

# MEETING OF THE ENGAGEMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

FRIDAY, 27 NOVEMBER 2015 10.30 AM



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## GROUP MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Mike Exton  
Councillor Helen Goral (Vice-Chairman)  
Councillor Nick Neilson

Councillor Nick Robins (Chairman)  
Councillor Judy Stevens  
Councillor Brian Sumner

## PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Councillor Kelham Cooke, Portfolio Holder: Governance & Communication

## OFFICERS

Executive Manager, Corporate (Lucy Youles)  
Executive Manager, Commercial (Judith Davids)  
Executive Manager, Development and Growth (Paul Thomas)  
Strategic Lead – Programme Delivery (Lee Sirdifield)  
Business Manager Spatial and Economic Growth (Roger Ranson)  
People and Organisational Development Senior Officer (Jane Jenkinson)  
Principal Planning Officer (Samantha Brooman)  
Democratic Officer (Lucy Bonshor)

## OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Mike King  
Councillor Bob Sampson

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## 29. COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

None received.

## 30. MEMBERSHIP

There were no substitute Members but the Chairman had invited Councillor Mike King to the meeting to discuss the Local Plan issue on the agenda.

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**31. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

None disclosed.

**32. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 1ST OCTOBER 2015**

The action notes from the previous meeting were noted.

**33. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING**

Nothing to update.

**34. QUESTION WITHOUT DISCUSSION REFERRED FROM COUNCIL 12TH NOVEMBER 2015**

**Recommendation:**

***That the necessary changes take place to amend the current recruitment and selection policy to include blind short listing for all posts.***

Councillor Baxter had asked a question at Council about whether it was time for the Council to adopt anonymous shortlisting or name blind applications and the question had been referred to Engagement PDG.

The Executive Manager, Commercial, Judith Davids gave a brief background to name blind short listing which was intended to help level the playing field and prevent unconscious bias with shortlisting panels. Following David Cameron's speech commitments to adopt name-blind recruitment for University Applications, Graduate Placements, Interns and apprenticeships from 2017 had been made by various organisations including UCAS, KPMG, HSBC, Deloitte, Virgin Money, BBC, NHS, Learn Direct and local government.

*(10.35am Councillor Judy Stevens arrived)*

Mrs Davids circulated to Members a list of current council employee statistics and read out extracts from the Council's current Recruitment and Selection Policy and Procedures. One of the key objectives of the Council's Recruitment Policy was an aim to have a workforce reflective of the demographic make-up of the community it supports. Shortlisting was carried out by a minimum of two people. A template was used with criteria for the particular post extracted from the person specification. Sensitive personal data was removed from applications forms by the Personal and Organisational Development Section before it got to the Managers. Managers would however, be made aware if the applicant was disabled as SKDC was part of the Positive About Disabled People Scheme, which ensures that candidates with a disability are guaranteed an interview if they meet the essential criteria: also special adaptations may be required for the applicant to attend the interview. The Councils overall

employee make-up was representative of the district. Although the proportion males working for the Council was slightly higher due to the waste services that were in house which tended to be more male dominated, there was nothing worrying about the current statistics.

A Member asked what impact blind short listing would have. Mrs Davids replied that there would be minimal impact if blind shortlisting was adopted. It could be seen as good practice to adopt blind short listing, however the CIPD which is the professional body for Personnel and human resources practitioners had published an article that stated that name blind CVs alone would not address race bias during the recruitment process.

A short discussion followed with Members keen to adopt blind shortlisting. The Chairman asked if there would be any resource implications to adopting blind shortlisting. Mrs Davids replied there would be a small administrative impact by removing the name but that was all. Members were reminded that the blind shortlisting was initially proposed for university graduates and apprenticeships. Some Members felt that blind shortlisting should be across the board and it was proposed, seconded and recommended that the recruitment and selection policy be amended to included blind shortlisting across all recruitment. On being put to the vote the recommendation was agreed.

Mrs Davids said that although she had given an informal response to Councillor Baxter she would do a formal response on behalf of the PDG following the meeting.

## **35. EXECUTIVE ARRANGEMENTS**

The Executive Manager Corporate, Lucy Youles presented report LDS162 which proposed changes to the Executive function of the Council. The work of the PDG's was to asset the Cabinet with the priorities of the Council. With a focus on the growth agenda it was important that the work of the PDG's was aligned with the overarching priorities and outcomes of the Council.

