

# MEETING OF THE RESOURCES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

THURSDAY, 17 JANUARY 2013 2.30 PM



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## GROUP MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Jean Bevan  
Councillor Michael Cook  
Councillor Nick Craft (Chairman)

Councillor Bob Sandall  
Councillor Trevor Scott (Vice-Chairman)  
Councillor Jacky Smith

## PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Councillor Mike Taylor (Portfolio Holder: Strategic Resources - Well Run Council)

## OFFICERS

Head of Finance (Richard Wyles)  
Head of Community Assets (Paul Stokes)  
Waste and Recycling Service Manager (Pat Swinton)  
Development Management Service Manager (Pat Reid)  
Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer (Carol Drury)  
Principal Democracy Officer (Jo Toomey)

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### 37. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

No interests were disclosed.

### 38. ACTION NOTES - 2 NOVEMBER 2012

The action notes from the meeting held on 2 November 2012 were noted.

### 39. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

#### Grounds maintenance issues

The district Council's Scrutiny Committee looked at Grounds Maintenance issues at its meeting on 27 November 2012. The Committee was made aware of weaknesses in the current grounds maintenance contract, which was shortly due to expire. Officers were developing new contract arrangements which

would be more robust and enforceable.

### MOT arrangements for hackney carriages and private hire vehicles

The Waste and Recycling Services Manager gave an update on opportunities regarding MOT arrangements for hackney carriages and private hire vehicles.

- Additional signs advertising the MOT service would be put up at the depot.
- Hackney carriages and private hire vehicles were exempt from MOTs but were required to undergo two inspections a year.
- It would be possible to investigate a discount scheme – members felt that this should be investigated and approaches made to taxi firms based in the district.
- The consensus of councillors was that the preferred option was offering incentives rather than mandating firms use the Council's service.
- Members also agreed that there could be something displayed within taxis explaining they had been serviced by the local authority to act as a mark of confidence for customers.

#### ***Action point:***

***That the Waste and Recycling Service Manager should develop an incentive scheme which gives discounts to taxi companies for the inspections of hackney carriage firms and private hire vehicles within the district to present to the PDG at its meeting on 28 March 2013.***

### Development Management accredited agent scheme

The Development Management Service Manager gave the PDG an update on the accredited agent scheme introduced by Cornwall Council and how a similar scheme could be considered for South Kesteven.

- Following a phased rollout, Cornwall Council had recently launched its accredited agent scheme across the county.
- An agent who submitted three applications which were considered of satisfactory quality could ask to be added to the list of accredited agents. Applications submitted by those agents would then receive a cursory check.
- If an accredited agent submitted an application of poor quality, they would be struck from the scheme.
- Cornwall reported that once on the scheme agents generally performed well.
- The Cornwall Council scheme was only usable by agents submitting plans electronically online and where associated plans were either A3 or A4 size; this meant only household application agents could be credited.
- Following a review of the development management team's

performance, a household application team was being created. When this team was set up, it could be complemented by an accredited agent scheme like Cornwall Council's.

- Officers had begun holding an agents' forum. It was suggested that proposals for an accredited agent scheme could be discussed to gauge interest.
- Any accredited agent scheme introduced by the council would not prevent Councillors referring applications to the Development Control Committee.

**Action point:**

- ***Following the creation of a household applications team, the Development Management Service Manager should consider an accredited agent scheme and gauge the interest of agents in such a scheme through the agents' forum.***
- ***A progress update to be provided for the meeting on 28 March 2013.***

#### **40. FEEDBACK FROM THE EXECUTIVE**

The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Resources – Well Run Council informed the PDG that the Cabinet had agreed its recommendations in respect of fees and charges and thanked members for their hard work.

#### **41. FINANCIAL SETTLEMENT**

The Head of Finance summarised report number HOF221, which updated the PDG on the provisional grant settlement for 2013/14.

- The council was notified of its provisional settlement for 2013/14 on 19 December 2012. The announcement of the final settlement was expected towards the end of January 2013.
- The report provided a breakdown of the elements that made up the £8.024M grant, which constituted a 5% reduction.
- A number of components made up the grant, including an element of revenue support grant, redistributed business rates, specific grants (council tax freeze, homelessness and council tax support grants).
- Future funding would see a shift towards funding through the retention of locally raised business rates and revenue support grant.
- The report also gave an indication of possible grant levels for 2014/15, which were based on analysis by LG Futures, and constituted a further 4% reduction.
- From 2014, the grant allocation would not include a breakdown of its components.

There was brief discussion on parish precepts. Members noted that parish precepts did not impact on capping but large precepts impacted on local

residents. As further reductions in budget occurred, it was suggested that the district council could pro rata the shortfall in council tax support to parish councils.

