

MINUTES

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
TUESDAY, 10 APRIL 2012



COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Bob Adams	Councillor Bob Russell
Councillor Paul Cosham	Councillor Bob Sampson
Councillor Reginald Howard (Chairman)	Councillor Ian Selby
Councillor Mrs Rosemary Kaberry-Brown	Councillor Mrs Judy Smith (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Michael King	Councillor Frank Turner
Councillor Helen Powell	

OFFICERS

Head of Legal and Democratic Services (Lucy Youles)
Principal Democracy Officer (Jo Toomey)

56. COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There had been recent reports in the local press regarding services at Grantham hospital, which had caused local concern most notably in respect of mental health service and accident and emergency provision. The Committee was asked to talk to representatives and question them about future plans for services in the hospital. Committee members echoed concerns and agreed to invite a representative from the Joint Lincolnshire Health Scrutiny Committee and the relevant NHS body to a future meeting. A site visit was also suggested.

Action Point:

- 1. Invite the Chairman of the Joint Lincolnshire Health Scrutiny Committee to attend a meeting of South Kesteven District Council's Scrutiny Committee.***
- 2. Invite representatives from the relevant health service body to attend a meeting of South Kesteven District Council's Scrutiny Committee.***

57. MEMBERSHIP

The Committee was notified that Councillor Adams was substituting for Councillor Nalson and Councillor Selby was substituting for Councillor

Davidson for this meeting only.

58. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Turner for the part of the meeting held on 10 April 2012. Councillor Turner was present when the meeting reconvened on Thursday 3 May 2012.

59. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

60. ACTION NOTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 FEBRUARY 2012

The action notes from the meeting held on 21 February 2012 were noted.

61. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

In respect of the action point at minute number 52, the Committee Support Officer advised that the Community Safety Partnership had agreed to gift the mobile CCTV unit to Lincolnshire Police for the use of neighbourhood policing teams.

62. FEEDBACK FROM THE EXECUTIVE

The minutes from the Cabinet meeting on 5 March 2012 were circulated with the agenda. At this meeting, the Cabinet considered the Committee's report on Procurement Lincolnshire. The report had been circulated to recipients identified in the document.

Action Point:

Follow up progress of the Committee's report, which had been submitted to Procurement Lincolnshire.

63. WORK PROGRAMME

A workshop to consider the 2012/13 work programme had been scheduled for 10 April 2012.

64. REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

Councillor Cosham advised committee members that he had attended an Association of Drainage Authorities meeting. The key themes of the event indicated that the boards were thinking more about storage of water than drainage. The introduction of water control measures covering the South Kesteven area was noted, and it was suggested that the district council could use its publication, SK Today, to suggest different ways residents could

conserve water. It was noted that this was primarily the responsibility of the water authority.

Action Point:

In conjunction with the Reputation, Communication and Consultation team, contact Anglian Water for ways to conserve water and publish in the next edition of SK Today.

Councillor Mrs Smith reported that the Elsea Park Community Centre in Bourne had been handed over by developers. The hall was available for use.

65. PORTFOLIO HOLDER UPDATE - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Economic Development Portfolio Holder was not able to attend the meeting. The Committee expressed their disappointment that the Portfolio Holder could not attend. The item was adjourned until 3 May 2012 at 10am.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:35am until 10:00am on Thursday 3 May 2012.

The Economic Development Portfolio Holder was welcomed to the meeting. She apologised for not attending on 10 April 2012, at which this item was adjourned.

Committee members put questions to the Portfolio Holder, who provided her answers. [The questions are shown in italic text and the responses in plain text].

Question 1

The Gravity Fields project/event in September was heralded as an event for the whole district, not just Grantham. Can you give us an insight as to how this event is progressing and how much information has been forwarded to the towns and villages, schools, colleges, etc. in the district as they need to be informed well before the end of the summer term so that the interest can be generated in good time?

Flyers to promote the event were being circulated. The internal launch was due on 1 May 2012, however this had been postponed to the week commencing 7 May 2012. The public launch of the website was due on 20 June 2012.

All schools with key stage 2 pupils had been contacted, of those 27 wished to participate by coming to displays, lectures or helping build structures for the final performance that would take place around Grantham. Grantham College was also involved, with a representative sitting on the Gravity Fields steering group.

The core programme was being funded by South Kesteven District Council. Applications had been made to a number of different funding sources; the success of these bids would determine the final programme beyond the core programme. Ticket prices would depend on the success of bids, which would subsidise the programme. Arrangements for the additional programme would be confirmed in time for the public launch on 20 June 2012.

