

MEETING OF THE COMMUNITIES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

FRIDAY, 18 NOVEMBER 2016 2.30 PM



GROUP MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Duncan Ashwell
Councillor Ashley Baxter
Councillor Barry Dobson
Councillor Mike Exton (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Breda Griffin

Councillor Charmaine Morgan
Councillor Mrs Andrea Webster
(Chairman)
Councillor Hannah Westropp
Councillor Ray Wootten

EXECUTIVE MEMBER

Councillor Mrs Linda Wootten, Executive Member Housing

OFFICERS

Strategic Director Environment & Property (Tracey Blackwell)
Community Engagement & Policy Development Officer (Carol Drury)
Senior Housing Options & Advisor (Sarah Hutchison)
Strategic Lead – Programme Delivery (Lee Sirdifield)
Business Manager – Environmental Health (Anne-Marie Coulthard)
Admin Assistant, Democratic Services (Anita Eckersley)

27. MEMBERSHIP

The Chairman congratulated Councillor Mike Exton on his appointment as Vice Chairman of the Communities PDG. She also thanked Councillor Hannah Westropp for all her work and support whilst she had been Vice Chairman.

28. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

No interests were disclosed.

29. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 1 SEPTEMBER 2016

The Chairman noted that the action notes were not minutes or a verbatim record of the meeting. Members were informed that if they wished their comments to be noted they should ask for this to be done but noted the comments would not be verbatim.

The action notes from the meeting held on 1 September 2016 were noted.

Your council working for you

30. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

The Strategic Director noted that the Car Parking Strategy would be on the Communities PDG Agenda in January 2017.

The dates for the updated joint Housing Summit were in the process of being arranged and Members would be contacted in due course.

31. ELECTED MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer presented report number LDS190 on the Elected Member Development Programme. The report had been presented to all three PDGs to provide a review of the Member training that had been delivered since the 2015 election to the Council. The report included details of attendance and Member's feedback.

Training for Members appointed to Development Control, Licensing and Governance and Audit Committees was mandatory. Attendance figures relating to mandatory sessions had highlighted that not all Members of the three committees had attended training during this term of office. This was probably due in part to some Members having undergone training during the previous term of office and there being no legislative requirement for them to attend training at the start of each new term of office.

Members were asked if they felt consideration should be given to whether mandatory training should be undertaken by all appointed committee members on commencement of each term of office with refresher training being undertaken on an annual basis.

Training sessions for the core training programme had been arranged for morning, afternoon and evening where possible. Appendix A contained a list of sessions that had been cancelled solely due to a lack of bookings and all related to events planned for evenings. Phase two of the training had followed the same format as phase one and was outlined in Appendix B.

Following the first year of training, Members had been invited to complete an on-line survey regarding the experience of the training offered. A paper copy of the survey had been provided for Members unable to access the survey on line. Members had been asked to provide information about the events they had attended, identify any gaps in knowledge they may have and highlight any suggestions or opportunities for further training they felt would be helpful to them. A total of 26 Members had completed the survey with an average of 16 providing responses to every question.

The Engagement PDG (now Growth PDG) had reviewed the feedback from the previous term of office which had highlighted that some Members had felt bombarded with information during the induction process that followed the election. As a result of this the training programme developed to follow the 2015

election was streamlined and a calendar of core and skills training had been provided over two phases lasting throughout 2015 and into the spring/summer of 2016. An overview of the training events offered to Members during induction and the first two phases had been provided in Appendix A.

As a result of the responses to the survey and based on the original training plan, a draft programme of events had been developed for winter/spring 2016/17. Members comments and views were being sought on the draft training and development plan at Appendix C of the report.

Members commented on the benefits gained as a result of attending the Speed Reading and Effective Speaking courses.

Councillor Baxter queried whether all training sessions were for half a day; the feasibility of being a substitute on regulatory committees if training was not available to all members and how this could restrict any opportunity for substitution and whether the new draft training programme would be provided in advance so opportunities would not be missed. He also queried why training for the three mandatory committees was not included in the programme and whether members not on the committee could attend the monthly planning training.

