

MINUTES

COUNCIL

THURSDAY, 24 JANUARY 2008

2.00 PM



PRESENT

Councillor Michael Taylor Chairman

Councillor Robert Adams
Councillor Ray Auger
Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing
Councillor Pam Bosworth
Councillor Robert Broughton
Councillor Paul Carpenter
Councillor Mrs Frances Cartwright
Councillor George Chivers
Councillor Michael Cook
Councillor Nick Craft
Councillor Alan Davidson
Councillor John Dawson
Councillor Mike Exton (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Stuart Farrar
Councillor Mrs Joyce Gaffigan
Councillor John Harvey
Councillor Robert Hearmon
Councillor Bryan Helyar
Councillor David Higgs
Councillor Trevor Holmes
Councillor Reg Howard
Councillor Mrs Maureen Jalili
Councillor Sam Jalili
Councillor Kenneth Joynson

Councillor Mrs Rosemary Kaberry-Brown

Councillor Vic Kerr
Councillor Jock Kerr
Councillor Peter Martin-Mayhew
Councillor Andrew Moore
Councillor Mrs. Linda Neal
Councillor John Nicholson
Councillor Alan Parkin
Councillor Mrs Margery Radley
Councillor Bob Russell
Councillor Bob Sandall
Councillor Susan Sandall
Councillor Trevor Scott
Councillor Mrs Judy Smith
Councillor John Smith
Councillor Mrs Maureen Spencer-Gregson O.B.E.
Councillor Jeffrey Thompson
Councillor Frank Turner
Councillor Tom Webster
Councillor Andrea Webster
Councillor Graham Wheat
Councillor Mike Williams
Councillor Avril Williams
Councillor Paul Wood
Councillor Ray Wootten

OFFICERS

Chief Executive
Strategic Director (BA)
Corporate Head, Finance & Resources

OFFICERS

Corporate Head, Healthy Environment
Monitoring Officer
Democracy Services Manager

"Listening Learning Delivering"

69. PUBLIC OPEN FORUM

[2.00pm to 2.07pm]

Two questions were received from Mrs Mary Patrick of Stamford:

Question 1:

Does South Kesteven District Council sell or give confidential information to third parties?

Answer – Councillor Mrs Linda Neal, Leader

The council as a whole would, so far as it is able, respect any confidence so far as it is permitted by law. For example, the council may be required to reveal information by virtue of the Freedom of Information Act.

Supplementary question:

Mrs Neal, the reason I ask this question is: do you give or sell information by the edited version of the electoral roll because it has been on the television that councils do.

Answer – Councillor Mrs Linda Neal

Yes, Mrs Patrick I can confirm this council does sell the edited version of the electoral register as permitted by the Representation of the People Act to certain recognised bodies.

Question 2:

Why have you cut the disabled adaptations from £200,000 down to £85,000 for year 2007/2008?

Answer – Councillor Mrs Maureen Spencer-Gregson (Resources and Assets Portfolio Holder)

Mrs Patrick, we have not cut the disabled adaptations budget. We have actually revised our estimate to £85,000 as a result of actual demand for this service. If there isn't a need then we can't spend the money. I think Mrs Patrick is referring to appendix A in the paper at item ten which refers to the £85,000 there. The £32,000 slippage will still be required in next year and that will be added to the £200,000 in the estimate for next year, so we have not cut any services.

70. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brough, Miss Channell, McBride, Newcombe-Jones, Lovelock, Selby, and Stokes.

71. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Wootten declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the item relating to the Lincolnshire Police Authority – Financial Circumstances. His interest arose by virtue of his membership of the National Association of Retired Police Officers and the Grantham East Police Panel. He left the meeting during consideration and voting on this item.

72. MINUTES

The minutes of the ordinary meeting held on 25th October 2007 were approved as a correct record.

