

**Annual Review – 2012/13**  
**South Kesteven Policy Development**

**1. Background**

- 1.1 This paper provides an update on the progress made by the Policy Development Groups since the introduction of the dedicated support role in May 2012. This role was developed to establish and assist the prioritization of relevant work plans for the Policy Development Groups (PDG) and Scrutiny Committee (SC).
- 1.2 The role was designed to ensure effective liaison between the Chairmen of the PDGs, the Cabinet and Senior Management Team. Through facilitating meetings with relevant members and officers, the support role assists in the development of and delivers work plans, consequently assisting in the development of policy options by the PDGs.
- 1.3 Effective relationships and cohesive methods of working are cultivated through a series of meetings ranging from assisting in the determination of items for consideration by PDGs through to ensuring PDG Chairmen and Vice Chairs have the knowledge and information required of the items being put before their PDG.
- 1.4 Throughout the year bi-monthly meetings were held between the Cabinet and Chairmen and Vice Chairs of the PDGs. This pilot Cabinet/PDG Liaison Group has informally reviewed the PDGs' remits and work programmes. The Group has considered the development of work programmes, the development of policies, items to be researched and evidence to be collected through working groups. The Liaison group has also examined how policies and procedures that impact on the people of the district must be supported by robust equality analysis. A key consideration was the importance of feedback:
- from the Cabinet and SMT to the PDGs – to agree items for consideration
  - from the Cabinet/PDG Liaison Group to relevant officers so they can support PDGs in forming recommendations
  - from the PDGs to the Cabinet – to put forward robust recommendations
  - from the Cabinet to the PDGs – on decisions made (including information on inclusion of recommendations or the rationale behind decisions that do not take account of PDG recommendations)
  - from the Cabinet to relevant officers to enable effective implementation of decisions
- 1.5 The Terms of Reference for the pilot Cabinet/PDG Liaison Group were based on those developed for the Policy Development Coordination Group as listed on page 46 (point 7.5) of the Constitution. Two small adjustments were made: 1) meetings would be chaired by the PDG chairmen instead of the Chairman of the Council and 2) the whole Cabinet was included in the membership rather than the Leader and Deputy Leader attending meetings by invitation only. The purpose of this change was to provide a formal mechanism for Portfolio Holders to feed in items and actions to the work plans of the individual PDGs.
- 1.6 Items for consideration can come to PDGs from a variety of sources: the Schedule of Decisions, Cabinet, Senior Officers, from members of the PDG itself or from other members of the Council. PDGs meet in public to make recommendations to Cabinet and council on development of policies and in private to consider development of policies by working groups. Liaison between Cabinet members and the PDGs is vital to the successful delivery of their work programmes. The table below shows the correlation between each PDG and the Cabinet portfolios.

<b>Cabinet Member</b>	<b>Portfolio</b>	<b>PDG</b>
Cllr Linda Neal	Policy	As appropriate
	Strategy	As appropriate
	Strategic Partnerships	Engagement (and any other PDG as appropriate)
Cllr Mrs Frances Cartwright	Grow the Economy: Economic Development	Communities (and any other PDG as appropriate)
Cllr Paul Carpenter	Governance and Communication	Engagement (and any other PDG as appropriate)
Cllr John Smith	Green, Healthy and Arts	Communities (and any other PDG as appropriate)
Cllr Mike Taylor	Strategic Resources: Well Run Council	Resources (and any other PDG as appropriate)
Cllr Teri Bryant	Good Housing	Communities/Resources (and Engagement PDG as appropriate)

\*Resources PDG crosses all Portfolios in relation to Fees and Charges

- 1.7 As a way of encouraging effective liaison between senior officers and the Chairmen and Vice Chairs of the PDGs, meetings were developed to agree the agenda for forthcoming meetings. These pre-agenda meetings take place at least one week prior to report deadline (which is two weeks before the scheduled PDG meeting date). Items from the work plan are added to the agenda and through the meetings members of the PDG and Senior Management Team have the opportunity to suggest other items for inclusion pertaining to the business of the PDGs including extended lists of attendees.
- 1.8 Officer liaison has also been important in the development of work programmes for the PDGs. It provides the link between the Cabinet/PDG Liaison Group, SMT and other officers of the Authority who have items for discussion and input by the PDGs. The Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer continues to liaise with officers to ensure the date-line within the work plan will be met and that Members and SMT have relevant information about each item during pre-agenda meetings and pre-meeting briefings.
- 1.9 Pre-meeting briefings have taken place prior to each PDG meeting. They involve the Chairman and Vice Chair, the assigned member of SMT and any officer presenting a substantive item at the PDG meeting. These meetings provide an insight to the Chairman of all items and give Members and officers an opportunity to discuss potential issues and share information.