Members were reminded that mandatory training was provided for those Members assigned to the Development Control, Licensing and the Governance and Audit Committees but were generally open to all Members of the Council to attend. The exception to this was the monthly planning training events to which only members of Development Control Committee were currently invited. It had been noted through Growth PDG that these sessions should be opened up to all Members. These sessions, unlike generic mandatory training for Development Control Committee, were topic specific.

The three mandatory training events initially provided had to be given during a short window of opportunity from the date of appointment at the Annual Council Meeting to the first meeting of each committee. The training ensured that Members were appropriately trained and able to participate in the Committees they had been appointed to. Additional one-to-one training had also been provided for Members appointed to committees during the year. The length of time for each training session varied depending on the topic and content. The draft programme referred to the period between December 2016 and March 2017 and would be available once finalised.

Other general training opportunities within the Member development programme were also both generic and topic specific and were open to all Members. A number of non-committee Members had participated in some mandatory training sessions which meant there was a pool of potential substitutes or future committee members.

Members also commented on whether additional “meet and greet” sessions could be provided halfway through the term of office; whether there were dates for the public speaking course; whether courses on how to engage with officers and how to distinguish between a councillors role and an officers role were available and whether training on accessing the Constitution on iPad could include “How to use the Constitution” itself.

Further discussion was around the possibility of joining forces with Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) in respect of attendance at courses they ran; whether it was possible to invite people from other Councils to attend courses at SKDC if uptake for a particular course was low; the use of iPads at committees but paper copies of the agendas were still being distributed; whether certificates could be provided to help Members retain a record of their training; whether members could be trained on how to respond to resident’s queries about the constitution; engaging with managers; whether there was a possibility for members to link into training from an external source if they were unable to physically attend a course and whether training had to be retaken at SKDC if the same training had been provided by Lincolnshire County Council.

Action points:

Members to forward suggestions or requests for relevant training directly to the Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer.

32. SAFEGUARDING POLICIES & PROCEDURES 2016

The Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer presented report number LDS191 on the development of a draft combined Safeguarding Policy and associated procedures relating to children, adults and domestic abuse. The purpose of the report was to highlight the development of this combined Safeguarding Policy with Members of the Communities Policy Development Group.

Members of the PDG were being asked to note the contents of the report and its accompanying appendices and put forward comments or make recommendations based on their local knowledge of any South Kesteven specific content they felt should be included within the Policy prior to it going to the Executive Member – Governance for approval by non-key decision.

Members were reminded of the statutory duties the Council had under Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 and Sections 42 to 45 of the Care Act 2014 to protect people from harm and neglect and to co-operate with other agencies. The existing Safeguarding Children Policy had been updated annually to reflect changes in legislation and statutory guidance such as Working Together to Safeguard Children. The Council had introduced a policy that related to the safeguarding of adults in 2013. This had been updated in 2015 to reflect the introduction of the Care Act.

The combined Safeguarding Policy had been developed to reflect the Council's responsibilities in regard to the protection of adults and children. The policy reflected the legal and corporate duties of care and responsibilities the Council had in safeguarding individuals from significant harm. Procedures for referring incidents and concerns were included in the documents.

The District Council's responsibilities for safeguarding both children and adults were the same in respect of reporting incidents or concerns to the responsible authority (Lincolnshire County Council) as well as working with other agencies to ensure the welfare of children and vulnerable adults within the district. A combined policy for the safeguarding of children and adults had been drafted (appendix A) to reflect this synergy.

Three sets of procedures had been created to support the document that would help locate the relevant information should there be cause for concern about a child or vulnerable adult. Updating individual parts of the document would also be easier using this format:

- Safeguarding Children Procedures (appendix B)
- Safeguarding Adults Procedures (appendix C)
- Domestic Abuse Procedures (appendix D)

A programme of in house training to accompany the revised policy and procedures would be available for all elected Members and staff following its implementation.

Members commented on the sound knowledge and guidance provided in respect of the requirements contained within the document.

Action Point:

Members of the PDG noted that the Safeguarding Policies & Procedures 2016 would go to the Executive Member – Governance for approval by non-key decision.

33. HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY

The Strategic Director Environment & Property informed the PDG that the report provided feedback on the consultation that had taken place between 31 May 2016 and 23 August 2016 and provided Members with an opportunity to comment on the draft housing allocations policy. Strong support for the proposed changes had been received generally with the exception of two issues.

The Senior Housing Options Advisor presented report BMH114 on the proposed changes to the Draft Allocations Policy. Members were informed of the range of people who had been invited to take part in the consultation such as doctors surgeries, Social Care, Housing Associations, current residents of social housing, and people on the housing register. During the three month

consultation period a good response had been received but assessing bedroom need and income levels, the two areas identified as being potentially contentious, had been less supported.

Assessing Bedroom Need: The proposal was to increase the age at which same sex siblings could share a bedroom from 16 to 21 years of age. Following analysis of specific reports that had been run this had indicated the potential to reduce the demand of four (plus) bedrooms social housing by around 30% in the Grantham area. 52% had agreed with this proposal and 41% had disagreed with 7% saying they did not know. Members were informed of the current demand for larger properties within Grantham, Bourne, and Stamford.

Members were asked for their views on the proposed increase in age.

Points discussed: that the proposed change was for same sex siblings only and not mixed sex siblings; whether people would be forced to move or could become homeless and how it would affect families where there were children from previous relationships.

Members were assured that the age increase would relate only to same sex siblings; that where appropriate, adult children would be signposted and encouraged to look for their own properties; that there was a different process for dealing with homelessness and that the demand was greater for 1 and 2 bed houses than it was for 4 bed and larger properties.

Councillor Morgan wished to have noted that her preference was for the age to be increased to 18 rather than 21 due to potential issues such as the availability of a quiet area to study.

Councillor Baxter wished to have noted that he also felt the age should be increased to 18 rather than 21 and queried whether the demand for 4 bed and larger properties should be flagged and factored into any new developments of social housing.

Further discussion took place around whether the Grounds for Possession – Unacceptable behaviour test at Appendix 3 on page 61 of the Policy was legislation; how people evicted from private housing due to them raising issues about the quality of accommodation they had been living in would be dealt with.

It was noted that the information provided under Grounds for Possession was legislation and that each request for accommodation would be considered on an individual basis using the policy. Private landlords did not have to provide a reason why a Section 21 notice had been issued. The particular issue raised by the Member would be discussed outside the meeting.

Income Levels: The current policy set the financial threshold of eligibility for social housing at £16,000 in savings, assets and or equity. Members were informed that other authorities had set the income threshold lower than £16,000

but the proposal was for the financial threshold to remain at £16,000. Single applicants who had an income in excess of £30,000 per annum and households with a joint income in excess of £50,000 per annum would either be refused access or subjected to a reduction in priority.

There had been significant support for reducing priority for income levels, but there had been some difference of opinion on the proposed income level. Overall 39% of respondents had said the income level was too high while a majority (54%) believed the levels to be about right with the remainder saying it was too low.

Members felt that the proposed new thresholds of £30,000 (single) and £50,000 (joint) were fair. Further clarification was sought on whether single parents would come under the same criterion; what consideration was given to people who came under the higher joint bracket but who may be in debt and whether they would be provided with guidance or signposted to debt advisors or CAB.

It was noted that hardship was an element taken into account when assessing all applications including those from single parents and families with complex needs. It was important to note that decisions could only be made on the information submitted and evidence provided by the applicants.

Councillor Morgan queried how management discretion was scrutinised and whether the PDG could receive a layman's brief on the transparency of the process.

It was noted that the process to go through when making decisions was outlined in the document but a more in depth briefing could be provided. Nationally, around 48% of cases considered by the Ombudsman had been found for the customer due to LAs not acting within their own policies.

A Member commented on the thorough and informative information contained in the document and had a query about what would happen should an elderly couple decide to downsize, but would not be taking their adult children with them. What would happen to the adult children?

Children would not be able to remain in a house after parents had vacated the property and the policy would not award priority to those households that wanted to downsize unless there was assurance from the applicants that the other household members had accommodation available to move to.

