

# MEETING OF THE RESOURCES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

THURSDAY, 15 MAY 2014 2.30 PM



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## GROUP MEMBERS PRESENT

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

Councillor Nick Robins  
Councillor Bob Sandall  
Councillor Trevor Scott

## PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Councillor Teri Bryant, Portfolio: Good Housing

## OFFICERS

Head of Finance (Richard Wyles)  
Head of Community Assets (Paul Stokes)  
Environmental Health Team Leader (Private Sector Housing) (Anne-Marie Coulthard)  
Team Leader Leisure and Amenities (Susie McCahon)  
Principal Democracy Officer (Jo Toomey)

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### 1. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

It was proposed and seconded that Councillor Scott should continue as vice-Chairman of the Policy Development Group. On being put to the vote, this was agreed.

### 2. MEMBERSHIP

The PDG was notified that Councillor Mike Cook would be substituting for Councillor Jacky Smith for this meeting only.

### 3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

No interests were disclosed.

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#### **4. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 27 MARCH 2014**

The action notes from the meeting held on 27 March 2014 were noted.

#### **5. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING**

The PDG noted the decisions bulletins on the Site Allocations Policy and the Clean, Green and Healthy Strategy.

The Chairman also gave a brief update on pay-by-mobile in council car parks. Installation of a pay-by-mobile solution was anticipated within a month to 8-weeks of the meeting and that the 12-month trial would be cost neutral. If a cost-neutral solution was not available, Cabinet would need to decide whether to proceed with the project. The PDG Chairman also informed members that the parking study of Bourne had been completed and results were being considered.

#### **6. FEEDBACK FROM THE EXECUTIVE**

The Portfolio Holder for Good Housing gave a brief update on the integration of health and well-being arrangements.

#### **7. FUEL SWITCHING**

The Environmental Health Team Leader (Private Sector Housing) gave a brief update on the Lincolnshire Energy Switching programme. The first round, facilitated by iChoosr, was open for online and telephone registration between 14 January and 18 February 2014. 3,658 households in Lincolnshire registered for the scheme, 520 of which were in South Kesteven. Participants from Lincolnshire joined people from other local authority areas nationally, meaning the contract was auctioned on the basis of 36,000 potential customers.

PDG members were advised that 'Make It Cheaper' provided an energy comparison and switching service for businesses; several businesses in South Kesteven had already taken advantage of this programme.

A community oil buying scheme operated by the charity Community Lincs was also highlighted. This scheme was available to residents, businesses and community organisations and could lead to average savings of 5 pence per litre. The scheme also worked with Lincup on an oil savers scheme, which allowed residents to make monthly payments. The suggestion was made that a similar scheme for Calor Gas would be beneficial.

#### **8. MARKETS PROVISION**

Report number HOF276 was presented by the Head of Finance, the Head of Community Assets and the Team Leader Leisure and Amenities. The report gave a high-level summary of the financial position for each market in the

district: Grantham, Stamford and Bourne. It also summarised a range of initiatives designed to encourage market users and traders.

Members queried a weaker than normal trading year for Stamford market in 2012/13. While still in credit, income was significantly lower than 2011/12 and 2013/14. This was attributed to poor trading conditions generally and a decline in markets nationally, together with the deterrent effect of bad weather on casual traders. The PDG noted that Grantham's outturn position was affected by the cost of market rights although it was noted that income had been reducing over recent years.

Events and festivals had proved a particularly successful tool for promoting the markets, examples included the Georgian Festival in Stamford and Christmas markets. There were also plans for a special market to run as part of the open air event during the 2014 Gravity Fields Festival. The last 'Love Your Market' event had seen a number of traders who tried a one-off pitch stay on as regular traders in Stamford.

Work was being undertaken to identify ways of making the service more efficient, including supplying and erecting market stalls for local events. Members asked to see information in relation to this efficiency project.

Members were particularly keen to attract people to the districts markets using entertainment. Councillors were supportive of providing a performance space for local bands, schools and performing arts groups. One member also suggested more traders might be attracted if they were able to take half a pitch; officers said they had never received requests for half a pitch but it was something that could be promoted.

## **9. BUSINESS RATES - SECTION 47 RELIEF POLICY**

Report number HOF275 provided proposals for a Section 47 business rate relief policy. In summarising the report, the Head of Finance explained that there was a range of business rate relief schemes available and that companies would need directing to the scheme most appropriate for their circumstances. If the PDG agreed with the recommendations, the report would be put to the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Resources – Well Run Council to make a non-key decision.

The Localism Act awarded powers to local authorities to introduce a Section 47 relief scheme, giving councils discretion to provide relief in respect of business rates. The report and the draft policy proposed criteria against which applications for relief would be considered. The proposed scheme was considered particularly useful for companies seeking to upsize or downsize, or businesses looking to move into the district, providing temporary relief to support any transition.

Discussion ensued on whether the policy should include criteria limiting relief to

businesses of certain sizes (e.g. based on the number of employees). Some concern was expressed about large national chains moving to the district and being eligible for relief. There was also concern about the potential detriment of large chains on small local businesses. After debate, a majority of members agreed that the scheme should remain as presented and it could bring real benefits for businesses in, and those looking to move to, to the district.

Members noted that no appeals system was prescribed in the legislation. It was proposed that officers would assess all applications on the criteria in the policy and that a member panel should be used to determine any appeals. One member suggested that the appeal panel should consist of the full PDG however a majority of other councillors felt it was most appropriate for the panel to comprise the Grow the Economy – Economic Development Portfolio Holder and the chairman and vice-chairman of the PDG, or a substitute in their absence.

### **Recommendations**

- 1. That an appeals panel be written into proposals comprising the Grow the Economy – Economic Development and the chairman and vice-chairman of the PDG; a substitute should be appointed to take the place of any panel member unable to sit.***
- 2. That the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Resources – Well Run Council makes a non-key decision to implement the S.47 business rate relief policy as proposed.***

## **10. WORK PROGRAMME**

Future work programme items for discussion included pool cars – fleet optimisation and fees and charge proposals for 2015/16.

## **11. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting was closed at 16:07.