73. COMMUNICATIONS (INCLUDING CHAIRMAN'S ENGAGEMENTS)

The list of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman's engagements since the last meeting of the Council was attached. The Chairman made the following announcements:

- (1) Recognition of volunteers: At the annual meeting of the Council in April, he intended to publicly thank all the people who voluntarily give of their time to help support the work of the Council. He invited members and staff to put forward details of anyone who provided volunteer work for the Council so that they may receive a certificate of recognition. Details should be given to Robert Moreland, Corporate Head, Partnerships and Organisational Development.
- (2) The Chairman advised members that following the success of a Councillors' "speed dating" event held last June that provided an opportunity for members to meet with staff from different sections, a similar event was planned for Monday 3rd March at 12 noon before the Council budget meeting in the afternoon. Members were asked to complete the pro forma on their desks to indicate their attendance. A member pointed out that there was a Cabinet meeting that morning and members would also be attending group meetings before council. The Chief Executive explained that the event was primarily for non executive members but would ensure that lunch was provided for members' convenience.
- (3) The Chairman referred to correspondence recently circulated

to all members from Mr E. Gilman of Stamford. He stressed that the contents of this letter was subject to legal proceedings which Mr. Gilman had himself instigated. He warned members that it would be inappropriate to discuss this matter. If any member had any questions they should speak to the Chief Executive in private.

74. LINCOLNSHIRE POLICE AUTHORITY - FINANCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

DECISION: The council would like to thank Lincolnshire Police for providing such a clear and concise explanation of their financial situation. It is evident that in spite of its promise to invest in policing, the government has completely failed to provide Lincolnshire with the resources needed to run an effective service. We would urge all residents of the district to support their local police force in seeking to get a fair government settlement for the county.

The Council welcomed Deborah McGovern (Chief Executive), Julie Flint (Treasurer), and Barry Young (Vice-Chairman) of the Lincolnshire Police Authority, together with Peter Davies, Assistant Chief Constable of Lincolnshire Police.

Mr Young introduced a short DVD presentation which explained the serious situation the Lincolnshire Police Authority (LPA) faced with regard to its funding requirements. The police force was now the lowest funded force in the country despite the fact that crime had reduced in the county for the fourth successive year. It appeared that the force had become victims of its success and was being punished for its consistent good performance. Without sufficient funding to meet the budget deficit estimated by 2010/11 to be £14m, the force would fail in its statutory duties. A financial recovery plan had been submitted to the government in June 2007. As 85% of the budget goes towards staffing costs, there was the option to not replace the retiring officers of which there were approximately forty a year, but this would still not achieve the savings required over the necessary timescale. Support staff could be made redundant but they would have to be replaced with serving officers which would be counterproductive as it would reduce the strength of officers on the street by 30% and this in turn would have a knock on effect on performance. Even neighbourhood policing was coming under threat as government funding runs out in 2008/09 thus leaving a poor level of service at a high unit cost. If the numbers of officers were cut, Lincolnshire Police would become the worst performing force in the country. Two solutions were in the hands of the government: one was to change the funding formula to provide the resources for the areas being lobbied for; and secondly to give further special grants as it had done this year. The third option would be to significantly increase the council tax precept without the threat of capping.

Even if current funding was sustained, performance would not improve beyond "fair". A rise of £2 per week on a Band D property was required in order to achieve a "good" performance. This would allow the force to boost the resilience in neighbourhood policing, increase the number of officers and PCSO's, as well as tackle major crime. The presentational DVD concluded with a call to all sectors of the community to support the LPA case.

Mr Young advised the council that this DVD had been made before the government grant had been announced and the LPA had received about £200,000 more than anticipated. However, they were continuing dialogue and lobbying the government and MP's to maintain pressure for sufficient funding.

The Leader of the Council stated it was appropriate for the council to pass a motion and so moved that the Lincolnshire Police Authority be thanked for its clear and concise explanation of its financial situation and that all residents be urged to support the force in getting a fair settlement. The motion was seconded.

