

Minutes of a meeting of the **POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL** held in Meeting Room 1, Council Offices, Priory Road, Spalding, on Tuesday, 25 July 2023 at 7.05 pm. (it was necessary to change the venue of the meeting to Meeting Room 1).

**PRESENT**

A R Woolf (Chairman)  
L J Eldridge (Vice-Chairman)

D Ashby  
N Chapman  
S Chauhan

M Geaney  
M Hasan  
J Le Sage  
M Le Sage

I Sheard  
T Sneath  
J Whitbourn

Apologies for absence were received from or on behalf of Councillors J Avery, A C Beal, J L Reynolds and S-A Slade

In Attendance: The Assistant Director - Wellbeing and Community Leadership, the Assistant Director - Corporate (virtual), the Head of Procurement and Contracts; the Business Intelligence and Change Manager, the Scrutiny and Policy Officer (virtual), the Democratic Services Officer and Councillor J R Astill

**1. MINUTES**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the following meetings:

- a) Joint Performance Monitoring Panel and Policy Development Panel (Budget Scrutiny) held on 26 January 2023;
- b) Policy Development Panel held on 28 February 2023; and
- c) Joint Performance Monitoring Panel and Policy Development Panel held on 6 March 2023.

**AGREED:**

That the minutes be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**2. ACTIONS**

Consideration was given to the update on actions which arose at the following meetings:

- a) Joint Performance Monitoring Panel and Policy Development Panel (Budget Scrutiny) held on 26 January

**Action By**

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2023; and

- b) Policy Development Panel held on 28 February 2023, which also tracked previous outstanding actions.

**AGREED:**

That the update to the actions be noted.

**3. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS.**

There were none

**4. QUESTIONS ASKED UNDER STANDING ORDER 6**

There were none

**5. TRACKING OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

There were none

**6. ITEMS REFERRED FROM THE PERFORMANCE MONITORING PANEL**

There were none

**7. KEY DECISION PLAN**

Consideration was given to the Key Decision Plan dated 14 July 2023.

**AGREED:**

That the Key Decision Plan dated 14 July 2023 be noted.

**8. SHDC POLICY REGISTER AND S&ELCP POLICY REGISTER**

The Panel gave consideration to the SHDC Policy Register and the S&ELCP Policy Register

The Business Intelligence and Change Manager introduced the item by giving a status update of overdue policies.

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In respect of the SHDC Policy Register:

- The Freedom of Information Policy and The Unreasonable Behaviour and Vexatious Requests Policy were linked to current service reviews across the partnership. Policy updates would come forward to the Panel in Q3;
- The SHDC Mobile Homes and Caravan Site Licensing and Fee Policy was originally scheduled to come to the Panel in Q2 however this had been moved to Q3;
- The Housing Allocations and Letting Policy and The Derelict and Untidy Sites Policy were scheduled for their initial annual review at the 11 October 2023 Policy Development Panel meeting;
- Ownership of the Equality and Diversity Policy had been transferred to H.R. (PSPS). The Monitoring Officer would retain an oversight of the policy to ensure enablement of effective governance and inclusivity in the decision-making processes of the Council.

In respect of the Partnership Policy Register:

- All policies listed on the Partnership Policy Register aligned with the SHDC Policy Register with the exception of the Sexual Establishments Policy which was due for review at Boston only. Nonetheless, the policy owner would be reviewing the SHDC Sexual Establishments Policy at the same time so that review dates for the policy would become aligned across the partnership.

The Chairman confirmed that an update to the Taxi Licensing Policy would be presented to the Licensing Panel for scrutiny.

**AGREED:**

That the SHDC Policy Register and the S&ELCP Policy Register be noted by the Panel.

**9. PARTNERSHIP COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY**

Consideration was given to the report of the Assistant Director – Corporate which asked the Policy Development Panel to consider a South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership Communications Strategy.

The Assistant Director – Corporate introduced the report by providing the Panel with the following contextual information regarding the draft Partnership Communications Strategy:

- The partnership recognised the importance of having a single communications function in place;

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- Corporate functions, including the Communications Team, were brought together under a single shared directorate across the S&ELCP in late 2022;
- A service review was undertaken which resulted in the appointment of a Group Manager for Communications and Engagement;
- The ambition, following the service review, was to bring forward a single Partnership Communications Strategy; this was identified in the current Annual Delivery Plan agreed by Council in March 2023;
- After undergoing a developmental phase, the Partnership Communications Strategy had been scrutinised at Boston Borough Council and East Lindsey District Council and both had stated their support: SHDC members had the opportunity to provide feedback at the current meeting;
- After the completion of scrutiny, the strategy would proceed to Cabinet in September 2023; and
- Whilst the strategy covered a four-year period, it would remain under review to enable adaptations in response to developments in the communications landscape.

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate, Governance and Communications stressed the importance of the iteration of a Partnership Communication Strategy and referred Members to pages 66, 67 and 68 of the agenda which outlined the aims and goals of the strategy.

