

# MEETING OF THE COMMUNITIES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

THURSDAY, 8 MARCH 2012      2.30 PM



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## GROUP MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Kelham Cooke  
Councillor Breda Griffin  
Councillor Charmaine Morgan  
Councillor John Nicholson (Chairman)

Councillor Mrs Jean Taylor  
Councillor Jeff Thompson (Vice-  
Chairman)  
Councillor Raymond Wootten

## OFFICERS

Strategic Director – Development and  
Growth (Ian Yates)  
Property Develop Manager (Neil  
Cucksey)  
Benefits Manager (Lee Sirdifield)  
Principal Democracy Officer (Jo Toomey)  
Income Recovery Officer (Debbie  
Mewes)

## PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Councillor Terl Bryant (Housing)  
Councillor Mrs Frances Cartwright  
(Economic Development)

## OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Terl Bryant  
Councillor Mrs Frances Cartwright  
Councillor Nick Craft

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## 44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Wootten declared a personal interest in agenda item 7 'Fire and Rescue' as a member of Lincolnshire County Council, which was the authority with responsibility for Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue. Later in the meeting Councillor Wootten also declared a personal interest in an item of any other business on street processions in South Kesteven as a member of Lincolnshire County Council, which was the responsible authority for Highways.

Councillor Mrs Taylor declared a personal interest in agenda item 7, as her husband was a former fire fighter and in receipt of a pension from fire and rescue services.

During the meeting Councillor Morgan declared a personal interest in the item of urgent business on street processions as a member of the group responsible

for organising Grantham carnival.

**45. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 5 JANUARY 2012**

The action notes from the meeting on Thursday 5 January 2012 were noted.

**46. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING**

During previous discussions on the draft skin piercing byelaw, which was adopted at full Council on 1 March 2012, a question had been raised about under what authority SKDC officers could enter premises. An answer would be provided.

**47. FIRE AND RESCUE**

At its meeting on 5 January 2012, the PDG considered a response to the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England consultation. As a result of discussion Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue's Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Nick Borrill was invited to attend the meeting.

Mr Borrill gave an overview of the consultation document from Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue's perspective. The Government produced a framework every 3-years, which set out the government's priorities and objectives. The framework was strategic and did not prescribe how fire and rescue services should undertake operations.

Three broad areas were laid down for fire and rescue: identifying the full range of risks in the area, making appropriate provision for protection and prevention and national resilience capabilities. Accountability was also emphasised in the draft framework.

The key strands of the strategy formed Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue's core business, which was based on an integrated risk management and planning process. Plans were available on Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue's website.

Further emphasis had been placed on national resilience and fire and rescue's role in preparing for major emergencies. Specialist units that could be accessed nationally included urban search and rescue, high volume pumping and mass decontamination. Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue suggested greater clarity was required on the structure through which national gaps could be identified. Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue had urban search and rescue and water rescue capabilities.

There were mechanisms in place to ensure the scrutiny of the fire service however a further requirement was the introduction of assurance statements. Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue had asked for further clarification on what that meant.

Members of the PDG were given the opportunity to ask questions of Mr Borrill.

Following media coverage of incidents nationally, Mr Borrill was asked to explain Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue's policy on responding to an emergency situation. Mr Borrill explained that the incident commander on-site would be responsible for conducting a dynamic risk assessment, considering the equipment available and training of personnel to and decide on the response to that situation.

In considering national resilience, councillors were advised that in the event of a major emergency, areas would consider their response and any specialist support required and then request that through a national co-ordination centre. Using the example of Operation Watermark (an east coast flooding exercise), which ran in 2011, Mr Borrill illustrated the national and local structures in place to respond to major emergencies. Further support could be accessed as required through the military; Mr Borrill gave assurances that Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue were aware of recent changes.

Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue were aware of changes that were underway within local military provision. If required, military support could be requested and assurances were given that Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue were aware of changes.

The Chairman thanked Mr Borrill for attending the meeting and answering group members' questions.

#### **48. CAR PARKING**

The Property Development Manager introduced himself to PDG members and gave a brief presentation on the key areas for consideration as part of the district council's strategic review on car parking, including locations of the car park and their usage.

As part of their considerations the PDG would need to take account of the Council's visions and priorities, planning policy documents and economic development aspirations. The Resources PDG would complement the work of the Communities PDG by considering the financial aspects of car parking. The review could provide the council with the opportunity to consider other opportunities including park and ride schemes or promoting access to town centres in other ways, for example using bicycles.

Discussion ensued on car parking need and opportunities to control on-street parking. Greater opportunities would be available following the introduction of civilian parking enforcement.

It was agreed that the PDG should hold workshop sessions to consider the strategic car park review and produce recommendations for the consideration of Cabinet.

*16:03 to 16:09 the meeting adjourned.*

#### **49. COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT**

The Benefits Manager gave a presentation on updates to welfare reform and council tax benefit. The Government had asked councils to introduce local schemes, which would replace a single, national scheme. Localised schemes would be introduced from April 2013. A 10% reduction in expenditure was required; this would be realised through a reduced level of grant. Based on 2010/11 SKDC spent £7.25m a year on council tax benefit.

Initial consultation documents indicated that pensioners (defined as those in receipt of a state pension) were a protected group, however confirmation was awaited on whether protection would apply to all pensioners or whether those who could afford to pay would pay. Other protected groups would need defining locally.

Based on research undertaken locally and nationally, (taking account of the 10% cut to expenditure and protecting certain vulnerable groups), projections indicated that non-protected groups could be required to contribute an additional 25% (approximately £340 based on current council tax levels) a year.

The service had seen an increase in the number of cases it administered. This trend was expected to continue and lead to increases in expenditure. When it set its policy, the Council would need to consider whether it would top up the grant or whether it would work within the grant allocated

The PDG was shown a projection of the numbers of people from specific vulnerable groups in receipt of council tax benefit. The groups typically classed as vulnerable in relation to council tax benefit were: passported (those in receipt of certain benefits who automatically had their council tax paid), lone parents, those in receipt of war pensions, carers and people with a disability. Projecting the caseload was complicated because there were overlaps between each group, which were not highlighted in the data however modelling tools had recently been made available.

Challenges were identified: defining vulnerable/protected groups (guidance was awaited regarding pensioners), the budget position was unknown, modelling different expenditure scenarios, deciding whether to 'top-up' the scheme, sourcing and procuring software to administer council tax and council tax benefit and promoting changes to those affected.

Members of the PDG discussed the presentation. Councillors were advised that if the Council did not adopt a local scheme, it would automatically enter a national scheme (based on the same principles as the current scheme). This would mean the Council could not achieve the required saving and would have no choice but to top-up the scheme.

One risk associated with changes was an increase in non-payment leading to an increase in council tax and rent arrears. The council would need to work with Lincolnshire County Council and Lincolnshire Policy Authority to develop a policy that took account of any losses should the council tax collection rate decreased. They would also need involving in discussions about whether the scheme should be topped-up. There was an expectation that schemes within the county should mirror each other as closely as possible.

**50. ANY OTHER BUSINESS, WHICH THE CHAIRMAN, BY REASONS OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, DECIDES IS URGENT**

Recently, the local media covered a story about Lincolnshire County Council and Lincolnshire Police, which stated that parades like the St. George's Day parade and the marches of remembrance and witness could be cancelled because of costs associated with road closures. The issue was experienced across the district. Reports indicated that policing arrangements in neighbouring districts differed, which meant events could proceed.

Councillor Wootten explained that a meeting with interested parties was scheduled to take place in Grantham on 9 March 2012 to discuss the issue.

**51. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting was closed at 16:59.