consider how they will be able to demonstrate to an external assessor that these views have not deterred them from playing a full and active part in the Council's decision making and scrutiny processes as setout in the constitution.
- (10) The Corporate Manager of Human Resources investigates the level of compliance with the Council's policies regarding staff appraisals and the effectiveness of the appraisals that have been undertaken.

EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF CABINET MEETING ON 6TH JUNE 2005

CO32. ISSUES FOR SOUTH KESTEVEN DC ARISING OUT OF A REVIEW OF THE CORPORATE GOVERNANCE REPORT ON LINCOLNSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

DECISION:

That the Cabinet approve:

- (1) **That all groups make a clear statement of support and commitment of partnership working through the LSP;**
- (2) **The Chairs or Vice-Chairmanships of DSPs be appointed according to the suitability and merit of members regardless of political allegiance;**
- (3) **That the Chairman of the Standards Committee be invited to report to the Council on the extent to which he feels that the members of the authority understand and support the role of the Standards Committee and any proposals he may have for improving the work of the Standards Committee;**
- (4) **That the Corporate Manager of Human Resources undertakes a review of the resources required to support a more comprehensive member training and development programme at South Kesteven using external expertise where appropriate;**
- (5) **That the Constitution and Accounts Committee design an amendment to the Constitution so that with effect from the 1st May 2007, the desirable and essential competencies required of both Cabinet and DSP members are defined with all members being required to attend designated sessions for the essential competencies within twelve months of their appointment;**
- (6) **That in the autumn of this year, staff of South Kesteven are asked to complete the survey used by the Audit Commission to inform the Corporate Governance report so that results can be compared;**
- (7) **That the Council re-affirms its commitment to the concept of Local Area Assemblies and pledges to work with local people to make these meetings effective forums for wider community engagement;**
- (8) **That under our priority for vulnerable people, the Director of Community Services prepares a strategy for Social Inclusion by December 2005;**
- (9) **That those members who may have concerns about the current system, or a preference for the Committee system consider how they will be able to demonstrate to an external assessor that these views have not deterred them from playing a full and active part in the Council's decision making and scrutiny processes as set out in the Constitution;**
- (10) **That the Corporate Manager Human Resources investigates the level of compliance with the Council's policies regarding staff appraisals and the effectiveness of the appraisals that have been undertaken.**

Considerations/Reasons for Decision

- (1) Report number CEX288 by the Chief Executive which identifies lessons from Lincolnshire County Council's Corporate Governance Inspection by the Audit Commission and makes recommendations for improvement to help the Council progress from a 'fair' towards an 'excellent' Council;
- (2) Representations received from the Resources DSP;
- (3) The environment in which both the County Council and the District Council operates is similar;
- (4) Fulfillment of a Category B Priority, improving the LSP and the Community Strategy. To improve knowledge, understanding and involvement between the LSP and Council members;
- (5) The Standards Committee, as the regulatory body, is viewed by the public as a means to hold elected members to account, demonstrating the Council's commitment to improve.

- (6) Member development at Lincolnshire County Council was described as “limited” yet is more comprehensive than that being applied by SKDC, where member development is viewed reluctantly by some Councillors;
- (7) Completion by staff of questionnaires on the perception of working relationships between members and members of the management team would prevent fragmentation and would supplement the results of the 360 degree appraisals being undertaken by members of the Executive.
- (8) The introduction of Local Area Assemblies and the Annual Stakeholders Conference has demonstrated that South Kesteven is willing to contemplate new forms of public consultation, countering any perceptions of parochialism.
- (9) The District Council does not have a strategy for social inclusion. Despite outreach to vulnerable people being included as a Category B Priority, preventing successful outreach to all individuals within South Kesteven.
- (10) The CPA Governance report states that the speed of improvement is not sufficient to match that achieved by other authorities and from a relative standing, the District Council may be slipping backwards. The recent Strategic Housing Report makes similar demonstrations.