Members considered the report and made the following comments:

- Members asked for an explanation of 'ChatGPT' as stated on page 67 of the agenda.
  - The Assistant Director – Corporate responded that:
    - ChatGPT was a chat generator, linked to Artificial Intelligence (A.I), which enabled digital users to receive answers to questions online; and
    - The partnership was alert to the new technology and was starting to consider how A.I. might work in a Local Government setting in general.
- Members asked how the strategy worked for people who were not digitally engaged.
  - The Assistant Director – Corporate responded that the scope of the strategy covered the mix of communication channels that the Communications Team utilised to deliver and receive information at a

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central level. This ranged from traditional media, such as newspapers, through to social media. The remit did not encapsulate communications direct to 'front end' service users.

- Members agreed that the strategy be reviewed by the Policy Development Panel one year from adoption.

**AGREED:**

- a) That after consideration of the Partnership Communications Strategy at Appendix A, the comments of the Panel be noted; and
- b) That the Partnership Communications Strategy be reviewed by the Policy Development Panel one year from adoption.

**10. PROCUREMENT STRATEGY - 2023-2026**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Procurements and Contracts (PSPS) which sought members' views on a new Procurement Strategy.

The Head of Procurement and Contracts (PSPS) presented the report to the Panel by relaying the following points:

- The draft Procurement Strategy 2023-2026 was detailed within the report at Appendix 1;
- Two minor amendments were recommended by members of Boston Borough Council and East Lindsey District Council as part of the scrutiny process;
- The Procurement Strategy documented how the Council delivered its procurement function and provided a clear direction on procurement activity for the following three years. The strategy could be reviewed;
- The reasons for the adoption of a Procurement Strategy were outlined, which included that:
  - best practice for local authorities was followed; this included the adoption and implementation of a Procurement Strategy;
  - The new strategy would ensure that the Council had a clear Procurement Strategy in place for the next three years;
  - An agreed approach to procurement existed which maximised savings opportunities for the Council;

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- Compliance with audit requirements; SHDC had received an audit recommendation to update its procurement strategies; and
- Key Council priorities were supported; that local suppliers were sourced and procurement was both sustainable and ethical.
- The proposed Procurement Strategy focussed on the following key themes from the National Procurement Strategy:
  - 'Showing leadership';
  - 'Behaving Commercially'; and
  - 'Achieving Community Benefits'.
- The themes were further divided into sections which served to improve and enhance the procurement service, which included:
  - The development and rollout of a basic procurement training programme for members which assisted with the understanding of the procurement process; and
  - That efficient and effective information be provided to local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and micro-businesses who were interested in supplying goods and services to the Council.
- The interpretation of 'local' had been split into the following three areas:
  - The first represented the boundary of each respective Council;
  - The second represented the boundary of the Partnership; and
  - The third represented the boundary of Lincolnshire, or 60 miles from the boundary of one of the Councils.

The Head of Procurement and Contracts (PSPS) outlined the following two minor amendments that had been recommended by Boston and East Lindsey scrutiny Panels:

- In respect of point 3.3 Managing Strategic Risk; the wording '*Carrying out due diligence checks (financial, insurances, and H&S (where relevant)) on preferred providers prior to Contracts being entered into*', was replaced by '*Following a procurement process, we shall carry out due diligence checks (financial, insurances, and H&S (where relevant)) on the supplier that we intend to award the contract to.*' The amend clarified that the Council did not have preferred providers and that due diligence checks were undertaken following a procurement process; and
- In respect of point 4.1 Creating Social Value; the wording

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*'Reviewing the possibility of using the Social Value Portal.'*, was replaced with *'Reviewing the possibility of using a social value IT system.'*

Members considered the report and made the following comments:

- Members asked whether the strategy included the capacity for urgent procurement decisions.
  - The Head of Procurement and Contracts (PSPS) referred members to the Contract Procedure Rules which included an exemption process for urgent decisions.
- Members queried the value at which a formal tender process was required.
  - The Head of Procurement and Contracts (PSPS) outlined the following stipulations as stated in the Contract Procedure Rules:
    - £0 to £5000 required one written quote;
    - £5000 to £10000 required two written quotes;
    - £10000 to £40000 required three written quotes, of which two must be sought;
    - £40000 to £85000 required five written quotes. The Procurement Contracts Team would be involved from this level/value as part of a formal process which included a 'Request for Quotation';
    - £85000 and above, to the respective relevant threshold, deferred to an open tender process. Frameworks also guided processes.
    - a link to the Contract Procedure Rules would be circulated to members after the meeting.
- Members asked whether procurement decisions were guided by monetary or best value factors.
  - The Head of Procurement and Contracts (PSPS) confirmed that the factors involved were assessed on a project-by-project basis and were usually based on a quality/price mix; and
  - The quality assessment was dependent on each project but included factors such as: previous experience, key personnel, and social value.
- Members praised the three-tiered approach to 'local' procurement and asked how the council actively encouraged engagement from local suppliers/businesses.
  - The Head of Procurement and Contracts (PSPS)

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- responded that council led 'Meet the Buyer' events offered guidance to potential suppliers;
- A new monthly/bi-monthly initiative had been proposed for officers to offer their services to local businesses which aimed to demystify local authority procurement processes; and
  - The Team were continuously looking to simplify project documentation to improve the process for suppliers.
- Members agreed that the Procurement Strategy 2023-2026 be reviewed by the Policy Development Panel one year from adoption.