Recommendation:

That the Communities PDG recommends to the Executive that:

- a) The Housing Allocations Policy is approved;

- b) The age at which same sex siblings could share a bedroom is increased from 16 to 21 years of age;
- c) The financial threshold for eligibility for social housing remains at £16,000 in respect of savings, assets and or equity and that the income for single applicants is increased to £30,000 per annum but for households with a joint income in excess of £50,000 per annum would be refused access or subjected to a reduction in priority.

Action Point:

That a briefing paper outlining the process and how it would be scrutinised when applying the policy and when management discretion would be used to be presented at a future meeting of the PDG.

34. SHARING FRONT OF HOUSE SPACE

The Strategic Lead, Programme Delivery presented report SLP010 on the use of the Council's front of house areas and the principles that could be adopted to maximise opportunities to share this space with other organisations. This was a discussion document for the PDG to review the space sharing principles contained within the report and consider whether any additions or amendments would be required to enable front of house space to be shared with other organisations.

Members were provided with an overview on the new Property Asset Strategy and how it considered the way the Council used its property for both commercial and operational purposes. Whilst the Customer Access Strategy supported this it also sought to ensure that face to face provision focussed on customers who required support from similar bodies by working with partner organisations who shared customers with the council. It looked at the feasibilities of more than one partner agency working in the same environment in order to improve the face to face offer and enhance customer experience whilst reducing the ongoing cost of delivery.

In order for this to be realised, consideration would need to be given to the principles of sharing space in a front of house environment that would ensure customer needs were met, there was a safe environment for both customers and staff and would meet the aspirations of both the Property Asset Strategy and the Customer Access Strategy.

A number of themes covered in the Property Asset Strategy placed a focus on organisations working together and supporting good connections between people and services. It would be important when considering sharing front office space that potential organisations concerned had similar principles to the Council. The Council could look for opportunities to work with public sector partners through the One Public Estate initiative. An overview of the suggested seven general principles for sharing front of house space was provided in Table 1 of the report. These were:

- To have a shared customer base;
- To target face to face provision to the most vulnerable;
- To support the incorporation of digital technologies in the provision of services;
- To contribute towards the ongoing operating costs of the shared facility;
- To have aligned opening hours;
- To have similar and clearly stated customer values;
- Where feasible to support integrated service provision.

Members were asked to consider whether they felt these principles were appropriate, whether more should be added or some taken out, whether all seven should be used or a combination of them considered. The list was not exhaustive but would ensure close alignment with the Council's strategic ambitions. There were also strong linkages with the principles within the One Public Estate initiative that could ensure the Council was well placed to respond where opportunities to work with other public sector bodies arose.

The Council could choose not to share its front of house space with others but it was felt this could limit the offer available to residents and not enable the full realisation of opportunities to reduce ongoing operational costs. Other local authority sites had implemented co-location initiatives. An initial impact assessment had been completed and had highlighted the need for effective design and management of any shared face to face provision. The contents of the analysis would be used to inform any future plans.

Discussion took place around the types of public sector bodies or outside organisations that would be considered for co-location; how staffing and back office space would be affected; whether this was just a financial saving initiative and the terms of tenancy such as length or term and the governance of exiting a co-location partnership.

Councillor Baxter queried whether further consideration would be given to integrating front line services including services such as CAB at the Deepings.

Councillor Morgan queried whether meeting spaces were made available for voluntary organisations at discretionary rates.

It was noted that integrated working space and co-working with other organisations was the direction authorities were going down. In respect of the integration of services at the Deepings, detailed consideration had been given to the suggestion. However, it was not possible to include a customer service function within the library premises. The aim was to encourage a minimal customer footprint by providing a number of complimentary services under one roof which in turn could provide a financial benefit to SKDC.

There would be an impact on back office space due to other organisations also requiring meeting rooms and office space. Tenancy terms would probably be negotiated on a case by case basis but they were typically expected to be between 5 and 10 years and would be chargeable.

Members noted the seven general principles for sharing front of house space.

35. WORK PROGRAMME

Members of the PDG noted the contents of the work programme.

- Car Parking Strategy – to go to January 2017 PDG
- Tourism Website
- Wyndham Park Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Developments
- Review of the Housing Strategy
- Refresh HRA Business Plan
- The Work and impact of the Neighbourhoods Team

Councillor Morgan queried whether the NHS Sustainability & Transformation Plans (STPs) should be added to the work programme.