## 2. Detail

### 2.1 Communities PDG

2.1a During the municipal year 2012/13 Communities PDG met on seven occasions. This includes an additional meeting to those scheduled to allow the PDG to consider the Council's Housing Programme of Work. At its meetings the PDG considered eighteen substantive items including:

Lincolnshire County Homelessness Strategy	<b>Right to Buy</b>	National Planning Policy Framework
<b>Car Parking Strategy</b>	Wind Energy Supplementary Planning Document	Rural Broadband
Sustainable Communities Act	Consultation on Intercity East Coast Franchise	<b>Localisation of Council Tax</b>
<b>Community Right to Bid</b>	<b>Tenancy Strategy</b>	<b>Allocations Policy</b>
Housing Strategy	Community Right to Challenge	<b>Waste and Recycling - Missed Bin Policy</b>
<b>Waste and Recycling – New Contract and Contamination</b>	<b>Planning Enforcement Policy</b>	Question without Discussion referred by Council: Biodiversity Duty

2.1b Of these items, one, relating to the Council's statutory duty in relation to Biodiversity, was a question referred by Council. The response to this question was presented by the Service Manager for Planning Policy and Partnerships.

2.1c Communities PDG also received updates throughout the year on items such as the Sustainable Communities Act and rural broadband, looking at rollout of fibre optic provision; sign-up by individuals, community groups and business to ONLincolnshire and developments relating to the increase of BT exchange boxes. Further updates were presented about ongoing work looking at car parking issues which included: civil parking enforcement, car park provision, resident parking schemes and alternative methods of payment for parking.

2.1d The PDG put forward recommendations to officers concerning the Wind Energy Supplementary Planning Document and the Housing Strategy and made nine recommendations to Cabinet. The substantive items to which these recommendations refer are shown in bold in the table above.

2.1e Members of the Communities PDG took an active role in two working groups this year. The first worked closely with the Head of Property Development to review car parking across the district which ultimately led to the implementation of a Car Parking Strategy. The second working group worked with the Service Manager and officers from Waste and Recycling Services on the education programme to reduce the amount of contaminated dry recyclable waste left for collection in light of an impending change of contract.

2.1f The PDG's response to a consultation on the East Coast Intercity Franchise took account of the Council's plans for growth within the district with a primary focus on Grantham.

## 2.2 Engagement Policy Development Group

2.2a Members of the Engagement PDG met a total of six times during the municipal year 2012/13. During these meetings fourteen substantive items were considered:

Means of Engagement – Local Forums and Community Drop In	Means of Engagement – communication with Parish and Town Councils	Question without Discussion referred by Council: Leader’s Activity Report
Means of Engagement – Customer Access Strategy	<b>Members Code of Conduct</b>	Bourne Community Access Point
Community Focus Forum	Means of Engagement – Citizens Panels	Customer Feedback
Protection of Freedoms Act	ICT Provision for Members	Communications Strategy
Councillor Training Programme	Review of Governance Arrangements	Tenant Involvement

2.2b The question without discussion on a Leader’s activity report put to Council on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2012 was referred to the Engagement PDG for response. This was given in the form of a letter to the elected member who put the question.

2.2c The items considered by Engagement PDG during this year have, for the most part, been in the form of reports and presentations for information and not requiring recommendations to be put forward. The only recommendation made to Cabinet in 2012/13 related to the Members’ Code of Conduct as shown in bold in the table above.

2.2d Engagement PDG has worked closely with the Head of People, Projects and Performance on a wide range of actions relating to improving and increasing the Council’s means of engagement with its customers and staff.

2.2e Members have been particularly keen to ensure effective communication channels exist between the district council and the parish and town councils across South Kesteven and requested that they be circulated with copies of the newly developed Parish and Town Council Newsletter.

2.2f Regular updates have been provided by the Head of Finance on the refurbishment of Bourne Corn Exchange and its development into the South Kesteven Community Access Point.

2.2g Members received a presentation on the Community Focus Forum – the Council’s consultation and network group in July 2012. This group was established to help fulfil the Council’s commitment to equality and diversity. The Chairman has regularly attended meetings of the Community Focus Forum and as a result of the information given in the presentation an additional member of the PDG has begun attending.

2.2h The Policy Development Coordinating Group was asked to consider a question requesting a review of Governance arrangements. The Group determined that Engagement PDG was the most appropriate to carry out this review. This item is ongoing.