The proposed changes to the Constitution were to change the Cabinet to the Executive and that Portfolio Holders become Executive Members. This was to reflect the strategic leadership of the executive function. The portfolios of the Executive Members were to be simplified for ease of reference to:

- Governance
- Growth
- Environment
- Housing
- Culture
- Resources

The name of the Communities and Resources PDG continued to be relevant however, the name of the Engagement PDG no longer aligned to the current

portfolios and it was proposed that it be changed to Growth to emphasise the Council's current growth agenda.

Liaison between the Cabinet and the PDG's had been through the Cabinet and Policy Development Liaison Group, however a new way of working had been undertaken with the Cabinet and the PDG Chairman and Vice-Chairman meeting with the Senior Management on a quarterly basis and this need to be reflected within the Constitution.

The membership of the PDG's were also proposed to be increase from seven members to nine and information briefing sessions to be introduced for all Members of the Council to attend.

A question was asked about the frequency of meetings and Mrs Youles replied that there was no proposal to change the current number of public meetings. One Member suggested that agendas should not contain information items as they did not serve any purpose. It was hoped that the briefing sessions would address this issue.

Further comments were then made about political balance (PDG's had to adhere to political balance) and having the relevant Portfolio Holder at a PDG. Councillor Cooke said that he would take the request back to the Cabinet for discussion.

Members supported the proposals recommended within the report.

### **36. A LOCAL PLAN FOR SOUTH KESTEVEN, EVIDENCE BASE AND SPATIAL STRATEGY**

Members had been circulated with report SEG013 which provided the Group with an update on the technical and supporting documents for the Local Plan (LP) for South Kesteven. The document had to be sound and robust with the content being formulated and discussed by the Engagement PDG and wider Member briefings where relevant as well as public consultation. The LP would be out to public consultation in September 2016 with submission to the Secretary of State in Spring 2017 and adoption in the Autumn 2017. The Government required the LP to be in place by Autumn 2017. As everyone else would be submitting plans at the same time plans were in place to speed up the exam process.

Evidence that supported the LP had to be sound and robust and a report was being taken to Cabinet in December covering the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, the draft Spatial Strategy, Employment Land Study and the Retail Needs Study. It was important that mechanisms were in place to give Members a chance to contribute to the preparation of the LP.

The Business Manager for Spatial and Economic Growth, Roger Ranson gave

a presentation to Members on the different aspects of evidence going to Cabinet in December.

The Strategic Housing Market Assessment covered two scenarios for the number of houses to be provided 2011 – 2036. The baseline growth was at 636 dwellings per annum and aspirational growth was increased by 10% to 698 dwellings per annum. The aspiration growth figure required the number of jobs to increase by an additional 2,000 by 2036 for economic growth. No decision had been made on the figure and it depended on the number of sites available. A Member questioned where the number of houses would be built, would it include greenbelt land.

The Spatial Strategy was a guide to strategic thinking and settlement hierarchy; it was not a policy in itself. The Core Strategy policy document had the majority of growth in Grantham. Evidence documents such as the Grantham Capacity Study document and the Stamford Capacity Study document would be taken into consideration, the right sites needed to be in the right location to deliver the amount of housing required. The Core Strategy had sites in place but they had not been implemented. The focus was on Grantham due to the range of services and employment provision but that included maintaining the role and function of all the market towns.

Local Service Centres (LSCs) and the range of facilities and community infrastructure was also a key feature. A review of criteria relevant to LSCs today and the next 20 years was needed especially in light of infrastructure changes to reduce bus routes and this would drive what could come forward in the future. Settlements below LSCs may not have had a significant amount of development in the last 10 years however, following the Regulation 18 consultation there was a general feeling that criteria had been too restrictive and a policy paper suggesting small amounts of infill maybe appropriate in certain areas, however until consultation was completed with Members and the public asking if they wish to be considered as a growth settlement this was not current policy.

The other two documents going to Cabinet concerned the Employment Land Study and also the Retail Needs Study. The Employment Land Study identified the suitability of land and premises for employment and whether existing sites were suitable for employment. B1 office space was required in Grantham but with a limited offer in the other three market towns. Some sites in Grantham were appropriate for employment use however some maybe de-designated as there was no evidence of demand.