REPORT TO COUNCIL

REPORT OF: Chief Executive

REPORT NO. CEX 293

DATE: 23rd June 2005

TITLE:	Issues for South Kesteven District Council arising out of a review of the Corporate Governance Report on Lincolnshire County Council.
KEY DECISION OR POLICY FRAMEWORK PROPOSAL:	N/A
COUNCIL AIMS/PORTFOLIO HOLDER NAME AND DESIGNATION:	N/A
CORPORATE PRIORITY:	CMAPMG
CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS:	N/A
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT IMPLICATIONS:	N/A

Background

1. At its last meeting the Council considered a report concerning implications for South Kesteven DC arsing from the corporate governance report on Lincolnshire County Council which included the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: That all groups make a clear statement of support and commitment to partnership working through the LSP.

Recommendation 2 : That the Chairs and Vice-Chairmanships of DSPs are shared between the major groups in a way that reflects the overall political balance of the Council.

Recommendation 3 : That the Chairman of the Standards Committee be invited to report to the Council on the extent to which he feels that the members of the authority understand and support the role of the

Standards Committee and any proposals he may have for improving the work of the Standards Committee.

Recommendation 4 : That in view of the increasing importance of members training the Corporate Manager of Human Resources undertakes a review of the resources required to support a more comprehensive member training and development programme at South Kesteven using external expertise where appropriate.

Recommendation 5 : That the Constitution and Accounts Committee design an amendment to the Constitution so that with effect from the 1st May 2007, the desirable and essential competencies required of both Cabinet and DSP members are defined with all members being required to attend designated sessions for the essential competencies within twelve months of their appointment.

Recommendation 6: That in the autumn of this year, staff of South Kesteven are asked to complete the survey used by the Audit Commission to inform the Corporate Governance report so that results can be compared.

Recommendation 7: That the Council re-affirms its commitment to the concept of Local Area Assemblies and pledges to work with local people to make these meeting effective forums for wider community engagement.

Recommendation 8: That under our priority for vulnerable people the Director of Community Services prepares a strategy for Social Inclusion by December 2005.

Recommendation 9: That those members who may have concerns about the current system, or indeed a preference for the previous Committee system consider how they will be able to demonstrate to an external assessor that these views have not deterred them from playing a full and active part in the Council's decision making and scrutiny processes as set-out in the constitution.

Recommendation 10 : That the Corporate Manager Human Resources investigates the level of compliance with the Council's policies regarding staff appraisals and the effectiveness of the appraisals that have been undertaken.

2. It was resolved by the Council that the report be considered by the Resources DSP and the Cabinet.

Views of the Resources DSP

3. The Resources DSP held a special meeting on the 24th May and resolved the following:

Recommendation 1 – agreed.

Recommendation 2 – this was considered inappropriate by the majority because it was thought that the best person for the job should be appointed as a Chair or Vice-Chair regardless of political allegiance. It was commented that officers should not be involved in assessing the suitability of members.

Recommendation 3 – agreed.

Recommendation 4 – agreed.

Recommendation 5 – this was agreed in principle but the DSP considered that to undertake training within a shorter period of six months would be more effective. Members considered external and internal training and the consequences of members failing to undertake the “essential” training.

Recommendation 6 – agreed.

Recommendation 7 – although one member expressed concern about one particular Local Area Assembly (LAA), it was considered generally that the LAAs were effective and should continue.

Recommendation 8 – agreed.

Recommendation 9 – agreed.

Recommendation 10 – agreed.

Views of the Cabinet

4. The Cabinet met on the 6th June and considered in detail recommendations 2 and 5 where changes had been proposed by the DSP.
5. On 2 the Cabinet agreed with the principle that appointment to Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen should be made on the basis of suitability and merit rather than political affiliation and considered that the Chief Executive should provide a further report to Cabinet on how such an assessment could be undertaken. On 5 the Cabinet agreed with the original recommendation of the report that in order to accommodate the other commitments of members they should be given twelve rather than six months to attend the designated training courses.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: That all groups make a clear statement of support and commitment to partnership working through the LSP.