Questions were then put to the guest representatives from members on the following issues and responses [*in italics*] were given:

- For 2006/07, why has there been an increase in the number of PCSO's set against serving officers and how many Chief Inspector and Superintendent posts have been civilianised? *Lincolnshire Police has invested significantly in the number of police staff (as opposed to sworn police officers) because there are obvious economic advantages due to the number of roles previously carried out by police officers which can be done more effectively by police staff. Last year 50 posts were civilianised; only one role occupied by a superintendent had been replaced by a civilian. Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary had shown Lincolnshire Police had a very slender management structure any further efficiency savings in that area would be extremely difficult.*
- What percentage of the policing budget is going towards PCSOs? PCSOs have limited powers – would it not be better to replace them with a smaller number of regular police officers? *There are two sources of funding for PCSOs: from central government and from county and local district councils. The government has confirmed its funding will continue but the money from local authorities is subject to a service level agreement and this was currently the subject to discussion. PCSO's were not seen as a duplication of effort as the question implies; they act as the eyes and ears of the police force and they do not work in isolation to the regular officers but fulfil a vital role in terms of visibility and intelligence gathering.*
- Is there a political motive for the disparity of funding? *The LPA had been very careful to leave politics out of its case which had solely relied on the evidence presented. The government had not been playing*

politics to get at rural areas in the way implied, but there was more political pressure from the city areas. Following experience around the country, the government had now moved away from giving PCSOs more powers. Local councils were encouraged to adopt the decriminalisation of on street parking as it was not part of a PCSO's role to become traffic wardens.

- *Areas to the south west of this county had seen large numbers of immigrants being arrested for criminal activities with resultant increased costs for the forces concerned. Was this an issue for Lincolnshire? The number of Eastern European immigrants and immigrants from other nationalities that are arrested in the county are arguably disproportionately large compared to their numbers within the overall population. However, crime has reduced despite large scale immigration in some areas. Overall the cost of interpreters is between £300,000 and £400,000 which is double the figure spent three years ago. However, a standing contract for this service was now in place rather than using interpreters on an individual basis.*
- *Grantham has recently seen the opening of a £9m new police station yet emergency calls to the police go through to a call handling centre in Lincoln. It was suggested that if the LPA was going to successfully convince the public of its case, then it needed to demonstrate a response at local level? A single call handling control centre was established some years ago; the criticisms were acknowledged but the force could not afford other more locally based arrangements. An open invitation was given to any member who wished to come and visit the Nettleham control room to see it in operation. The new police station in Grantham was a one off capital investment; it was important to have a good quality building in Grantham and this has now doubled the cell capacity. The detection rate had increased since the new facility opened.*
- *Noting that other rural forces don't appear to have been as hard hit as Lincolnshire, is the government wanting to see rural forces amalgamate? The government had given assurances that the matter of amalgamation was a "dead duck". The LPA had gone out of its way to collaborate with other forces to prove that it was not necessary to amalgamate in order to work together. The LPA had not looked into the funding aspects of other rural forces but had undertaken extensive analysis of the rural element of the funding formula as it applied to Lincolnshire. This work ran into some thirty pages.*
- *What proportion of the budget goes towards fulfilling central government targets and what feedback has been received to the financial recovery plan? On the issue of targets, the Chief Inspector of Constabularies has produced a list of efficiencies and one of these is to cut bureaucracy. The LPA had requested a meeting with ministers in November 2007. A meeting was to take place with the policing minister, Tony McNulty in February but a formal response to the financial recovery plan had not yet been received. The LPA was to meet on 27 February in order*

to determine the level of precept required to balance the budget.

- Was Stamford police station under threat of closure, and if so, how could Stamford ward members encourage residents to support the police? *Stamford police station is not under immediate threat of closure although its custody suite would cease to be used as it no longer complied with modern standards.*

After the question session, the Leader stated she wished to respond to the point made about the decriminalisation of on street parking. It was fair to say that South Kesteven had been at the forefront in asking the County Council to agree and move forward on the transfer of enforcement to local councils but the County's position is that it would not consider this until all districts were agreed to take this function on. All the districts were prepared to do so apart from Lincoln City Council.

