

APPENDIX TO COUNCIL MINUTES: 26<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2006

MINUTE 107: QUESTIONS WITHOUT DISCUSSION

QUESTION 1: COUNCILLOR ROB SHORROCK

As I am sure you are aware Voluntary Action Kesteven based in Grantham are in dispute over arrangements for the structure and delivery of services to the voluntary sector. Key concerns for Voluntary Action Kesteven (VAK) are:

For the purposes of funding the voluntary sector, Lincolnshire has been broken up into 3 area partnerships with an ambition to create a more integrated and streamlined approach.

VAK has signed up to the Southern Area Partnership, but not the model of working that is being proposed which requires them to provide services to organisations outside the district and/or the terms of their constitution.

The infrastructure plans are designed to deliver funding in a more integrated way. All funding will be channelled through the Consortium (of which SKDC is a member) to the partnerships in Lincolnshire. Therefore, for a Council for Voluntary Service to receive funding it must subscribe to the conditions of the partnerships. Although this principle is supported by VAK, severe pressure is being placed on the organisation to alter its constitution to work with groups and organisations outside its remit, to fit an untested and inflexible plan of delivery that has not yet been agreed.

£79,000+ is being held by GOEM and VAK were given an understanding that they could bid for this directly to the Consortium. However, the Consortium secretariat has failed to circulate the bid to members for consideration and decision. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) has been tracking this process and has concluded in an email to GOEM on 13<sup>th</sup> January that **'VAK feels that it is being deliberately excluded from accessing these funds and will have no fair chance of developing service delivery. More seriously, VAK will have to issue redundancy notices by the middle of next month to close end of March 2006'**

Because it was prematurely assumed that VAK were not part of the partnership, a decision was made (21<sup>st</sup> November 2005) to remove VAK from the executive group of the South Kesteven LSP, and invite Boston CVS to be a member as, under these current arrangements, they would potentially channel funds into the district. An opinion from the SKDC legal officer suggests that under the terms of the LSP this was an unlawful act and only the full partnership board can decide who will, or will not, be a member of the executive group.

The Cabinet met with the Trustees of VAK on 16<sup>th</sup> January and strongly urged them to continue with the existing partnership arrangements.

In all of this it is worth noting that:

GOEM made it a condition of the first phase of Change UP grant that all parties in the Southern Partnership agree to a process of conciliation. Despite continual requests from

VAK and NCVO to date this has not happened and is clearly being resisted by some members of the partnership and the co-ordinator of the Consortium.

The model in other parts of the County respects the independence of the voluntary sector organisations involved. Organisations in the West partnership have not been asked to change their organisational structures and are working in a 'free' partnership. It is unclear why this is not the case in the south.

The key document setting up this infrastructure model (Change Up June 2005) **makes it clear that it expects district councils to provide rolling funding through a 5 year plan to the partnership.** To my knowledge, this has not been discussed by any DSPs or included in any Council financial forecasts.

There is a growth and preponderance of intermediary bodies to channel and distribute funding. For example, Change UP funding from GOEM goes to the Community Foundation, through to the Consortium, to the Partnerships and then to front line organisations. The effect of this is to whittle away what the frontline organisations finally end up with. Many of these bodies appear to have similar functions.

On behalf of the Council will the Leader provide a full statement of her, and her cabinet's actions in relation to this issue; the perilous position that Voluntary Action Kesteven now finds itself in; the financial implications to the Council as a funder and Consortium member of subscribing to the voluntary sector infrastructure plan for the south and ensure that all these matters are promptly and fully investigated by the appropriate DSP?

### **RESPONSE TO QUESTION 1: COUNCILLOR LINDA NEAL**

From Cllr Shorrock's lengthy preamble to his actual question it is easy to see that he has been taken in by Voluntary Action Kesteven's biased view and interpretation of recent events. It contains various inaccurate and untrue statements. Most specifically to state the Cabinet strongly urged them to continue with the existing partnership arrangements I am told is completely untrue. Voluntary Action Kesteven's current position is totally of its own making. However, I understand, following the meeting with the Cabinet the Chairman of the Trustee Board subsequently relinquished his position and has been replaced by a Chairman who is determined to forge a way forward for VAK within the Southern Partnership.

### **SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION: COUNCILLOR ROB SHORROCK**

I apologise for having to raise it in this format. I had asked the Leader for a report on these matters to come to Council but had no response about that and therefore had no other way of bringing it to Council within the timescale that was available at the time when I had the information. This is a very serious issue and is not being reported to council and in terms of VAK, it could affect their ability to exist in the future. VAK are part of a new partnership in terms of funding. They are part of that partnership and they have signed up to it. There are key issues that area here that I have asked the Leader to address in terms of the Cabinet's action and the actions of representatives of this Council in terms of the Local Strategic Partnership. There are significant implications in becoming part of this partnership within the voluntary sector, which has funding implications for this Council, which is not being shared with this Council. It is the equivalent of matching what Lincolnshire County Council already provides. I would like this whole matter to be put to the appropriate DSP for investigation so it can be more fully explored.