Recommendation 2 : That the Chairs and Vice-Chairmanships of DSPs are appointed according to the suitability and merit of members and that the Chief Executive reports to a future Constitution and Accounts Committee on a method of determining this.

Recommendation 3 : That the Chairman of the Standards Committee be invited to report to the Council on the extent to which he feels that the members of the

authority understand and support the role of the Standards Committee and any proposals he may have for improving the work of the Standards Committee.

Recommendation 4 : That in view of the increasing importance of members training the Corporate Manager of Human Resources undertakes a review of the resources required to support a more comprehensive member training and development programme at South Kesteven using external expertise where appropriate.

Recommendation 5 : That the Constitution and Accounts Committee design an amendment to the Constitution so that with effect from the 1st May 2007, the desirable and essential competencies required of both Cabinet and DSP members are defined with all members being required to attend designated sessions for the essential competencies within twelve months of their appointment.

Recommendation 6: That in the autumn of this year, staff of South Kesteven are asked to complete the survey used by the Audit Commission to inform the Corporate Governance report so that results can be compared.

Recommendation 7: That the Council re-affirms its commitment to the concept of Local Area Assemblies and pledges to work with local people to make these meeting effective forums for wider community engagement.

Recommendation 8: That under our priority for vulnerable people the Director of Community Services prepares a strategy for Social Inclusion by December 2005.

Recommendation 9: That those members who may have concerns about the current system, or indeed a preference for the previous Committee system consider how they will be able to demonstrate to an external assessor that these views have not deterred them from playing a full and active part in the Council's decision making and scrutiny processes as set-out in the constitution.

Recommendation 10 : That the Corporate Manager Human Resources investigates the level of compliance with the Council's policies regarding staff appraisals and the effectiveness of the appraisals that have been undertaken.

Duncan Kerr
Chief Executive

EXTRACT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING ON 23RD JUNE 2006

44. ISSUES FOR SOUTH KESTEVEN DISTRICT COUNCIL ARISING OUT OF A REVIEW OF THE CORPORATE GOVERNANCE REPORT ON LINCOLNSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

DECISION:

- (1) That all groups make a clear statement of support and commitment to partnership working through the LSP;
- (2) That the Chairs and Vice-Chairmanships of DSPs are appointed according to their suitability and merit in the opinion of the Leader;
- (3) That the Chairman of the Standards Committee be invited to report to the Council on the extent to which he feels that the members of the authority understand and support the role of the Standards Committee and any proposals he may have for improving the work of the Standards Committee;
- (4) That in view of the increasing importance of members' training, the Corporate Manager of Human Resources undertakes a review of the resources required to support a more comprehensive member training and development programme at South Kesteven using external expertise where appropriate;
- (5) That the Constitution and Accounts Committee design an amendment to the Constitution so that with effect from the 1st May 2007, the desirable and essential competencies required of both Cabinet and DSP members are defined with all members being required to attend designated sessions for the essential competencies within twelve months of their appointment;
- (6) That in the autumn of this year, staff of South Kesteven are asked to complete the survey used by the Audit Commission to inform the Corporate Governance report so that results can be compared;
- (7) That the Council reaffirms its commitment to the concept of Local Area Assemblies and pledges to work with local people to make these meetings effective forums for wider community engagement;
- (8) That under the Council's priority for vulnerable people, the Director of Community Services prepares a strategy for Social Inclusion by December 2005;
- (9) That those members who may have concerns about the current system, or indeed a preference for the previous Committee system, consider how they will be able to demonstrate to an external assessor that these views have not deterred them from playing a full and active part in the Council's decision making and scrutiny process as set out in the constitution;
- (10) That the Corporate Manager of Human Resources investigates the level of compliance with the Council's policies regarding staff appraisals and the effectiveness of the appraisals that have been undertaken.

The Leader presented report CEX293 by the Chief Executive, which set out recommendations from the Cabinet following referral at the previous Council meeting and scrutiny by the Resources DSP. In proposing acceptance of the ten recommendations presented in the report, the Leader proposed that recommendation 2 instead provide that the Leader be given authority to consider the merit and suitability of members for Chair and Vice-Chairmanships, rather than referring the consideration of such a selection procedure to the Constitution and Accounts Committee. This was seconded.