The Retail Needs Study gave a health check on town centres with emerging capacity in Grantham to support a large food store post 2021. However, it was difficult to forecast need and with the growth of the internet this would be kept under review. In both Stamford and Market Deeping the study found that convenience shopping could accommodate a small food store by 2036 but that was not justified at the moment. Grantham offered a significant capacity for

population and housing growth and any offer needed to be right for the environment.

Mr Ranson then spoke of other evidence based work that needed to be completed and this included:

- Water cycle studies
- Open Space Assessment
- Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulation Assessment
- Landscape Character Assessments
- Renewable Energy Assessment
- Green Infrastructure Strategy
- Geo and Biodiversity study
- Plan viability assessment/ infrastructure costings

Next steps in the LP process included a call for sites and any employment sites not already known about. Public consultation through newsletters and parish updates. Parish services work on the community infrastructure of a parish, the LSC policy and a scoping paper on renewable energy. The tender for Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment had been awarded.

Members then discussed the presentation. One Member referred to the four major development sites in Stamford and how this would impact on neighbouring authorities such as Rutland, Mr Ranson referred to the duty to cooperate between authorities which in effect wiped away local authority boundaries. A briefing had been organised for Members, unfortunately it was in Grantham, a separate briefing in the evening in Stamford could be arranged.

Councillor King who had been invited to attend the meeting by the Chairman of the Group referred to the timetable and expressed his concerns. He felt the Local Plan was tremendously important because it affected many walks of life across the District for the next 20 years. It looked like Members would not have the necessary chance to debate the options at this early stage before the paper went to Cabinet and became public. There seemed to be no rush and a month's delay would not matter. Other Members were also concerned about the timetable and the apparent lack of scope for Member debate.

Councillor King then went on to talk about the substance of the paper. Firstly he asked whether the two options for the projected number of new homes should be regarded as minima, maxima or targets? In any case would homes on brownfield sites have to be allowed over and above these figures?

The Strategy made clear that Grantham was the main focus for growth.

He then went on to address the part of the paper dealing with the villages. What was contained currently in relation to LSCs and growth settlements for villages was "woolly" and the difference between LSC and growth settlements was not clear. What was it that should trigger "growth settlements"? Was it simply that the community wanted a village to grow? If the community said it

wished to grow, how did such a village fit into the hierarchy? Some clarification on criteria was required. Some villages may like to be viewed as a group rather than in isolation. Utility services should also be included to see whether or not they would be adequate if a village was developed especially in relation to surface water and foul drainage which could result in capacity and flooding issues. Consultation should be not just with the Environment Agency but with the Lead Local Flood Authority (LCC) and the five other “responsible” authorities designated under the 2010 Water Management Act. Cllr King felt that perhaps a small working group should be clarify this part of the document, although he had made some suggested revisions which he had given to the Chairman, the Executive Member and the officers before the meeting.

One Member asked about the SHMA and the number of houses, would this be front loaded or would the timescales be equal. Mr Ranson replied that they would be evenly spread over the time period and monitoring would be built into the process so that any economic changes could be addressed. Under the Duty to Co-operate work would include Peterborough in connection with the housing market especially with people commuting from the south of the district into the Peterborough area, housing figures needed to justify this aspect.

Mr Ranson then spoke about LSCs and those settlements below and whether there was demand for expansion, this could be evidenced through Neighbourhood Plans. The Spatial Strategy was not prescriptive; it depended upon what may come forward in the community for a limited amount of development. Was there an initial appetite? This would be dependent on what sites came forward; the document could be amended to give more clarity.

Cllr King felt that the main purpose of this paper now was to get communities’ feedback, it should be seen as an Options paper rather than a firm policy paper and the language might be changed slightly to reflect this. Questions should be asked before the document was approved for this purpose Mr Ranson replied that it wasn’t a policy that was out for a recommendation, it was a forward to shaping the policy, what it could be, there was a series of work in progress and this would include genuine engagement with communities to get their thoughts on where the direction of travel might be.

The Executive Manager for Development and Growth, Paul Thomas stated that the document was a work in progress, a blank sheet enabling the Council to be fully informed about issues and what options to take forward. Wording within the document would be changed to promote a style that was more questioning and not prescriptive, but he felt that it should not be delayed being put before Cabinet at the December meeting.

Cllr King felt that the focus of growth and investment for Grantham should be framed as an option paper, Mr Thomas replied that the wording could be a “should we or shouldn’t we question”.