### **RESPONSE: COUNCILLOR LINDA NEAL**

First of all for a matter of clarity: I did receive an email from Councillor Shorrocks; I do not believe he asked me to make a report to Council in that particular email; I did respond to him and say that I would give him reply as soon as possible. But bear in mind the length of that and the investigations I had to undertake and the work that I have been putting into this Council. Members might like to know that over four working days, I have actually put in 50 hours and I have simply not had the opportunity to put in the work, speak to the officers and find out the responses for him. I do believe that by saying he asked me to report here is misleading the Council. However, I will respond to the point that Councillor Shorrocks makes. There is very little that I actually wish to add other than to say that the Cabinet has actually done nothing other than to try to establish the true facts of the situation: that the Grantham area now finds itself in – there is no access to change of funding.

### **QUESTION 2: COUNCILLOR MISS CHANNELL**

The Leader and other Cabinet members bothered to trail all the way to Stamford in early January 2006, before the Cabinet met on 9th January, apparently to persuade Stamford Town Council to change their decision about withholding £500 from the £1.4m Gateway Project proposed by Stamford Vision.

The Cabinet decided on Monday 9th January this year that the £1.4m project could proceed without £500 from Stamford Town Council, so, why did the Cabinet bother with the internal meeting with Stamford Town Council?

### **RESPONSE TO QUESTION 2: COUNCILLOR LINDA NEAL**

Cllr Ms Channell has misunderstood the purpose of the informal meeting. It was arranged for the sole purpose of better understanding the Town Council's decision, in view of its previous support for the project. I am sure all Cabinet members will agree with me when I say it was a very useful meeting, which certainly helped with the decision that had to be made on the 9<sup>th</sup> January.

### **SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION: COUNCILLOR MISS CHANNELL**

Councillor Neal, notwithstanding that answer, would you please explain to me the legality or even the democracy illustrated by the Cabinet, bearing in mind the decision made by them that a contribution to the Stamford Gateway Project should be dependent on a contribution being sought from Stamford Town Council and then that decision being rescinded.

### **RESPONSE: COUNCILLOR LINDA NEAL**

I believe that it was perfectly legitimate for the Cabinet to ask Stamford Town Council to make a contribution. They make their choice as to whether they do or whether they don't.

### **QUESTION 3: COUNCILLOR MISS CHANNELL**

Can Councillor Bryant confirm, in respect of the Cabinet decision to spend £350,000 of Council Tax Payers money on the Gateway Project of Stamford Vision, that the majority of

people who have spoken to him about this from the Stamford Ward he represents, support the spending of their money.

**RESPONSE: COUNCILLOR TERL BRYANT**

You asked how many people have spoken to me from my Ward on the Gateway Project. It has been 2 for the project with 1 undecided and 1 against.

BUT the people I have spoken to from Stamford not necessarily from my Ward have in the main been supportive of the project but they have expressed concerns over the Vision Group and its running of the project.

If Councillor Channell had been at the Open informal meeting that she referred to in her question to the Leader, she would have seen the Town Council, when members did not have to declare an interest under the stringent code we have to comply with, and having to leave the meeting, were in a ratio of about 3-2 in favour of the project.

I was also at the meeting of the Town Council when the decision to 'not fund' was made. Interestingly only 2 people spoke against the project and 5 spoke against Vision not even mentioning the project and 4 supported the Gateway Project. So having gathered the facts myself by speaking to some Stamford people and attending 2 meetings at which the town councillors spoke I had to support what is obviously the majority view not a view skewed by what was obviously an articulate vociferous few.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION: COUNCILLOR MISS CHANNELL**

Councillor Bryant, would you please explain why an un-elected body, which incidentally includes the Editor of The Stamford Mercury (how unbiased can it be expected to be?), is allowed to spend large amounts of our money on a project which is supported by no one. And I mean that, no one I have spoken to.

**RESPONSE: COUNCILLOR TERL BRYANT**

I am sorry, I didn't really understand the question. I am sure what Councillor Channel is saying, is that Stamford Vision is not a legal entity. I actually thought that it was a Town Centre Management Partnership under the guises of this Council, which was voted on and set up by this Council. I hope that answers your question.

**QUESTION 4: COUNCILLOR STEPHEN O'HARE (put by the Chairman)**

A slide presentation to councillors estimated a net lump sum receipt, should housing transfer proceed, of £36 million.

3 months later the independent financial consultants stated in writing that the estimated usable receipt would be £27.8 million.

Both used a starting figure of £48 million.

What is her comment about the difference ('loss') of £8million in just 3 months?

**RESPONSE: COUNCILLOR MRS FRANCIS CARTWRIGHT**

Most Councillors who have attended the briefings have understood that the actual receipt received from a Stock Transfer is dependent upon the offer we made to tenants.

**QUESTION 5: COUNCILLOR STEPHEN O'HARE (put by the Chairman)**

Previously she has confirmed that she knows that the contents of Your Home your choice Issue 1 October 2005 were fair, impartial and unbiased.

Does she feel able to confirm that the contents of that issue are accurate?

**RESPONSE: COUNCILLOR MRS FRANCIS CARTWRIGHT**

The only word which I can find in that issue which you could possibly dispute is "*December*" when referring to the Council meeting. However, this was true at the time of going to print and the meeting was only delayed to give all members the maximum opportunity to research the available information before making a decision.