For the first year, Grantham would be the primary focus, the aim of the festival being to promote Grantham as a place to visit. However, accommodation would be required across the district. In future years it was hoped that there would be fringe events taking place throughout South Kesteven.

Question 2

The message is that South Kesteven, and Grantham in particular, is doing very well but how do you measure our success against other towns?

The district had a strong reputation in the manufacturing sector, with many companies looking to expand. The district council was doing its best to enable this. Work was also being undertaken to help start-up businesses. The district had a good reputation for new businesses succeeding beyond their first two years.

To promote the district and encourage businesses to move to the area, the Council was beginning a project called 'Destination SK'. A team had been set up to deal with enquiries from people wanting to move businesses into the district. They were able to provide information about key points of contact and what a business would need to do to relocate to South Kesteven. Lincolnshire County Council were setting up a new initiative to promote the county as a whole; this was to replace 'Invest Lincolnshire'.

The Portfolio Holder highlighted that a key challenge in attracting businesses to the area was that they did not want second-hand premises.

Question 3

What aspect of our economic development strategy do you think could be done better?

The Economic Development Strategy had recently been refreshed and replaced. The new strategy concentrated on delivery rather than aspiration, stating what the Council was doing and how it was doing it.

Question 4

What aspect of the economic development and planning do you think the Scrutiny Committee should focus on or investigate this year?

A potential area of work the Committee could do to assist the Portfolio Holder concentrated on the skills agenda for young people. It would involve the Committee doing an audit of skills requirements and shortages across the district and investigating provision for that training within the district. Councillor Mrs Cartwright highlighted that despite having an engineering course within the district, a lot of students travelled to Lincoln.

Action Point:

That the Committee consider a piece of work on the skills agenda for young people as part of its work programme for 2012/13.

In response to a supplementary question on work experience, the Portfolio Holder stated that she encouraged businesses she visited to take on apprentices. She advised members of a company who had taken on apprentices saw eight out of ten leave before they had finished their course. The Council was working with local colleges to give their students work experience; of particular note were discussions for students learning brick-laying erecting walls for the Council. This would provide them with an opportunity to apply their skills in a real-life situation while gaining experience of work.

A further supplementary question was asked in respect of encouraging businesses in the southern part of the district. The business innovation centre in the Deepings is designed to help new businesses and support their growth within the district. The centre consisted of different sized spaces that would be suitable for businesses in the research and development or light manufacturing sectors.

Question 5

When you took up your portfolio for economic development and planning what measures did you take to brief yourself and what officer and professional support do you rely upon, in particular,

- *What is your understanding of why the present economic demise continues within South Kesteven?*
- *How is economic development and planning throughout South Kesteven being monitored, why is it not more fairly balanced to promote/support sustainability in the hinterlands?*
- *Does any analysis of feedback from failed and departing organisations take place, how is this applied to influence future economic development strategy within South Kesteven?*

The Portfolio Holder received a briefing when she was first given the Portfolio but explained that she was still learning through all the meetings and groups she attended. She received regular updates from the service managers, corporate heads and strategic director with responsibility for the services incorporated within her Portfolio. Committee members were advised that

officers had been very supportive. To keep her knowledge current, Councillor Mrs Cartwright attended national conferences which disseminated up-to-date information and best practice to councillors.

Councillor Mrs Cartwright did not agree that there had been a significant economic demise within the district as there was a strong manufacturing base. The decline in retail was national.

In responding to the question in respect of the policy for development outside the town centres (as included in the Council's Core Strategy), the Portfolio Holder explained the definition of sustainability that had been applied. She explained that while there had been challenge by the inspector, it was because the council had not demonstrated the methodology it used to determine its sustainability. Following its production, the challenge was withdrawn. The premise of the definition of sustainability was that it was unwise to build a lot of houses where there was no local work, post office, school or public transport link.

There was discussion about opportunities for villages defined as unsustainable to put forward bids for growth. Some Committee members suggested that if villages were allowed to grow, the elements that would make them sustainable would follow. The Council policy required key elements to be in place before consideration would be given to reclassification.

In answering the final part of the question, the Portfolio Holder informed the Committee that often when businesses failed, the district council was late in the chain to find out. The council did try and make contact with those businesses; in most instances the reasons for collapse were global.

When any business failed locally, council officers always try to talk to the local manager and find out what it can do to help and support staff who would be losing their jobs.

The Committee questioned whether revised contact and monitoring would mean the council would hear about the potential collapse of businesses sooner. The Portfolio Holder explained that discussions were undertaken with local managers who may not be aware of the position nationally. A record of any meetings held with local businesses would be kept by officers. It was suggested that the Portfolio Holder make regular visits to all businesses in the district. Councillor Mrs Cartwright explained that from her experience, businesses only welcomed interaction with Councillors when there was a specific problem, however contact was maintained through network events including local business clubs and sector-targeted breakfast meetings.