The Chairman thanked the LPA representatives and the Assistant Chief Constable for their attendance. Mr Young responded by thanking the Council for inviting them and its overwhelming level of support towards their case. He said that if they received the same level of support throughout the county, then this would bode well for the campaign.

75. RECYCLING

The Healthy Environment Portfolio Holder introduced the presentation on this priority A topic by suggesting the story of recycling at this council had been like a fairy tale in that what had once not been seen as particularly important, was now – following a period of enormous change – a high profile service and a great success. The protection of the environment and climate change was now high on the agenda and he encouraged other members of the Lincolnshire waste partnership to embrace this change and preserve our environment.

The Corporate Head, Healthy Environment took Councillors through a presentation which started with the bringing back in house of the waste collection service in 2003. Recycling levels were then only at 7%, rising to 15% with a kerbside collection scheme than was not uniform throughout the district. National targets for recycling meant that much more need to be done and in 2005 twin bins and a fortnightly collection were introduced. Now 98% of homes had a full recycling scheme and the council's performance on the amount of waste recycled had rocketed to almost 50%, and when combined with composted waste, it had actually exceeded this level during some months.

Looking ahead, members were advised that the recycling target to include composted waste had been set at 55% for 2008/09 and 60% by 2010/11.

The priority action plan provided for the extension of the green waste service, emphasis on an educational campaign, and more challengingly, to support the development of a zero waste community. Further planned local developments included the letting of a new dry recyclable contract to receive and process dry waste by early summer, a feasibility study for trade waste recycling, a recycling scheme for household and car batteries, a school waste scheme, and the extension of the recent recycling of waste at the council offices to include the leisure centres.

The Corporate Head then outlined what was happening on the national scene. The national waste strategy showed that South Kesteven was exceeding national targets but further challenges lay ahead to achieve some value derived from the recovered material. The Lincolnshire waste management partnership was developing a joint municipal waste strategy that was currently out for consultation. Part of this strategy was to progressively divert biodegradable waste from landfill. In the future, the council would be fined for each tonne it took to landfill that was in excess of the limits; by 2020 this would be £150 per tonne equating to £65 per household in Lincolnshire. Landfill was increasing becoming less of an option to dispose of our waste and consideration would have to be given to solutions that minimised the impact of landfill fines such as means to turn waste into energy. Other challenges also lay ahead; news coverage was frequently given to pilot schemes in other parts of the country involving variable charging based on amounts of household waste.

The Corporate Head concluded by stating that the council was now delivering a brilliant service; resident participation reflected ease of use and this was borne out by the results of the resident satisfaction survey which showed a satisfaction rating of 91%. The portfolio holder thanked the Corporate Head, the staff and all the waste operatives who had worked so hard towards this success.

Questions and comments were then invited from the floor, to which the Corporate Head responded. These covered the sale of compost back to residents, the timescale for the introduction of battery recycling and trade waste recycling, how low energy light bulbs could be recycled given their mercury content, the cost to the environment through incinerating waste, whether data could be obtained to show the recycling rates of different parts of the district, and the need to put continuing pressure on the government to get manufacturers to reduce packaging.

A question was asked on the validity of the sample size for the residents' survey. The Chief Executive explained that the survey size had been between 3,000 and 4,000 randomly selected throughout the district and appropriately weighted. This had produced a robust and reliable data set. A suggestion was made that as there was still some confusion over whether certain items could be recycled or not, the Council should review and if necessary re-issue information given to residents.

[The meeting adjourned for tea break between 3.55pm and 4.14pm]

76. LEADER'S REPORT ON URGENT NON KEY DECISIONS

The Leader submitted her report number CAB006 which gave details of three urgent non key decisions made under access to information procedure rule 23.4 that had been taken since her last report to Council in September 2007. Reasons for the urgency provisions were given in the report. Several members indicated they wished to raise issues concerning the subjects of the non key decisions but were advised by the Chairman that the Constitution provided that this report was for noting only and not for debate.