One Member felt that this was risky as depending upon who was asked, you

could get polarised views and it had the potential for a too large remit and not being able to get quantitative evidence. The document had to be robust with both Members and Officers and site allocation was a difficult aspect.

Another Member felt that some of the villages would die if some development was not done, however she did not necessarily agree with the thinking about communities being done now. Growth was employment driven and it was how this was addressed. Mr Ranson said this was part of the debate, the economy was at the heart of what we did and we didn't need to go beyond the baseline unless changes were made to the economy and these ambitions were reflected within the Economic Development Strategy (EDS).

The EDS was out to consultation and as part of the strategy an action plan would be compiled to support the EDS with inward investment bringing sites forward to market such as the KiNG 31 site.

Further discussion followed with one Member stating that there was a fine line to follow between encouragement and enforcing. The Council needed to be seen as an enabler to help set up businesses and align them to the potential sites available. It needed to be shown that we were open for business and be proactive rather than prescriptive. With regard to site allocation and housing, building shouldn't take place unless the houses could be sold and that again reflected on economic growth.

Another Member felt that SKDC was not a high investment area, it was low wage and low economy. Property needed to be built to service the community and respond to local need. She felt that a sales conversation needed to be held to identify companies that we think would be appropriate for the area.

Mr Ranson replied that 80% of businesses were already here, but sites needed to be right with the correct land premises and housing available. There were great locational advantages but we shouldn't be too prescriptive, more marketing would be addressed within the EDS action plan.

Mr Ranson replied that changes could be made to the document to ask more questions and be more open rather than have statements. The Cabinet report was already out in the public domain but comments made would be taken away and the views expressed to defer the specific item.

The Retail Needs Study was then discussed. Comments were made about how heavily it was linked to the Spatial Strategy and Grantham town centre, it was felt that it should not be too prescriptive and that the market should dictate need. Grantham was very spaced out and this to some extent was why it struggled. Mr Ranson agreed that the evidence to date did point in that direction with the retail offers tending to be on the edge of the town centre, and the town centre was too large, constraints maybe needed with additional residential offers.

Comments were made about getting a representative view and to some

Members the work being done on the LP was “passing them by”. A discussion followed on whether it was worth having a briefing at full council to make all Members aware from all the political groups.

Mr Thomas said that the debate at the Engagement PDG had been very good but it was capturing that debate at the right time in the process and not leaving anybody behind. One Member referred to a recent presentation that the Strategic Director for Development and Growth had given to the Grantham Area Committee which had given a good insight into the LP and had been of real benefit. The Engagement PDG had the responsibility of the development of the LP and all items would come through it. Members felt that other Members needed to be made aware and get involved with the development of the LP and a briefing at full council was the ideal opportunity. Other Members felt that the setting of full council would not stimulate a meaningful debate and perhaps a briefing should be held after the full council so that everyone had a representative view of the work done to date. The Chairman felt that the briefing should be held within the Council meeting itself. A question was asked about the time scale to which Ms Brooman replied that it was a national Government directive when the LP had to be ready by.

Further comments were made about the importance of the LP and “tweaks” that needed to be made before going to Cabinet. All Members needed to have a basic understanding of the evidence base in order for discussions/debate to flow. The presentation should focus on the LP as a whole then an overview of each subject within the LP. Subsequent presentations should be on the evidence being collected and what it is telling us.

*(Cllr Sampson left at 12.15pm)*

### **Action Notes**

- 1. Revisions to be made to the Spatial Strategy paper by Officers**
- 2. A briefing for all Members to be arranged on the work done to date on the Local Plan to be arranged for after the next full council meeting.**

## **37. ACHIEVING CHANNEL SHIFT**

Members had been circulated with report SLPD002 which concerned customer expectations and how the Council should respond to these to ensure that the ambitions of the Customer Access Strategy were delivered. There had been a significant cut in budgets and pressures from customers wanting “more” from us. Customer expectations had changed over the last ten years with more people wanting to do things themselves or online without any human interaction 24/7 and unless the transaction failed or things went wrong then they would pick up the phone.

Nine out of ten people had online access through two or more devices, with around 67% of customer journeys starting on line. The Citizens Panel had said that they would go online if it was easy.

