

MEETING OF THE COMMUNITIES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

THURSDAY, 17 MAY 2012 2.30 PM



GROUP MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Phil Dilks
Councillor Breda Griffin
Councillor John Nicholson (Chairman)

Councillor Mrs Jean Taylor
Councillor Jeff Thompson (Vice-
Chairman)
Councillor Raymond Wooten

PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Councillor Teri Bryant (Good Housing Portfolio Holder)

OFFICERS

Strategic Directors (Ian Yates, Tracey Blackwell)
Head of Finance (Richard Wyles)
Housing Solutions Service Manager (Kevin Martin)
Senior Housing Options Advisor (May Read)
Planning Policy and Partnerships Service Manager (Karen Sinclair)
Principal Democracy Officer (Jo Toomey)
Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer (Carol Drury)

1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Cooke.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

3. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 8 MARCH 2012

The action notes from the meeting held on 8 March 2012 were agreed as a correct record subject to the deletion of the words "*stopping benefits when the grant was spent*" (minute number 49, paragraph 4).

4. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

An update was given on rural broadband:

- Communities in Lincolnshire were asked to register their support for proposals on rural broadband improvements.
- Two communities in the county achieved over 100 registrations; both were in South Kesteven - Tallington (106) and Foston (126).
- District councils were being asked to sign a memorandum of understanding, which formalised partners' commitment.
- Lincolnshire County Council hoped to begin procurement in June/July 2012, award the contract in late autumn and launch early in 2013.
- There was a small amount of funding available for pilot projects in villages. Lincolnshire County Council would release further information shortly.
- A recent project in Lancashire had seen village residents in Forest of Bowland running their own broadband project.

Action Point

Research the broadband project in Lancashire and report back to the PDG.

5. LINCOLNSHIRE COUNTY HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

The Housing Solutions Service Manager and Senior Housing Options Advisor gave a presentation on the Lincolnshire County Homelessness Strategy. This was a requirement of the Homelessness Act 2002. A countywide approach looked to ensure an equitable service across the county. Consultation had been undertaken with a range of stakeholders. The strategy took account of local, regional and national influences. The key themes were partnership, prevention, young people, rough sleepers and welfare reform.

The Council had a statutory duty to provide a free housing advice and homelessness service for all. It was also required to undertake prevention work. Since the last strategy was introduced, a number of outcomes had been achieved:

- 6-bed homeless hostel in Grantham
- Support service for 130 households on an on-going basis across the district
- Foyer status for a young persons project in Grantham, which incorporated accommodation, teaching life skills, educational attainment and return to work
- Countywide rough sleeper service
- Reduced number of households in emergency accommodation across Lincolnshire

Compared to other districts in Lincolnshire SKDC received the highest number

of homelessness applications and acceptances. Affordability was highlighted as a key issue affecting the acceptance rate of homelessness applications, particularly regarding properties in the south of the district and properties for smaller households.

A successful homeless application could see people housed in council properties, through registered social landlords or through the private rented sector.

PDG members asked questions:

- Priority was not currently given to ex-service personnel – homelessness law was applied as in all cases; any change would need incorporating in the Housing Allocations Policy. The Council worked closely with organisations including SSAFA.
- Some tenants could experience difficulties as a consequence of welfare reform, which would see benefits paid directly to them. It was hoped discretionary arrangements would be included in legislation that would allow in some circumstances benefits to be paid directly to the landlord when they are considered fit and proper.
- Customer uplift as a result of welfare reform was difficult to anticipate, however the Council was working on a projection of 20%.
- Where a customer approached the council and appeared to be homeless and in priority need, the Council had a duty to make enquiries into the claim.
- If people were unsuccessful in a homelessness application, appeal mechanisms were in place, which were explained to applicants.
- A recent count of rough sleepers identified lower numbers in the district than some other parts of Lincolnshire
- Capacity within Housing Solutions was sufficient to meet demands. The focus of the service was working as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Officers were thanked for the presentation and Councillors commended the work of the team.

6. REINVIGORATING THE RIGHT TO BUY

A presentation was made to the PDG which summarised a new scheme in relation to right to buy. To reinvigorate the scheme, government increased the percentage discount available. As part of the self-financing of the Housing Revenue Account, the government formula incorporated an estimate on right to buy purchases (11.5 sales). The Council had to choose whether income from sales above this number would be paid into a national pool for the development of new affordable housing, or whether it would be kept by the Council for local investment in affordable housing.

If the Council chose to pool deposit receipts, it could bid into the pool. If it retained receipts, it would be required to deliver housing within 3 years of the

sale however it could choose how the housing was delivered; options included the council building affordable homes, new homes built by registered social landlords and purchasing existing homes on the open market. Building new homes would help attract new homes bonus.

The Council needed to choose whether it would retain or pool receipts by 27 June 2012. If the decision was taken to retain receipts, the Council would have the opportunity to withdraw after each quarter. Failure to build new affordable homes within three-years would mean repaying the receipts to government with interest.

PDG members considered the options and recommended that the receipts from right to buy be retained by the Council for local investment in affordable housing. The Portfolio Holder would take a non-key decision which determined the Council's approach.

Recommendation:

That the Council retain receipts from right to buy sales for local investment in affordable housing.

16:11-16:16 The meeting adjourned

7. NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

At its meeting on 1 September, the PDG considered the draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and made a number of recommendations which formed the basis of the Council's response to consultation. The final NPPF was published on 27 March 2012 and was effective immediately. It replaced all previous planning policy statements and guidance notes, however some companion documents remained. Transitional arrangements were incorporated in respect of planning policy documents, which had full weight for 12-months. During this period the Council could review and update its local plans or choose to use only the NPPF.

The PDG was provided with a summary of the final document in respect of the recommendations it made. The framework reiterated that the planning system was plan-led.

The draft NPPF required that councils identify a 5-year supply of housing land plus a 20% buffer. This was revised so that councils with a reputation for successfully delivering housing were only required to identify an additional 5%.

Concerns were expressed that the draft NPPF placed the onus on local authorities in respect of economic growth. In the final document, the emphasis on the role of local authorities remained however there was recognition that local authorities needed to work with the business sector.

Wording that the PDG had found ambiguous in the draft had been clarified in

the final version.

More discretion was given to local authorities. The draft implied that in respect of development, Greenfield land could come forward first. The final version said it was up to local authorities to make their decision based on which sites it considered most sustainable. The prescribed housing density target had been removed, which left it a matter for local policy making. The final NPPF enabled local authorities to give equal weight to social, environmental and economic factors when taking decisions.

A duty to co-operate had been introduced which required neighbouring authorities working together on strategic cross boundary issues. There was also a requirement to work with other public bodies.

The consultation processes were not as prescriptive as they had been with the Local Development Framework. The Council could also look at adopting development orders, which would give local discretion to waive the need for planning applications for certain forms of development in prescribed areas.

The Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer provided a summary of her role and the ways in which she could help the policy development groups, including work programming and research.

8. CAR PARKING STRATEGY WORKING GROUP

The first meeting of the car parking working group had taken place on 20 April 2012. The notes of the meeting were circulated with the agenda. Two further working group meetings would be arranged for June 2012.

9. WORK PROGRAMME 2012-13

A Green Waste Policy update and Civilian Parking Enforcement were suggested as work programme items.

Action Point:

The Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer to work with Heads of Service to programme work for 2012/13.

10. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting was closed at 17:01.