

# ACTION NOTES

## SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 27 NOVEMBER 2012



---

### COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Paul Cosham  
Councillor Alan Davidson  
Councillor Reginald Howard (Chairman)  
Councillor Mrs Rosemary Kaberry-Brown  
Councillor Michael King  
Councillor David Nalson

Councillor Helen Powell  
Councillor Bob Russell  
Councillor Bob Sampson  
Councillor Mrs Judy Smith (Vice-Chairman)  
Councillor Frank Turner

### OFFICERS

Head of Development and Growth (Mark Williets)  
Head of Housing and Neighbourhoods (Ian Richardson)  
Head of HR Customer Service and Performance (Sue Griffiths)  
Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer (Carol Drury)  
Principal Democracy Officer (Jo Toomey)  
Performance Management Officer (Sam Selby)  
Team Leader Operations (Mike Smith)  
Grounds Maintenance Supervisor (Lynne Le Conte)

### OTHER MEMBERS

Councillor Michael Cook  
Councillor Ian Selby

---

### 38. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

No interests were disclosed.

### 39. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING ON 9 OCTOBER 2012

The action notes from the meeting held on 9 October 2012 were noted and agreed as a correct record subject to the following amendments:

- The addition to action note number 33 ('Being the Best' – East Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Trust Consultation) of: "Committee members

highlighted the importance of local knowledge and local drivers particularly in the Fenland area.”

#### **40. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING**

##### Relationship Between Portfolio Holders, Officers And Policy Development Groups

One Councillor queried the third action point at action note 34: “That a progress report be presented to the Scrutiny Committee in October 2013, including a summary of the progress of recommendations”. This related to operational improvements in the workings of the policy development groups. These were introduced following the appointment of the Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer. Councillors suggested that they should be involved in any changes before they happened instead of reviewing them when they had been operating for a year.

##### ***Action Point:***

***Include an item on how policy development groups’ work to the agenda for the Committee’s next meeting on 22 January 2012.***

##### Work Programme

A Councillor requested that the names of working group members be included in the work programme to provide points of contact for any other Member with information or ideas.

##### ***Action Point:***

***Include details of working group membership in the Committee’s work programme.***

#### **41. EAST MIDLANDS AMBULANCE SERVICE - 'BEING THE BEST' CONSULTATION**

The Chairman welcomed three representatives from East Midlands Ambulance Service (EMAS) to the meeting:

- Jon Sargent – Director of Finance
- Lynn Rutland – Service Delivery Manager
- Greg Cox – Operational Support Manager, Lincolnshire

Mr Sargent gave a presentation on EMAS’ ‘Being the Best’ consultation. The programme comprised a package of changes in respect of asset management, service provision, deployment and staff management. The document, which constituted an estate strategy comprised changes aimed to make the most of clinical staff and improve performance against key targets.

As part of the consultation, EMAS was talking to patients, the public and stakeholders. Key proposals included replacing 66 ambulance stations with 13 hubs/super stations and introducing 118 Community Ambulance Posts (CAPs). Five hubs were planned for Lincolnshire. The hubs would be the start and end point of the working day, providing a base for vehicle maintenance and the clinical cleaning, stocking and preparing of ambulances; these activities currently carried out by ambulance crews would be undertaken by dedicated staff. There would also be an educational facility, which would replace regional facilities, so that staff could be trained locally. Management/supervisory staff would also be available at hubs to brief and debrief teams as appropriate.

CAPs would replace standby points (points at which ambulances park in laybys, car parks, etc.) All CAPs would include a building which provided facilities for crews to rest. These would either be shared facilities with other local stakeholders, or when this option was not available, modular buildings. The location for CAPs was based on modelling work that identified the best places from which to respond to help EMAS provide a better service.

Councillors were reassured that the number of ambulances and the level of cover would stay the same. Throughout the strategy period, EMAS was working to reduce the age of the fleet from ten years to five years.

Deployment systems were also under review so that callouts received a proportional response appropriate to the incident. This would mean sending the most skilled paramedics to the most serious incidents. Shift patterns would also be staggered so that not all ambulances were off the road for changeover simultaneously.