During consideration of the above item, a member raised a challenge as to what constitutional provision permitted the Leader to propose a notice of motion in relation to the Lincolnshire Police Authority issue when nine clear days notice had not been given. The Chief Executive replied that since his appointment, it had been his experience that it was custom and practice in terms of the Council's operation for a member to be able to move a motion on any agenda item. He acknowledged the challenge that had been raised and stated that he would further examine the wording of the Constitution and, if necessary, refer the matter to the Constitution committee.

77. CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE

DECISION:

- (1) That Part 3 of the Constitution be amended to delegate to corporate heads the authority to accept tenders, place contracts and procure other resources and services subject to compliance with financial regulations and contract procedure rules where the contract is to be awarded on the basis of lowest possible price;**
- (2) That contract procedure rules be amended at clause 3.11 to permit the officer delegation proposed at (1) above.**

The Chairman of the Constitution Committee presented the minutes from the meeting held on 15th January 2008 copies of which had previously been circulated to members. He briefly referred to the discussion that had taken place and that the committee had been satisfied that the necessary checks and balances were already in place to ensure openness and transparency in the proposed extension of delegated authority for the award of contracts in these circumstances. He moved the recommendations as presented and received a seconder.

A member asked who decided whether a contract should be accepted based

on lowest price as opposed to best value. The Chief Executive explained that the contract specification stipulated how the tender would be assessed. It was impractical to ask for prices and then decide how the quality would be assessed. Another member expressed his concern over the proposed delegation, suggesting that he would prefer that the final check lay with the portfolio holder as it did at present.

Reference was made to wording in the minutes which indicated a question had been asked at the meeting on notices of motion to which an officer had given a response. However, the minutes did not give any details of the question, and the member asked that future minutes provide more detail when questions were raised. The Chief Executive noted this request.

78. REVIEW OF THE CAPITAL PROGRAMME

DECISION:

- (1) to approve the revised housing capital programme as appended to report number CHFR89;**
- (2) to approve the additional £52,000 project for the replacement of a refuse vehicle within the general fund capital programme.**

The Portfolio Holder for Assets & Resources presented report number CHFR89 which summarised the outcome of a partial review of the capital programme for 2007/08. The report explained that the housing capital programme for 2007/08 had been reviewed in the light of current and up coming contractual commitments for completing works on the council's housing stock in the remaining part of 2007/08 and any work now planned to be completed in 2008/09. The general fund had been reviewed to include an additional project which related to the replacement of a refuse vehicle written off during the financial year. A second hand vehicle would be purchased costing £52,000. The Portfolio Holder moved the recommendations as contained in the report and the motion was seconded.

Before a vote on the motion took place, clarification was sought on the apparent reduction in the budget for upgrading sheltered housing and disabled adaptations. The Corporate Head, Finance & Resources explained that this budget related to disabled adaptations on council owned properties the revised figures reflected actual demand for the work and therefore was not a reduction in service. Similarly there had been no further requests for capital schemes and it was therefore part of the housekeeping process to ensure that the capital programme reflected what the Council was actually going to spend. There was a separate fund within the Housing Revenue Account for minor disabled adaptations. There was £500,000 within the capital programme for disabled adaptations for residents in the private sector.

A member expressed concern that many requests for adaptations were driven through the County Council's occupational therapist service and as there was a shortage of these therapists, demand for necessary adaptations could be held up. The Corporate Head stated that during the budget preparation stage, the relevant service manager would have taken demand into account. However, she acknowledged the issue raised and confirmed she would pass this on to the service manager for investigation. Concern was also raised at the amount of slippage in the programme and the question asked as to what steps were being taken to redress this. The Chief Executive acknowledged that more accuracy was required in the projection of the capital programme but it was difficult to be completely scientific in the process due to unforeseen circumstances. He assured members that the projected figures would improve as the Council moved forward with the capital programme. The Corporate Head explained the capital programme was largely funded from use of reserves and outlined the impact that slippage had on the generation of receipts and cash flow. Following a vote, the motion was carried.