The Council had taken steps to improve online access with investment in replacement CRM and DMS and the redesign of the website. This had delivered a new platform which had seen over 50% of garden waste services being accessed on line, over 14,500 customers setting up an online account and nearly 20% of street scent customers accessing the service on line without any promotional literature.

In order to build on this the Council needed a clear channel shift strategy to encourage customers to access those Council services that were online rather than face to face or over the telephone.

Proposed measures included redirecting all face to face enquires to the self service terminals within the Council. Promotion and marketing to promote going online through outgoing correspondence, through the website and as part of the way the Council did business. Active promotion through Customer Services with each telephone or face to face interactions seeing customer service officers registering the customer for online access and running through a script to sell the benefits as part of the call. This would see a significant increase in the number of customer's accounts and this would enable direct marketing provision to encourage and maintain the channel shift. A direct result of this would see an increased call length and waiting times in the short term whilst take up activity was completed. Online would be promoted as the way to contact the Council. A London Borough had successfully had "online" as the way to contact the Council and had made savings of over £400,000. Where no online offer was available people calling in would be prioritized over calls where an alternative route had been provided to access Council services. A shift in channel usage could be achieved by reducing the capacity on the telephony channel and making it less convenient to wait on the phone. This would free up resources to support the most in need.

Mr Sirdifield stressed that all avenues to contact the Council would still be available so customers would still have a choice.

The changes proposed would have an impact on performance measures and these were also highlighted within the report and included a reduction in the telephone answer rate from 95% to 80% and an aim to respond to general online enquiries within one working day.

*Cllr Helen Goral left at 12.34pm*

Members discussed the proposals with comments being made about telephony contact particularly the one number, promotion and marketing of the channel shift via Ward Representatives on Parish Council's, the use of SK Today to

promote the shift and discounts for people “doing it” themselves.

The Corporate Manager Finance, Richard Wyles referred to legislation which meant that discounts could not be offered for all services, only discretionary services such as green waste could have a discount applied. The Resources PDG had recommended that a £3 discount be applied for those customers who accessed the service on line and paid by direct debit.

Further comments were made about people who had bad internet connectivity and those that simply did not want to interact on line. Once again Mr Sirdifield reiterated that maintaining all contact routes to the Council was part of the Customer Access Strategy, whether that was by telephone or face to face but for those who wished to transact on line that facility was there.

On the whole Members supported the measures to encourage access to services through the online channels.

### **38. UPDATES FROM WORKING GROUP**

Members had been circulated electronically with the recommendations that had come out of the Local Authority Controlled Working Group. The Working Group had held two meetings and had been made up of Members from each of the three PDG's. Cabinet at their meeting on 7th December were due to approve the formation of the company. The Company would be limited by shares which would all be held by South Kesteven District Council and would enable the local authority to trade commercially. The Council would not be able to interfere with the day to day working of the Company but as the main shareholder, it was the Council's role to ensure that the directors of the company did not operate beyond their powers. It was hoped that all delegations would be in place by April 2016 for the Company to be trading.

One Member asked about the make-up of the new Company to which Mr Wyles replied that the Board would be made up of a maximum of five directors including the potential to appoint an external representative. The view of the Working Group was not to include the Council in any name for the Company and the decision of the name to be left to the new Board. As the Company would not employ any staff initially Officers would charge any time they spent undertaking work for the Company back to the Company.

The Council would lend money to the Company on a commercial basis from its investments and this would be under separate headings in the Council's accounts. It would take about three years for the Company to mature and it offered opportunities within the private sector that the Council could not take. A full copy of the report going to Cabinet was available electronically.

### **39. GRAVITY FIELDS 2016**

The Business Manager for Venues and Facilities Management, Paul Stokes gave an update to Members on the progress for the Gravity Fields Festival. The project team had met and a bid for £90,000 was being made to the Arts Council for funding. Guidance had been sought from the Arts Council about the content of the bid. The Steering Group had also met. Buildings and assets within the district that would be used included St Wulfram's Church, Harlaxton Manor, Belton House and Woolsthorpe Manor. Work was being done with the National Trust to commemorate 350 years. The outcome of the bid would in some respects determine aspects of the festival, whether funding had been successful would be known in February. The Chairman asked if there were any outdoor events planned such as when the Mallard had come to Grantham to which Mr Stokes replied that they had some potential headline acts involving St Wulfram's church but until the exact amount of funding was known he could not confirm what they would be.

### **40. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 1.05pm.