The model proposed by EMAS had been successfully introduced by West Midlands Ambulance Service who reported good results, and the South Coast Ambulance Service. The model was also used internationally.

So that the feedback of local people could be fully incorporated within detailed proposals, Mr Sargent explained that the consultation was on the broad principles only. When local views had been fed in, more detailed plans would be developed. Consultation had taken a variety of formats which included public meetings, general meetings, media releases, EMAS' website, social networking sites, free phone and free post. Consultation with staff was also underway.

Mr Sargent advised the Committee that EMAS hoped that all changes could be achieved from within existing resources.

The Committee was advised that proposals would be formally submitted to the EMAS board in January 2013 and changes would be implemented between April 2013 and April 2018. Mr Sargent summarised that by making the changes, EMAS aimed to ensure patients received the right clinical care, response times

were improved, the Trust would be the best it could be providing a modern service fit for the future with increased support for staff.

Members of the Committee were invited to ask questions. A summary of discussion is provided below:

- Citing a document produced by Unison one Councillor questioned whether it was correct in stating the future plan was the existing plan. The 'Being the Best' programme was not the same as existing arrangements; no current station was big enough to turn into a hub. It was noted that some existing ambulance stations could be turned into community ambulance points.
- The map included in the presentation which showed proposed hubs and CAPs in relation to key road networks did not include the A1. Councillors highlighted the importance of quick access to the A1. CAPs were planned for Stamford and Grantham which would provide this access.
- Ambulances with the most highly trained paramedic staff would be deployed on the same basis as present. Units would go to the nearest call and despatch would be based on priority need.
- While travelling to and from hubs increased the mileage at the start and end of shifts, the number of miles travelled during the day should reduce because of the strategic location of CAPs.
- Local maintenance should ensure that a lower percentage of the ambulance fleet is off the road than under the current provision of two regional garages.
- Rural police stations were suggested as possible CAPs.
- As hubs needed to be eco-friendly, councillors suggested including solar panels and rain reservoirs in designs. It was suggested that the Trust might be able to access grant funding to provide these.
- One councillor and former paramedic commended the proposals and in response to concerns about sufficient cover in the event of a major accident stated that all resources would redeploy to ensure sufficient cover across the whole area.
- Existing arrangements provided for staff to choose whether they were available for call during meal breaks. Negotiations were underway in respect of ongoing arrangements.
- Councillors noted that initial consultation was based on broader principles and computer modelling and were pleased that the input of local stakeholders received through the consultation would define the detail of proposals.
- The location of CAPs was based on modelling. Councillors were assured that decisions would not be based on the re-sale value of the land on which current ambulance stations were sited.
- The full range of hub staff may not be available 24 hours a day however there would be sufficient coverage to allow round the clock operation, which was as efficient for crews as possible.
- EMAS was funded for each journey undertaken; pricing was subject to

national rules but based on local prices. EMAS was working with commissioners to try and identify ways in which funding could be increased, particularly in Lincolnshire.

- East Midlands Ambulance Service was running a programme to train people as paramedics. In response to a councillor's question, officers explained that when former army medics applied and their skills matched, they were appointed as paramedics.
- Councillors expressed concern that in the construction of hubs, improvements to the fleet should remain a top priority. EMAS officers reassured the Committee that continued improvements were planned to the fleet with an annual capital spend of approximately £5m (£4m on ambulances and £1m on IT equipment within ambulances and for despatch purposes). All of the vehicles that the Trust was buying were capable of carrying bariatric patients.
- Concern was expressed about the proposal to locate a CAP in Morton and not Bourne. Councillors highlighted the benefit of using Bourne, noting particularly that it was a growing town with a higher volume of people. They hoped this local knowledge would be used to inform the final location of the CAP. It was also suggested that Grantham would be a more suitable location for a hub than Sleaford.
- The Eastern region was exploring adopting the same model of operation. Both Trusts were liaising with other Ambulance Trusts in the UK, including neighbouring Trusts.

The Chairman thanked the representatives from EMAS for attending the meeting and answering the Committee's questions.