Debate ensued on whether or not it was within the best interests of the Council to allow solely the Leader the authority to determine the suitability of members. One member spoke at length in opposition to this amendment of recommendation 2; he suggested that British democracy had fought over many generations against patronage; there were no criteria for selection in this proposal; democracy, in relation to scrutiny, was about challenging the executive and Chairmen were of symbolic importance in this role. A number of other members spoke in support of this objection. It was suggested that criteria or a protocol could have been established for appointments; that there was too much potential for favouritism; if a private organisation operated in such a way, its performance would be failing; and the resources of members would not be utilised in the best way if the proposed was accepted.

In favour of the proposal and in relation to the points raised previously about democracy, a member of the administration commented that the electorate had voted their members into power. He added that Chairmanships had been offered to opposition members and therefore the administration could not rightly be accused of favouring their own members. Another member of the administration added that the proposal did not imply appointments would only be made within the controlling party. This was supported by the Leader who stipulated that the opposition's assumption that Chair and Vice-Chairmanships would not be offered to them was incorrect.

Suggesting that the proposal was contrary to the principles of democracy, a member proposed an amendment that the recommendations in the report be accepted as printed. This received a seconder and on being put to the vote, was lost. A further vote was taken on the original motion and this was carried following a vote.

Member training

The working group interviewed the council's training manager to determine the current situation and the best way forward for member training on council finance.

Members' inductions have always included information on council finance as part of a suite of modules. The finance module, however, was voluntary. On 23rd June 2005, the council decided to ask the Constitution and Accounts committee to prepare an amendment to the constitution with the effect that "from the 1st May 2007, the desirable and essential competencies required of both Cabinet and DSP members are defined with all members being required to attend designated sessions for the essential competencies within twelve months of their appointment". It is envisaged that this will require a number of training sessions for essential core knowledge issues. In order to achieve full training for members, different methods and arrangements for training will have to be explored.

Comment

"New members were competing with the experienced members. New members should be given the choice whether to attend their own session or a session with experienced members".

Responses to recent training request sheets had shown improvement uptake of training by members. The issue to resolve was how much detail should be included in induction and training before getting into operational matters. Also, training arrangements at the moment mainly involved a set of sessions repeated throughout the year. This may need to be examined in the future.

The council has not yet fully explored using online training material. The training manager explained to the working group that preparation time for this is considerably more than for face-to-face sessions. It may attract some members and has a useful place in a range of training arrangements but it is believed to not be very popular. Personal interaction, which can help boost confidence, is lost for online learning. This is especially important for new members.

Comment

"I found the induction training sessions very wearing, they were long and rooms were crowded and there wasn't much opportunity to question officers. Shorter meetings with fewer members would have been better".

The working group considered timing of member training sessions to encourage attendance. The training manager had just piloted a training session starting at 4.30p.m. on the new training session options. In the past, sessions had been provided before other meetings to make it easier for members. This had not been as popular as expected and considerable wastage had been caused. Preferred times had been asked for but such a wide range of responses were received. This is supported by the working group's questionnaire to all members, which, although showing a general preference towards sessions at any time held in Grantham, demonstrated a broad range of preferences for training sessions. The training manager considered that trialling member sessions at different locations throughout the district could be successful.

The member survey also identified a desire for further training on council finance matters. 22 out of 30 respondents said that they would benefit from additional training in council finance.

Recommendation:

(8) That the Constitution and Accounts committee be recommended that basic understanding of council finance matters be included as an essential training module for all members from May 2007. Optional modules can be provided for higher levels of competency if there is such a demand. Further training in the council's financial affairs should be made available on a regular basis to all members and at variable times, durations and locations.

Engagement DSP - Performance Monitoring 2005/06

Those indicators with a number in the PI column are from the Government's Best Value Performance Indicators suite used by many Councils. The remaining indicators are local to SKDC and may be relatively simple measures/indicators only. The reader is asked therefore to exercise an element of caution when interpreting any data attached to them.