79. JOINT LINCOLNSHIRE PROCUREMENT SHARED SERVICE

DECISION:

- (1) To delegate authority to the Chief Executive in consultation and agreement with the Resources & Assets portfolio holder, to enter into a collaboration agreement with all other Lincolnshire authorities to provide shared services, in accordance with an agreed programme subject to the approval of the terms by participating authorities;**
- (2) To delegate to the Chief Executive in consultation and agreement with the Resources & Assets portfolio holder the authority to negotiate and enter into the agreement relating to shared procurement service (known as Section 101/19 agreement, included in draft format as appended to report SD15);**
- (3) To agree to delegate to Lincolnshire County Council the procurement function elements contained within the 101/19 agreement, subject to its approval by participating authorities.**

Members had before them report number SD15 prepared by the Strategic Director (Beverly Agass) which set out the background to the formation by the eight local authorities in Lincolnshire of a shared services partnership, the purpose of which was to improve service delivery to customers and achieve efficiency savings. A programme of work had been prepared and the partnership would be exploring opportunities for greater collaboration around ten services as part of phase one of the programme. The first of the ten work streams to reach a conclusion is procurement and, following the preparation of a detailed business case (a summary of which was

appended to the report), all eight authorities had agreed to support the establishment of a Lincolnshire joint procurement unit to be hosted by the County Council.

The Strategic Director's report went on to advise members of the financial implications one of which would be the estimated yearly cost to this council of £31,700 for joining the procurement unit. There would also be an initial one off set cost of £14,750. The projected potential savings of approximately £30,000 per year relate purely to those savings generated from procuring goods and services. These would be supplemented by reducing the reliance the council has on consultants for procurement exercises and reducing the number of transactions the Council undertakes i.e. using electronic delivery channels and by reducing the number of invoices it pays.

Details of the legal and governance issues were outlined, along with the comments of this council's monitoring officer on the legal and financial commitments upon this council which would arise as a result of granting the delegated authority requested in the report.

The Resources and Assets portfolio holder commended the report to members and moved the recommendations contained therein subject to an amendment to include the words "and agreement" after "to delegate to the Chief Executive in consultation" in both the first and second parts of the recommendation. The motion was seconded.

Clarification was sought and given by the Strategic Director on a number of issues concerning the variable fee and levels of savings quoted in the report. Whilst expressing some concern at the ever increasing delegation to officers, a member acknowledged that for procurement, it had to be dealt with in this way given the number of authorities involved.

80. SAFEGUARDING POLICY FOR LOCAL HOUSING ALLOWANCES

DECISION:

- (1) To approve the adoption of the Safeguard Policy for local housing allowances with effect from 7th April 2008;**
- (2) That in so doing, the Council deplores the change in policy and writes to the Minister to express its strong concern.**

Members of the Council had previously been circulated with report number RB001 (previously considered by Cabinet on 7th January 2008) which referred to a new scheme of housing benefit introduced by the government for those living in private rented accommodation. This local housing allowance is paid direct to the tenant. However, recognising that some tenants may not be able to cope with the responsibility of paying their own rent, the authority has discretion to make payments direct to the landlord.

This policy will act as a safeguard for these tenants and provide reassurance to landlords. It will also assist officers in the administration of the system.

On behalf of the Cabinet, the Assets and Resources Portfolio Holder recommended that this policy be adopted for the reasons given in the report. The motion was seconded by the Leader.

A member then stated he wished to add to the motion; he proposed that the Council write to the government to urge them not to change the policy of paying housing benefit to the landlord. He expressed concern that some tenants would be tempted to spend the money on other things and then the council would be faced with more homelessness cases. The Chief Executive advised that the legislation to introduce the payment of local housing allowances had already been approved by Parliament. He suggested the member might wish to consider altering his amendment for the Council to condemn the legislation rather than seek a change in the policy. The member accepted the advice given and changed his amendment accordingly which the Portfolio Holder and her seconder agreed to incorporate as part of the original motion.