Councillor Baxter queried whether healthy lifestyle was an area that should be considered by the PDG.

It was noted that the NHS Sustainability & Transformation Plans (STPs) would probably go to Scrutiny rather than a PDG. In respect of healthy lifestyles, scoping of the work required and how it would affect and fit within the Council's priorities would need to be undertaken initially.

Action note:

- 1) **That the Work and Impact of the Neighbourhoods Team be added to the Work Programme, and**
- 2) **That the Strategic Director to arrange for the initial scoping work document template to be forwarded to both Councillor Morgan and Councillor Baxter.**

36. ANY OTHER BUSINESS, WHICH THE CHAIRMAN, BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, DECIDES IS URGENT

Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Consultation Response - Houses in Multiple Occupation and Residential Property Licensing Reforms

The Business Manager – Environmental Health referred to the Government intentions for future regulation of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), and licensing reforms. A draft response to the consultation on the implementation of the changes had been provided for Members.

Members were informed that the intention was to raise standards in HMOs by extending the scope of mandatory HMO licensing, and introducing mandatory national minimum room sizes for rooms used as sleeping accommodation in licensed HMOs.

The Department for Communities and Local Government was consulting on the implementation of the decision, and had invited comments on the details of the proposals by asking specific questions concerning the proposed secondary legislation. Views on a number of other possible measures such as determining “fit and proper”, refuse disposal in licensed properties, and the treatment of some student accommodation were also being sought. The full consultation document was available as a background paper and a copy of the draft response to the 32 questions was provided at appendix 1.

The 8 week consultation was due to close on 13 December 2016.

A brief overview of the proposed changes was provided:

Extension of mandatory licensing: A mandatory HMO licence was currently required when a building was 3 or more storeys and occupied by 5 or more persons comprising of 2 or more households sharing some facilities. The Government’s intention was to extend the number of properties requiring a licence by removing the rule relating to the number of storeys. Flats in multiple occupation which met the same occupancy criteria but were in converted buildings or were part of a building being used for non residential purposes, such as flats in multiple occupation above shops, would also be included.

It was proposed that these changes would come into force during 2017.

National Minimum Room Size: To prevent overcrowding in family homes the current room and space standards allowed for different size rooms for sleeping babies, children and adults. The Government intention was to insert a new compulsory condition in every mandatory HMO licence to ensure that rooms would be disregarded as suitable for sleeping accommodation unless they met a statutory minimum prescribed size. The sizes would be the same as the current room size standards for adults but would not differentiate between whether the room was used by a child or an adult. The minimum sizes were:

- 6.52sq.m for one person
- 10.23sq.m for two persons

Potential Local Impacts: The minimum room size proposals would include HMOs that were already subject to mandatory licensing but could have rooms that did not meet the condition. Currently there were 25 licensed HMOs in the district, 3 of which might be impacted by the introduction of a minimum room size.

There would be an increase in the number of HMOs that would need to be licensed and subject to inspection. Landlords were not required to inform us of an HMO unless it met the current criteria for a mandatory license so information was limited. As far as the Council was aware there were 55 HMOs with shared facilities but these did not meet the current requirements for a mandatory licence. Approximately 25 of these might meet the extended licensing criteria.

Members views were sought on the responses to the questions and they were asked to forward any issues they felt should be included in the response to the Business Manager Environmental Health by 25 November 2016. Members were asked in particular to consider the following questions on the response form:

Question 12

Do you agree that there should be no difference in how children and adults are counted for the purpose of the room size condition? If not please explain why.

Question 15

Do you think that the proposal not to treat temporary visitors as occupiers is appropriate?

Question 16

Do you think that introducing minimum room sizes will impact upon persons sharing protected characteristics and if so how will it impact on them? If you think the impact is negative can you suggest how it may be mitigated?

Action Points:

- a) That Members note the potential impacts of the changes locally, and**
- b) That Members would forward their comments on the draft response to the Business Manager – Environmental by 25 November 2016.**

37. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting was closed at 16:20.