

# MEETING OF THE ENGAGEMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

THURSDAY, 9 JULY 2009 2.00 PM



---

## PANEL MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Michael Cook  
Councillor Mike Exton (Chairman)

Councillor Reginald Howard  
Councillor Ian Selby

## OFFICERS

Corporate Head Finance and Customer Services (Richard Wyles)  
Corporate Head Partnerships and Improvements (Robert Moreland)  
Democratic Officer (Lucy Bonshor)

---

### 9. MEMBERSHIP

The Group were notified that Councillor Howard was substituting for Councillor McBride for this meeting only.

### 10. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jock Kerr, Councillor Bob Russell and Councillor Tom Webster.

### 11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

### 12. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 7TH MAY 2009

The notes from the meeting held on 7th May were agreed as a correct record of the meeting subject to "there" last sentence page 4 being changed to their.

### 13. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

The Corporate Head Partnerships and Improvements referred to the A5 telephone directory and indicated that a copy had been e-mailed to Members and a hard copy would be available soon.

### 14. CONCESSIONARY TRAVEL - CONSULTATION PROPOSALS

The Corporate Head of Finance and Customer Services told the group of the new challenges a head that had significant implications for the future of the



*"Listening Learning Delivering"*

**South Kesteven District Council**

STAMFORD • GRANTHAM • BOURNE • THE DEEPINGS

travel concessionary scheme. He gave a brief background to the changes that had taken place to the scheme since 2001 to the present. The District Council was a nominated Travel Concessionary Authority (TCA) and although a rise in funding of the scheme had been made over this period the administration of the scheme had remained the same. The Department for Transport (DfT) was looking to review the current arrangements and were currently consulting solely on the future administration arrangements for the travel concessionary scheme. The new national scheme had now been in place for 14 months and the DfT wanted to know how the scheme was working. The Corporate Head of Finance and Customer Services (CHFCS) said that there were local concerns with the scheme, it was not ideal and there was a complicated national picture with different authorities offering different discretions and there was no consistency across the country. There was a lot of disquiet amongst authorities on how the scheme operated given the different variables in place. The CHFCS indicated that the DfT's preference would be to move the administration to County with satellite offices situated within the county which in principal seemed a good idea, however, the CHFCS strongly felt that the administration and finance should be looked at together as a single issue not separately.

He then spoke about SKDC's financial position with regard to the travel concessionary scheme compared with other local authorities in Lincolnshire. SKDC was in a better financial position as they had only agreed to implement the statutory scheme, unlike other authorities in Lincolnshire who were now paying the price. He referred to the figures shown in the table on page 5 of the report and appendix A to report CHFCS52 which showed information provided by the CLG on the 4 options for calculating the redistribution of Revenue Support Grant (RSG) to take account of previous concessionary travel funding. This information was something that authorities had been asking the government about for numerous years and had previously been told that the formulae was too complicated to be able to calculate the specific grant for each authority, however it seems that they can now do that. The speculative options put forward would mean that in a worse case scenario SKDC's grant settlement for 2011/12 would be £1.2m less. He felt that it was very dangerous to look at the administration of the scheme in isolation from the financial side as this could impact strongly on the Council's future finances. In theory having a consistent scheme across the county was a good idea, but looking at the administration of the scheme separately from the financial side was in his view very wrong.

A long discussion between Members and the CHFCS followed about what the financial implications to the scheme could mean to the District Council, if the administration of travel concessions went to County and what this would mean to the RSG settlement that the District Council received in the future. Members were very concerned with the possibility that front line services would have to be cut to pay for the short fall in RSG. Although they agreed that a consistent service across the County was not a bad idea, the concern over how the financial aspect would impact the Council was of greater concern. The CHFCS said that the County would only take on the responsibility of the

administration of travel concession if it was cost neutral to them. Comments were then made about possible changes to the service once County were in charge of the administration to which the CHFCS replied that they could change the discretions in place to make it just the statutory service across the county or 24/7 travel it would be at their discretion and they had not declared a view one way or another. Most Members felt that it was very wrong and dangerous to look at the issue of administration and funding separately and agreed that this should be conveyed back in the consultation to the DfT. Members agreed to stay with the scheme that they currently had as they felt that there were too many unknowns with a change of scheme to the County also that on the response to the DfT reference should be made about Member's concern that the administration and funding were being looked at separately instead of together.

***Recommendation:***

***That the administration of concessionary travel remains with the District Councils as it is at present and that the issue of funding of the scheme should be looked at with the administration of the scheme.***

Once a response to the consultation was available a further report to be submitted to the Engagement PDG.

**15. WEBSITE REVIEW PROGRESS UPDATE**

The Corporate Head Partnerships and Improvements (CHPI) updated Members on the review of the Council's website. The current website was not user friendly, did not score highly on the rating system and was past it's sell by date. Currently any updates to the system had to be carried out by a skilled person in IT which caused delays and frustration within services. The new software that had been purchased enabled each section to update their own pages and released the IT person to pursue other issues and freed up jams within the system. The front page would be looked after and kept updated by the Communications Team, the idea of the new website that less is more with far less text and more pictures and graphics. He then showed Members mock up pages of what the new website would look like from the home page to landing pages for each area and highlighted additions to the system such as tag clouds and mapping software. Colours for each area would follow through the screens for that section. New software had also been found to offer accurate translations of the top 10 languages used in the area. It was hoped that the new website would be launched towards the end of September beginning of October. Members were happy with the new look of the website with one Member commenting that the contact details should be easily seen on the home page as per the mock up version and they all looked forward to its launch. It was suggested that once the new website was up and running that a report be submitted to the PDG on the number of hits, where people logged on from responses to e-mail etc. The CHPI said that in the IT section there was already software that currently carried out some of these functions and he invited any Member who was interested to view the programme in the IT

section but would bring a paper back to the Group in the autumn.

Members noted the presentation and the Chairman thanked those officers who had been involved in the work carried out to date on the website.

**16. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 3.17pm.

A short discussion followed on possible issues to be discussed at the next meeting and the CHPI circulated members with a list of issues which came under the remit of the Group.