Question 6

In respect of the first pre-hearing comments of the Inspector for the Grantham Area Action Plan and the Site Allocations Development Plan Document:

1. *Why do you think the inspector has said that the Delivery Plan for the Grantham Area Action Plan is weak?*
2. *Why do you think the inspector's criticism of the Site Allocations DPD about there being no objective evidence why some local service centres have been chosen for housing allocations whilst others have not?*

Councillor Mrs Cartwright explained that the Inspector had initially stated that the delivery plan for the Grantham Area Action Plan was weak because it did not provide funding details for the relief road, on which delivery of the project was reliant. Funding information had not been included because SKDC was waiting for Lincolnshire County Council to approve forward-funding of the road. When provision was made in the County Council's budget, an explanation was given to the Inspector, who no longer saw this as an impediment to progressing inspection.

The Inspector's challenge to the Site Allocations Development Plan Document was because the Council did not present its methodology. When the methodology was provided, the Inspector agreed to proceed with the inspection. Committee members asked why the methodology had been omitted. Councillor Mrs Cartwright agreed to find out whether it was a specified requirement for submission.

Action Point:

Councillor Mrs Cartwright to find out submission requirements and report back to the Committee.

Councillors challenged whether the process undertaken to identify development land for 120 houses across 15 local service centres justified the level of effort required by parish councils. On being invited to submit and rank locations that would be suitable for development, parish councils invested a significant amount of time. The level of requirement meant that in many cases none of a parish council's proposed sites were selected. It was suggested that SKDC could have highlighted preferred sites and consulted on them with parish councils rather than raising expectations. The Portfolio Holder explained that the process was required as part of the Local Development Framework process. To be fair to all the identified local service centres, nominations were invited; not following this approach could have led to challenge and potentially judicial review.

Question 7

What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the present relationship between the three parties of officers, Communities PDG and Cabinet?

The Portfolio Holder felt officers and Cabinet members worked well as a team.

She suggested that policy development groups needed to think how they could help portfolio holders with detailed work.

Discussion ensued on whether the Portfolio Holders should task the PDGs or whether the PDG was expected to determine its own work. The Scrutiny Committee suggested further work to ensure better communication and clearly define work programming arrangements was required. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services explained that an officer had just been appointed to improve the relationships between Cabinet, Scrutiny and the policy development groups.

Action Point:

That the Committee consider a piece of work on the relationship between Portfolio Holders and Policy Development Groups as part of its work programme for 2012/13.

Question 8

What industrial or employment sectors in the council concentrating on?

- 1. Have we considered any research on these sectors?*
- 2. Do we know who our competitors are?*
- 3. Has this knowledge led us to review our strategy?*

The Portfolio Holder stated that the Council was particularly encouraging innovation. In respect of research, SKDC used information from Lincolnshire County Council, who had access to a wide range of data.

One councillor quoted NOMIS figures which showed that 17.5% of industry in the district was manufacturing. 13% employment was based in the finance and information technology sector (below the regional average of 18% and national average of 22%). Councillors queried, given the drive for innovation, why the district figure was not higher. Councillors noted poor broadband provision. The key role broadband played in economic development had been emphasised in a recent bid for funding to improve the local broadband infrastructure.

Committee members discussed how innovation could be nurtured within the district, making it more appealing than competing authorities. A lot of work was done to support young enterprise initiatives in schools. Recently a company set up at one local school had become a fully-fledged business.

Discussion ensued on areas offering reduced business rates for companies moving into an area, and the risk of attracting business away from the district. Funding for rate reductions was coming through Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). It was not in the council's discretion to reduce business rates as these were set by and paid to government. LEPs would subsidise rates where incentive schemes were offered; the Council could not afford to do that.

The Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership (which included north Lincolnshire) was improving. The success of businesses, including Totemic which had recently been selected as the Sunday Times' ninth best company to work for, were also highlighted.

The Portfolio provided a summary of the different aspects of her role, which included being the Council's heritage and equality champion, Grantham Growth, Lincolnshire Agricultural Forum, Welland Market Towns Partnership, Grantham Canal Partnership, tourism groups, Gravity Fields Festival, Bourne Core Area and attending Local Government Association – Urban Commission meetings.

Action Point:

Councillor Mrs Cartwright to circulate a list of her Portfolio responsibilities

The Chairman thanked Councillor Mrs Cartwright for attending the meeting and answering questions about her Portfolio. She invited any member with any questions to contact her; she worked from the council offices most days.

66. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting was closed at 11:33am on Thursday 3 May 2012.