

# MEETING OF THE ENGAGEMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

THURSDAY, 12 NOVEMBER 2009

2.00 PM



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## GROUP MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Michael Cook  
Councillor Mike Exton (Chairman)  
Councillor Jock Kerr  
Councillor Stuart McBride

Councillor Bob Russell  
Councillor Ian Selby  
Councillor Tom Webster (Vice-Chairman)

## PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Councillor Ray Auger Access and Engagement

## OFFICERS

Corporate Head Partnerships and Improvements (Robert Moreland)  
Principal Democracy Officer (Paul Morrison)  
Democratic Officer (Lucy Bonshor)

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## 26. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

## 27. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 10TH SEPTEMBER 2009

The notes from the meeting held on 10th September 2009 were agreed as a correct record with the inclusion of Councillor Auger being present at the meeting.

## 28. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

Members asked if a briefing note could be prepared for the IT issues discussed at the last meeting. The Corporate Head of Partnerships and Improvements (CHPI) said that this would be arranged. He then spoke about the new website which was currently being run beside the old website. So far comments about the new website had been positive although it was not completely finished as yet. The Portfolio Holder Access and Engagement agreed that the new website was far better than the old but reminded Members that it was not yet complete and referred to two areas which still had work to be done on them. It was proposed that the "switching off" of the old website would be taking place



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very shortly.

Members asked the CHPI to pass on their praise to Hannah who worked in Business Transformation and Information Management for her help and assistance with Members IT queries. Members said that she was fantastic, very helpful and a credit to the service.

## 29. BT PROPOSALS FOR PARISH COUNCIL'S TO ADOPT KIOSKS

### **Recommendation:**

***At this stage the Engagement PDG deplore any removal of the BT Phone boxes and the equipment contained therein. An emergency call facility should be retained within each village or certainly within easy walking distance of a village. If Parish Council's wish to have the phone boxes removed or to adopt the box (the equipment removed and keep the shell) for their village they must contact the District Council stating the reasons why they wish the box to be removed and also show what discussions had been taken within the parish/village concerning the proposals. The Parish Councils concerned should be invited to the next meeting of the Engagement PDG.***

The Corporate Head Partnerships and Improvements gave a short presentation on the latest round of consultation by BT on the future of a number of phone boxes in the district. He referred to previous meetings of the Engagement PDG at which the issue of BT's proposal to remove 72 kiosks had been discussed and the Group together with the Scrutiny Committee had objected to the closures. BT now had a new scheme where a Parish Council can adopt a kiosk which meant that BT would remove all equipment from the kiosk and the maintenance would pass to the Parish Council. This was with regard to the old style red phone boxes not the new modern ones. BT was proposing this with 47 parish councils which represented 29% of the payphones in the Council's area. The District Council who were one of the statutory consultees had contacted all the Parish Councils asking them if they wanted:

- i) To adopt the kiosk
- ii) The District Council to lodge an objection on their behalf
- iii) The District Council to maintain objections where one exists from previous proposals.

Of those parishes who had responded 20 wished the Council to object, two wished to pursue adoption, one wished the box and contents to be totally removed and three nothing.

Members were very concerned about the latest proposals and the discussion raised the following issues:

- by removing the kiosk's contents people would not have access to emergency services.

- Concern that only half of the Parish Councils had responded to the Council's letter. Did they not care that a reliable form of communication in an emergency was being taken away from them. It was of paramount importance in an emergency that the kiosks and contents remained regardless of the number of times they were used.
- phone boxes were often used as landmarks on Ordnance Survey maps, were BT informing the OS when they removed the boxes and were the OS going to print new maps?
- With the progress in technology surely BT could maintain the current status quo.
- Members felt strongly that each village should have access to emergency services facilities or a least access to a working phone box that was within easy walking distance of a village.
- Some comments were made about three kiosks that had previously been taken away in Grantham, those living close to the kiosks had not been notified that they were being removed was the "thin edge of the wedge".

Some Members queried how extensively the parish council's had consulted their communities about these proposals and it was suggested that those Parishes who wished to dispose of the whole box or the contents must inform the District Council why and the reasoning behind their decision. It was commented that people who were most vulnerable would be the least likely to attend Parish or Council meetings or look at websites informing them of what BT's proposals were. It was proposed and seconded that at this stage the Engagement PDG deplored any removal of the BT Phone boxes and the equipment contained therein. An emergency call facility should be retained within each village or certainly within easy walking distance of a village. If Parish Council's wished to have their phone boxes removed or the equipment removed and keep the shell they must contact the District Council stating the reasons why they wished the box to be removed and also show what discussions had taken place in the parish/village about the proposal.

### **30. REVIEW OF LOCAL FORUMS**

#### **Recommendation:**

***That for the next round of Local Forum meetings: January 2010 an item should be put on the agenda for discussion, should Forums continue and if so in what format.***

› **Action Note**

***Posters for the Grantham Forum should be placed in Grantham Members pigeonholes for that Member to distribute.***

› **Action Note**

***The Principal Democracy Officer to make a list of issues discussed by the Forums for reference***

Following on from the previous meeting's discussion at which Local Forums were discussed at length the CHPI asked were the Forums purposeful, did they engage with local communities as they should or should they be removed or reformed. He referred again to the reasons they were originally set up which was for the three layers of local government, county, district and town/parish to talk about issues affecting communities relevant to the area. Did Forums still have a place or could we look to combine with other partners who provided forms of engagement such as the Police Neighbourhood beat panels.

A discussion followed in which Members said that without publicity for the Forums it didn't matter what was on the agenda or who was speaking if people were unaware that it was happening. It was felt that further publicity for the Forums was essential and one of the Grantham Members suggested that for the Grantham Forum posters should be placed in each Grantham Member's pigeon hole for distribution by that Member to which the other Members agreed. Other Members felt that now there were other avenues available to the public to get information and maybe the Forums weren't as critical.

The CHPI informed the Group of proposals that the Council undertook to engage the public such as the resident's survey and new initiatives that were due to take place shortly to engage the public such as a stall on the Christmas market at Grantham and Stamford to promote cleaner, greener and safer issues, where recycling will be promoted along with community safety. Depending upon the success this could be a more effective way of engaging the public.

A further discussion followed on the type of issues discussed at Forums, the effectiveness of the three tiers of local government meeting together and the involvement of the public at forum meetings. The CHPI asked the Principal Democracy Officer (PDO) if it was possible to have a list of the issues each Forum had discussed for reference to which the PDO replied yes. Further comments were made about the role of Parish and Town Council meetings and it was suggested that at the next round of Forums, the Forums be asked for their views on whether they wish to continue, and if so what format would they like to Forums to follow. The Principal Democracy Officer suggested that perhaps instead of having a Rural North and South Forum that two Parish Council Conferences were held a year one in the north and one in south as these formats seemed to find favour with the Parishes. The issue to be discussed again following the responses received from the January Forums.

**31. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 3.10pm.