*The meeting was adjourned between 11:43 and 11:55*

#### **42. QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE REPORT: SUPPORT GOOD HOUSING FOR ALL**

The Performance Management Officer presented the quarter 2 performance report which had a focus on the council priority 'support good housing for all'. The reports listed projects that had been successfully completed; three projects had been signed off (the purchase of a new electoral registration/elections software system, 'tell us once' and the outsourcing of careline alarms). It was hoped that the Gravity Fields Festival project would be signed off by the Performance and Programme Board by the time the Scrutiny Committee received its next update.

Performance in development management, the abandoned call rate, the percentage of the housing stock which met the decent homes standard and sickness levels were highlighted and updates provided. Councillors questioned why, despite improved performance, the sickness level showed as red and questioned whether it should be amber. Because of previous performance in this area, the tolerance between achieving a target and not achieving a target was tight. It was up to the service manager and head of service to determine

how performance should be represented.

The Head of Development and Growth provided an updated on actions that had been taken to improve performance against development management planning targets. A performance clinic had been held which led to a number of recommendations. Performance measures were based on the average amount of time it took to determine planning applications unlike the old best value performance indicator measure which had a single target. It was recognised that ways of working needed to reflect this change.

Officers were becoming more proactive in respect of applications chasing up applicants required to submit additional information. Development officers were also working more closely with statutory consultees to improve the speed with which applications are determined. Additional meetings of the Development Control Committee had been called to help catch up with the backlog of applications.

It was hoped that by quarter 1 in 2013/14 performance would be meeting targets and could be maintained for the full year.

Councillors asked questions about the circumstances under which officers could refuse applications because additional information was required but not supplied promptly. It was suggested that officers could issue a deadline for the applicant to provide responses; failure to meet that deadline would see that application being put forward for decision on the facts available. There was some risk attached to determining applications without sufficient information.

The Head of Development and Growth explained that the determination period through which performance was measured, began when an application was validated. An application was validated when it was received with all information required within a local checklist. When officers found an application that did not include sufficient information, the applicant was contacted immediately.

In response to a question from a Committee member, the Head of Development and Growth provided an update on Section 106 officer. The Council had a dedicated officer who monitored trigger points and ensured that payments were made to the appropriate place at the correct time.

The Head of HR, Customer Service and Performance explained the roles of the Performance and Programme Board (this monitored the development and progress of projects in support of the council's priorities) and how performance clinics operated (peer challenge by officers outside the service).

The Head of Housing and Neighbourhoods talked to the Committee about the Council's 'good housing for all' priority and associated projects. He explained that following the completion of careline alarm outsourcing, the monitoring of calls was undertaken in Lincoln while the despatch of officers to calls had not

changed.

The Localism Act required a review of the Housing Programme. Councillors noted in particular new opportunities to develop new affordable housing which was a result of the refinancing of the Housing Revenue Account. Council tenants would have more input into provision of services through the introduction of a dedicated tenant's scrutiny panel. Performance against targets in respect of void properties had improved; the target for the number of days a property was void was 29 and was running in November at a rate of 23.88 days. In total approximately 1.81% of the Council's housing stock was void (including minor and major voids) however a stretch target of 1% had been set.

An increase in the number of approaches from households presenting as homeless was reported. Referrals were often made to landlords in the private rented sector. On a number of occasions the Council's rent deposit scheme had supported people finding accommodation (81 households year to date against a full year target of 100). 16% of approaches travelled through the statutory homelessness route, a real terms increase against previous year performance.

Councillors were also advised of potential impacts resulting from welfare reform. Specifically highlighted was the change to housing benefit entitlement for under-occupancy (reducing benefits for people living in accommodation beyond what they need). Pensioners were exempt from this change. Estimates showed approximately 1,000 households in district council housing were likely to be affected. The Council had put in place contingencies where households classed as overcrowded or under-occupied could swap to properties of a suitable size.

Councillors were given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments. In so doing, the Committee was advised that the council had a duty to provide housing advice and a general duty to house people who met statutory criteria laid down in the Homelessness Act.