Several other members also voiced similar concerns at the implications for those private tenants who would not use the money for the purposes it was meant. A counter view was expressed that the new legislation would help to clarify present anomalies in the system. The Corporate Head, Finance and Resources explained the reasoning behind why the new housing allowance would be paid direct to the tenant. It completely changed the way the Council calculated and paid housing benefit. The safeguard policy was for exceptional circumstances and it provided for a schedule of acceptable evidence that would need to be produced in order for the housing allowance to be paid to the landlord. A member put forward a scenario in which a person became homeless by not using benefit payment for her rent and asked if this affected the definition of intentional homelessness. The Chief Executive replied that there had been no change to the legislation regarding intentional homelessness that was relevant to this new policy. A member requested that the Council vote on the original motion and the amendment separately. The mover of the motion confirmed she accepted the amendment as part of one motion and the vote was subsequently taken resulting in the motion being carried.

[At 5.19pm the Chairman indicated that the meeting had now been in progress for three hours. In accordance with council procedure rule 9, a motion was now required to continue the meeting. A motion to continue the meeting was so moved and seconded, and upon being put to the vote, carried.]

81. REPRESENTATION ON OUTSIDE BODIES

DECISION:

- (1) That the Council agree to appointing a replacement representative on the South Lincolnshire Blind Society;**
- (2) That Councillor Ray Wootten be appointed to serve as this Council's representative on the South Lincolnshire Blind Society;**
- (3) That Councillor Higgs be appointed to serve as this Council's representative on Disability Lincs;**
- (4) That Councillors Mrs Frances Cartwright (Economic Development portfolio holder) and Councillor Craft be the nominated representatives to sit on the Grantham Growth Point Strategic Board and that Councillor Mrs Maureen Spencer-Gregson as Assets & Resources portfolio holder and Councillor Mike Taylor be their respective named substitutes.**

Before debate began on this item, the Chairman announced his resignation as one of the Council's representatives on Grantham Future.

Members had before them report number DEM007 prepared by the Democracy Service Manager in which the Council was asked to consider nominations to fill two vacancies which had arisen on outside bodies, together with new appointments to the Grantham Growth Point Strategic Board. The Chairman indicated that each appointment would be taken in turn and called for nominations to the South Lincolnshire Blind Society.

Councillor Wootten was so nominated and seconded. A member raised an issue over the wording of the recommendation in the report and stated that it instructed that the Council "considers nominating a replacement representative" first. He therefore asserted that the Council must first decide the issue of whether to appoint or not. The Chief Executive advised that it had always been practice to deal with nominations; if none were forthcoming then the Council would not appoint to an outside body. After further debate, the Chairman ruled that he would take a vote on the issue of whether or not an appointment should be made. It was so moved and seconded that an appointment be made to the South Lincolnshire Blind Society and this was carried following a vote.

Before a vote was taken on Councillor Wootten's nomination, the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee who had considered this particular matter, advised the Council that during discussion, his committee had looked at the issue of appointments to outside bodies in general and, following some concerns it had over the process, asked that this be placed as an item at a future council meeting.

The former representative on this body indicated he wished to speak on the matter. The Chairman ruled that the matter before the Council was the

nomination of Councillor Wootten and he was not prepared to accept any further debate. The member concerned expressed his disagreement with the Chairman's ruling and immediately left the meeting. A vote was taken on Councillor Wootten's nomination and carried.

The Chairman then called for nominations for Disability Lincs. Councillor Higgs was proposed and seconded. There being no further nominations, a vote was taken on Councillor Higgs' candidature and carried.

The following nominations were put forward for the Grantham Growth Point Strategic Board: Councillor Mrs Frances Cartwright, to be substituted by Councillor Mrs Maureen Spencer-Gregson; and Councillor Craft, to be substituted by Councillor Taylor. There being no other nominations, a vote was taken on these proposals and carried.

Immediately upon his appointment, Councillor Craft announced his resignation as a representative on Grantham Future.

82. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

There were no questions on notice submitted for this meeting.