### 2.3 Resources Policy Development Group

2.3a Resources PDG has met a total of six times during the municipal year 2012/13 with one meeting being held earlier than was originally scheduled in order to finalise its recommendations in relation to the implementation of fees and charges for 2013/14. The PDG considered eleven substantive items including:

Void Properties	<b>Fees and Charges Strategy</b>	Localisation of Council Tax Support Scheme
Car Parking Strategy	Financial Settlement 2013/14	Cycle Centre, Grantham
<b>Implementation of Fees and Charges</b>	HRA Business Model	Local Authority Mortgage Scheme
Medium Term Financial Strategy	Discretionary Council Tax Payment Scheme	

Items where recommendations were made are highlighted in bold in the table above.

- 2.3b The PDG worked closely with officers and external advisors in the development of the Fees and Charges Strategy in 2012/13.
- 2.3c Workshops were held with service managers on the determining of fees and charges for the forthcoming year and subsequent proposals were put to the PDG. The PDG's recommendations were then made to Cabinet. Recommendations relating to fees and charges were broken down by service area.
- 2.3d The PDG formed two working groups during the municipal year to concentrate on fees and charges and the localisation of Council Tax support (including the development of a new scheme for South Kesteven).
- 2.3e Members of Resources PDG made several suggestions and recommendations to officers during the year. Items which may have been secondary to the substantive items became recurring items throughout the year. These included the investigation into the possibility of using a single energy supplier for all council properties, bulk purchasing of fuel oil to assist council tenants, Car Park charges, use and publicising of the Cycle Centre and an Accredited Agent Scheme and charging for pre-application advice from Development Management.

### **3 Conclusion**

- 3.1 The three Policy Development Groups work in very different ways. Content for Resources PDG generally focuses on issues relating to the financial strategies and plans of the Council. This has become increasingly important given the testing economic environment. Whilst all three PDGs overlap in terms of content it should be acknowledged that the potential for crossover is greater between Communities and Engagement.
- 3.2 It has however been a productive year for the three Policy Development Groups. Collectively the PDGs have considered forty-three substantive items, made thirty-two recommendations to Cabinet and helped to develop seventeen policies, strategies and schemes for the Authority. It is interesting to note that for the first time since 2009 no PDG has had to be cancelled due to lack of items. The production and distribution of work programmes within agenda packs further assists in the Council's accountability and transparency in the development of policy. Ensuring that reports and presentations were prepared and distributed within the agenda management timetable meant Members consistently had the appropriate information to allow for informed deliberation and subsequent recommendations to officers and Cabinet. Improved systems for following up action points have ensured that members of PDGs are fully aware of milestones and achievements throughout the process of policy development to decision.
- 3.3 The Cabinet/PDG Liaison Group is still in its infancy however its continued development will enable officers and members to increase the effectiveness of the Policy Development Groups and ensure that work programmes going forward will contain appropriate content. Early involvement of the PDGs in the development of policies and procedures, working closely with officers, will ensure that recommendations put forward to Cabinet are robust.

### **4. Moving Forward**

- 4.1 During meetings of the Cabinet/PDG Liaison Group there has been some discussion over the remit of the PDGs. Issues raised have included the allocation of items and the limited topics for allocation to Engagement PDG. This led the group to question whether three PDGs were needed. The broad scope of Communities PDG was noted together with the cross-cutting nature of Resources PDG. Going forward there are opportunities available to address the parity of the PDGs workloads: reviewing the remit of each PDG and reviewing the operational function of each PDG.
- 4.2 A review of the remits of the PDGs could see realignment against Portfolios or priority themes to balance the workload. The report has identified that a considerable number of substantial topics are allocated to the Communities PDG whereas items considered by the Engagement PDG are for noting only. Adjusting the scope for each PDG would increase the number substantial items and consequently the number of councillors actively participating in policy development.
- 4.3 The different remits of each PDG can affect how business is transacted. Varying operational approaches suit these differences and mean the system, though not uniform, is fit for purpose.
- 4.4 Cross-over between Policy Development Groups should be encouraged to ensure we work effectively in the future. A joined-up approach to the development of policies and procedures has the potential to involve greater numbers of elected members in a policy's path from proposal through to recommendation and ultimately decision making. This approach has been shown to be effective this year with both Resources PDG and Communities PDG working on the development and implementation of the Car Parking Strategy. This approach could be further enhanced through the use of joint (cross-PDG) working groups so that the different components of policy development could be addressed simultaneously.