Councillors were advised that the Council had a duty to ensure its properties met the Decent Homes Standard. Current performance against a target of reaching 100% properties by 2015 was running at 97%. This work was covered in the capital programme and mapped within a rolling programme of improvements. Stock condition surveys also helped inform this.

The Committee was advised that although void properties were brought up to the highest standard, they were still, on occasion, turned down; this was particularly the case for some older persons' accommodation. Councillors suggested that this could be because the accommodation did not sit on public transport routes, which made them less attractive, particularly in respect of older people.

Councillors were advised that electrical testing was responsible for some of the

delays turning round void properties. This was necessary work and officers were working closely together to meet the needs of all concerned.

In response to a question from a councillor, the Head of Housing and Neighbourhoods stated that the market for flats had tailed off. He suggested that despite appearing more affordable, they were still above the means of some people wanting to get into the housing market possibly because lenders were wary and first time buyers were unable to secure a deposit. It was suggested that there could potentially be good news for the private-rented sector as landlords could buy cheaper; it was hoped that they would pass on their savings to tenants by reflecting this in their rents.

Committee members noted changes in the demands of tenants; people wanted properties with an additional bedroom so that they could have visitors. Mr Richardson suggested that the Council might need to investigate the configuration of adaptable properties. The attention of members was redrawn to housing benefit changes in respect of the 'bedroom tax'.

The Head of Housing and Neighbourhoods summarised the housing programme of work and explained that the Council must have a Tenancy Strategy in place by 15 January 2012. To complement the programme, additional work would include consideration of how the Council controls the housing register and the allocations policy.

The call centre service had been outsourced and was being carried out by City of Lincoln Council. Responding to a question on the involvement of Procurement Lincolnshire Mr Richardson explained that they had only been involved in the Supporting People Contract. He further answered that the Council needed to recover costs on services provided and the districts were at the beginning of the tendering process.

#### **43. GROUNDS MAINTENANCE CONTRACT MONITORING**

The Team Leader for Operations from Property and Facilities and the Grounds Maintenance Supervisor gave a brief presentation which outlined the current grounds maintenance contract in relation to grass verge cutting and flower maintenance. This contract was due to end in 2013 and work was underway to develop a new, more robust contract, which would cover the whole county. The countywide contract would begin in 2014, so officers were negotiating with the current contractor to extend their contract to fill the gap.

Councillors were advised that Lincolnshire County Council paid SKDC to cut verges; this was then contracted out to Veolia. Officers added that historically SKDC had cut verges more often than was paid for by the county council.

Officers explained that the Council had received a number of reports over the summer when the contractors had not performed the cutting of verges within the contract specification; this was partially attributed to bad weather. While

officers had brought failings to the attention of the contractor, it was felt the current contract was too lenient in times of contractor failure. Councillors felt that monitoring had been an issue and acknowledged the work that officers had undertaken.

Members of the public and parish councils had helped considerably in the monitoring of the contract by directly contacting the Council with their complaints and had assisted officers challenging the contractors for not fulfilling the requirements of the contract.

Some concern was expressed about the gap between the cessation of the current contract and the start of a new contract, and negotiating with the existing contractor to continue work in the interim. Officers explained that Procurement Lincolnshire was developing the new contract, which had to fit with other authorities in the county. Working with Procurement Lincolnshire offered the opportunity of economies of scale. Councillors emphasised the importance of providing a quality service.

One village in the district had taken over the maintenance of open spaces; they were paid by the district council at the same rate as the current contractor. The village had, through its parish council, increased the precept so it could make further improvements to this service in the local area. In response to a question about whether parish councils could take on the responsibility in their areas following the implementation of the new contract, the Council would do everything it could to ensure those that wished to do so could. This would involve serious negotiation with parishes to make sure they were aware of the level of commitment they would be taking on and to also make sure that they had sufficient resources in place.

The chairman thanked the officers for their presentation.

#### **44. REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES**

The Committee was advised that officers were now in place at the Welland Deepings Internal Drainage Board.

Councillor Russell had attended the last meeting of the Lincolnshire Health Scrutiny Committee. The committee asked that the Council appoint him as an authorised substitute.

#### **45. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting was closed at 14:30.