## **42. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS MODEL**

The Head of Community Assets gave a presentation on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business model:

- Management of the council's housing stock was a key priority in achieving the good housing for all priority.
- A stock condition survey of all the council's housing stock identified that approximately 63% of properties met the decent homes standard. The asset management plan and capital programme had been revised with the aim of achieving 100% decency.
- The asset management strategy needed to look at the management of the housing stock on a more strategic level and consider long-term performance and sustainability (including management, maintenance, refurbishment and redevelopment, and regeneration).
- It was proposed that the Chartered Institute of Housing work alongside the council to support the development of a strategic plan.
- The Council had received grant funding to improve the Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) rating of a number of council homes in respect of energy efficiency. Further grants had been awarded to enable further rollout.
- The Council's current asset management plan was being reviewed; it was anticipated that a new plan would be put forward for adoption in September 2013.

A number of members expressed their support for the prospect of the council building more homes. Opportunities for the council to develop additional homes were available as a result of the self-financing of the HRA and the way in which the council decided to fund this.

Members discussed the energy efficiency improvements being made to council homes; one phase of improvement would include some of the rural areas in the district. The PDG was advised that rural properties were often difficult to heat and some had no gas connectivity. It was proposed that the Council investigate a scheme that would help tenants in rural areas access fuel oil without having to bulk buy, relieving some of the financial burden to heating homes. PDG members suggested that alternative energy should be taken into consideration for any new homes developed by the Council.

### ***Action point***

***Officers to look into working with an oil supplier to provide fuel oil for council properties in rural areas so that tenants do not have to bulk buy fuel and report back to the PDG at its meeting on 28 March 2013.***

At a previous meeting, the PDG had recommended that the Council look at opportunities to use a single supplier for utilities. Officers were investigating schemes in Norwich and Salford who operated similar schemes.

***Action point***

***The Head of Community Assets to provide an update on a single utilities supplier at the meeting of the PDG to be held on 28 March 2013.***

**43. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT**

Report number HOF220 by the Head of Finance summarised actual spend against the budget and the forecast outturn position as at 30 November 2012

An under spend of £330k was forecast against the general fund revenue account as at 30 November 2012 although the PDG were updated that the latest forecast variance showed a significantly reduced under spend. Key variances included the Olympic torch relay events, which were identified as part of the outturn and funded through the priority reserve.

There had been a reduction in income from markets, particularly Grantham. This was partially attributed to improvement works in Westgate during 2012/13. Members suggested offering stalls to charity and community groups free of charge so that they could advertise their work or raise money. This would fill empty pitches and help raise interest both in the organisation and the market area. Members noted that a review of markets was listed on their work programme for their meeting on 28 March 2013.

Audit fees had been reduced following the appointment of KPMG as the Council's new external auditors. They would charge a scale fee based on an agreed level of activity, however if additional work was required beyond that agreed level, a day rate would be applied.

Fees for development control and land charge were higher than budgeted however figures for December showed income decreasing once more. Building control income was lower than forecast and was anticipated to remain so for the rest of the financial year.

Additional income had been achieved through charging for the collection of green waste. This had been used to enhance street cleansing, identified as a priority through the SIMALTO exercise the council had previously undertaken. The service also achieved increased income through improving recycling credit income and the extension of the Stamford Civics contract to the end of the financial year.

Environmental services had been scheduled to carry out a private stock survey;

this was deferred until 2013/14 and funding from the budget would be set aside at the end of the current year.

A slight increase in income from car parks was reported; the impact of CPE was not yet clear. Councillors provided anecdotal evidence of improvements to parking in Stamford since its introduction. However, members did raise concerns about the number of taxis; particular reference was made to Stamford on Friday nights and suggested that periodic targeted enforcement could help reduce this.

The variance to the forecast position of the Housing Revenue Account was £140k. Key variances highlighted included a void rate of 1.3% compared to a budget of 1.5% which led to projected additional income of £62k. There was a forecast increase of £100k in respect of disabled adaptations due to four major referrals.

The variance of the HRA capital programme was forecast at £288k (6%) against an under spend of £2,046m (30%) at the same point in 2011/12. The general fund for the capital programme had a number of variances which were a result of the complexity of some of the schemes; funding for these projects (including the business innovation centre, station approach and the shop-front scheme) would move across to future years. Members were advised that the Bourne Community Access Point had almost been completed and would be running from March 2013.

The headcount showed a variance of 31.0 below the budgeted level of 626.1.

#### **44. WORK PROGRAMME**

The work programme was noted and PDG members suggested possible items for inclusion:

- HRA business plan - opportunities for the Council to build new homes and sites
- Medium term financial strategy
- Update and action plan on cycle centre

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

The meeting was closed at 16:02.