83. NOTICES OF MOTION GIVEN UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 12:

(1) DECISION:

The Minister for Housing has been attributed with saying "The Government is considering a policy whereby couples over the age of forty, living in Council accommodation in our towns and cities, whose children have left home, should leave their homes and be moved to rural areas, to make way for younger couples."

This Council views with grave concern such statements and resolves to oppose such a policy and assures our tenants that they will not be forced out of their home.

In presenting his motion, Councillor Adams stated that it had been prompted by articles in the press in December 2007. He said it gave him no pleasure in putting forward this motion and he would gain no satisfaction if it were passed by the Council. He was appalled that a Minister of the government would deem it appropriate to say someone had to leave their home on the basis of age or change of circumstances. The motion was seconded.

A member said he supported the principle behind the motion but queried the source of the quote. Councillor Adams said that the source had been

given to him by the Ministry of Housing on 12 December 2007 and the Department for Community Affairs had subsequently confirmed that the Minister had made these comments and intended to pass legislation on this basis in order to release what she considered to be in the region of hundreds of thousands of properties.

(2) DECISION: That this Council

- (a) is concerned about the costs that are being loaded directly onto our council tax payers by stealth and the abrogation of responsibility and accountability by the current labour government to fulfil their national objectives. We are further concerned that these underfunded additional financial and administrative responsibilities are going to impact severely onto the excellent services we have consistently tried to deliver. I move that the council write to the relevant ministers and inform our council taxpayers of the situation expressing our extreme concern at the potential damage and limitation to our community's services; and**
- (b) consults with its partners in the Local Government Association to explore ways in which national objectives delivered by local authorities can be adequately funded by central government.**

The Leader submitted her motion (as set out in part (a) above) explaining that it followed a stance she taken at a recent Cabinet meeting over the government grant settlement and specific grants the Council was to receive to assist it in fulfilling its duties in the coming financial year. She said she felt very strongly that council tax payers had a right to know what their money was being spent on. She suggested that most people in the street knew their money went towards the refuse collection service but if asked, would South Kesteven council tax payers expect this Council to deal with homelessness and homelessness application, to contribute to the administration of benefit payments, and to contribute to the new concessionary travel scheme which comes into operation on 1 April this year. The grant settlement received from the government in no way covered the cost of delivering these services on behalf of the government. She considered it was worth bringing this to the attention of the council tax payer so that they could be more informed about what central government expects South Kesteven district council to spend its money on.

With regard to her reference to the abrogation of responsibility, the Leader gave an example that this Council had to pay a levy of about £500,000 to the internal drainage boards whose areas fell within South Kesteven district. Up until about three years ago, this payment was refunded in full by the government, but this reimbursement has been gradually withdrawn so that now this Council had to find all this money from its own resources. This is what she felt was the government's abrogation of responsibility.

The motion was seconded by the Economic Development Portfolio Holder who gave further examples of increased costs incurred by central government policy and associated guidance such as the new Local Development Framework and all the consultation procedures that had to be followed.

In opening the debate, a member stated that he did not feel the motion went far enough and proposed an amendment that the Council consults with its partners in the Local Government Association to explore ways in which national objectives delivered by local authorities can be adequately funded by central government.

With the consent of her seconder, the Leader indicated she was prepared to accept the amendment and incorporate it as part of her motion.

Several members expressed strong support for the motion, as now amended, referring to the particular difficulties faced by rural communities that were exacerbated by such government driven policies such as increasing fuel prices. The Chairman of the Development Control Committee informed members that it was proposed that local planning authorities would have to take over the running of local planning inquiries to deal with appeals against refusal of planning permission by other authorities.

In her right of reply, the Leader made reference to the government's targets for local councils to make 3% efficiency savings over three years. She stated that the government had indicated that the £212m it had allocated for the new national concessionary travel scheme would meet the costs. This Council had set aside £450,000 in the budget for the new national scheme but she considered that the government's confidence was misplaced and therefore South Kesteven District Council needed to ensure it was adequately prepared to administer the government's scheme. Time would tell if the government's projections were correct.

84. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 5.52pm