IND Type = C - Cumulative/% - Percentage/ CA - Cumulative Average/N - Number/A - Average

Reporting = blank - Monthly/Q - Quarterly/Y - Yearly/H - Half yearly (Sept)

PI	SKDC Priority Area and PI Description	Lead Officer	IND Type	Reporting	2005/06 SKDC Outturn	2004/05 Upper Quartile	2006/2007 SKDC Target	April	May	June	July	Are We Improving Yr on Yr?	2007/2008 SKDC Targets	2008/2009 SKDC Targets
ACCESS Priority A														
SK20	No of visitors to the SKDC website	Andy Nix	C	Q	434,194	N/A	420,000			118,999		Y	450,000	460,000
SK21	% of 'application for service' transactions that are dealt with by the CSC - Grantham	Andy Nix	C		N/A	N/A	50%	n/a	22.60%	22.6%	28.7%	n/a	65%	80%
SK22	% of 'application for service' transactions that are dealt with by the CSC - Area Offices	Andy Nix	C		N/A	N/A	50%	n/a	3.10%	3.1%	3.1%	n/a	65%	80%
SK23	No of self service transaction (excludes Internet & Telephone Payments	Andy Nix	N	Q	N/A	N/A	1000			264		n/a	1200	1440
SK24	% increase yr on yr in all self service transactions	Andy Nix/Revs Manager	%	Q	169.6%	N/A	10%			69%		N	10%	10%
COMMUNICATIONS Priority A														
SK70	No. of copies of SK Today issued	Ellen Breur	C	Q	4	N/A	5			1		Y	5	5
SK71	No. of SKOOPS issued	Ellen Breur	C	Q	6	N/A	6		1			n/a	6	6
SK72	No of Residents that have received a copy of SKToday	Ellen Breur	N	Y	57%	N/A	67%					n/a	72%	77%
SK73	No. of staff that feel well informed (measured through staff survey)	Ellen Breur	CA	Y	36%	N/A	50%					n/a	60%	65%
SK74	% of PR outputs to media actually published	Ellen Breur	%		81.8%	N/A	82%	100%	100%	83%	90%	Y	84%	85%

DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANELS (DSPs) WORK PROGRAMME 2006/7

INTRODUCTION

This Work Programme is partly derived from the Cabinet's Forward Plan, but also contains items that have been brought forward by the DSPs themselves.

Where the item has appeared on the Forward Plan, the anticipated date of the key decision is listed in the second column. The third column shows the last available date that the full DSP can consider this item before the key decision is due to be taken (unless a special meeting is called). This does NOT necessarily mean that the item will appear on the DSP agenda, this will only happen if this is requested by the Chairman or members of the DSP. There will also be instances where there is no DSP meeting before a decision is due to be taken; in these cases the next meeting date after the decision date is shown.

As Cabinet meets monthly and the DSPs meet bi-monthly it is not possible within the current timetable of meetings for the DSPs to consider every single Cabinet or Cabinet Member decision. Scrutiny members are therefore encouraged to read this Work Programme and bring forward items for consideration where they think that an item should be considered by the DSP.

DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANELS (DSPs)
WORK PROGRAMME 2006/7

ENGAGEMENT DSP

<u>ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION</u>	<u>Date item appeared on Forward Plan</u>	<u>DATE OF KEY DECISION (IF APPROPRIATE)</u>	<u>DSP MEETING</u>
Members IT	N/a		Working Group is meeting
Access and Modernisation Group	N/a		Working Group is meeting
Equalities	N/a		To receive minutes of Multi Cultural Consultation Forum
Election Turnout/Democratic Review	N/a		Democratic Review Working Group to report on 21.09.06
Training for Council Members	N/a		Identified as an issue 24.07.06 To be considered on 21.09.06
Monitoring of telephone standards	N/a		Previously considered on 06.07.06
Review of Generic Equality Scheme	14.07.06	Not before November 2006	21.09.06 or 16.11.06