**AGREED:**

- a) That after consideration of the Procurement Strategy 2023-2026 by the Policy Development Panel, the comments of the Panel be noted; and
- b) That the Procurement Strategy 2023-2023 be reviewed by the Policy Development Panel one year from adoption.

**11. PROPOSED JOINT SCRUTINY ACTIVITY FOR 23/24 FOR THE SOUTH AND EAST LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCILS PARTNERSHIP (S&ELCP)**

Consideration was given to the report of the Assistant Director – Corporate which asked the Policy Development Panel to approve the scoping documents for the proposed joint scrutiny topics for 2023/2024; and to agree the appointment of three members to each of those Joint Task and Finish Groups.

The Scrutiny and Policy Officer introduced the report by outlining the proposed topics for the partnership as detailed at Appendix A.

The project scopes for two Joint Task and Finish Groups were outlined for the Healthy Living Action plan and Partnership Housing Standards Strategy at Appendices A and B respectively.

Members were asked to volunteer for the Task Groups and the following was agreed:

For the Healthy Living Action Plan Task and Finish Group which would commence in September 2023, membership was confirmed as:

- Councillor Ingrid Sheard;



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- Councillor Nanette Chapman; and
- Councillor Mark Le Sage

For the Partnership Housing Standards Strategy Task and Finish Group which would commence in January 2024, membership was confirmed as:

- Councillor James Le Sage;
- Councillor Margaret Geaney; and
- Councillor Thomas Sneath.

**AGREED:**

- a) That after consideration by the Policy Development Panel that the topics and associated scopes, as set out at Appendices B and C, be agreed, with each Task and Finish Group authorised to review the scopes and determine the detailed lines of enquiry and witnesses; and
- b) That the Committee agreed to appoint three members to each of the proposed Task and Finish Groups identified in Appendices B and C, as named above.

**12. POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL WORK PROGRAMME**

The Panel considered a report by the Interim Assistant Director – Governance (Monitoring Officer) which set out the Work Programme of the Policy Development Panel.

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which outlined the following main points:

Appendix A set out the dates of future Panel meetings along with proposed items for consideration. The programme included policies that were either due for review, were overdue, or were undertaking their first annual review.

Appendix B set out the Task Groups that had been identified by the Panel. The South Holland Centre Task Group was still current but had been paused pending the receipt and implementation of the business plan.

The Chairman raised the following points in respect of Appendix A:

- Regarding the pending Work Programme items, the Chairman queried whether the Strategic Tenancy Policy could come forward to the Panel in the near future.

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- The Assistant Director – Wellbeing and Community Leadership responded that the Strategic Tenancy Policy was not in a position to come forward however a briefing note regarding its current status could come forward if required.
  - The Chairman agreed that a briefing note would not be required for the next Policy Development Panel meeting, but this would be kept under review for the future.

The Chairman referred to Appendix B, and raised the following points in connection with ongoing Task Groups:

- In respect of the South Holland Centre Task Group: three Task Group members would need to be recruited to replace the two members who had not been re-elected at the May 2023 election, and the one member who had moved to the Executive. The Chairman asked for volunteers and the following members stated their wish to be involved when the Task Group was reconvened:
  - Cllr Jan Whitbourn;
  - Cllr Ingrid Sheard; and
  - Cllr Mark Le Sage.
- The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Task Group would remain on hold until the appropriate time.

The Chairman raised the following in respect of pending task groups:

- The Chairman had recently received contact from the Head of Planning regarding the Planning Design Task Group. At the current time it had been agreed that the task group remain pending until legislative changes at central Government level had taken place;
- The Devolution Task Group remained pending subject to the nature of future developments; and
- The Data Protection/Data Retention Task Group was formed in 2017 as a result of the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The Task Group was dormant but could be called upon if needed.

The Chairman requested that members consider whether they wished to scrutinise any existing policies or suggest the creation of new ones where a need had been identified. Suggestions could come forward at the current meeting or at future meetings. The Chairman asked members to be mindful of officer capacity when considering the creation of new task groups. A task group was not always necessary for the formation of a new policy.

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A discussion ensued around the potential formation of a new district-wide Street Scene Policy with a proposed aim of improving the aesthetic qualities of shop frontages. Members stated that:

- Some residents were uncomfortable with full coloured vinyl treatments on shop windows;
- The reasons some businesses chose to install full vinyl window treatments needed to be understood;
- A policy would need to be in place to enable enforcement action, should this be required; and
- It was requested that Spalding Town Forum had the opportunity to engage with the formation of the policy.
  - The Assistant Director – Wellbeing and Community Leadership responded that:
    - Both small businesses and large corporation chains utilised vinyl window treatments;
    - The transparency of shop windows was preferred in respect of public safety and Trading Standards however reasons for proposed changes to existing practices needed to be clearly established;
    - The window treatment topic had been explored previously at SHDC which established that the Planning Framework did not allow for enforcement against full vinyl window treatments;
    - The reasons why members of the public either patronised or avoided shops with vinyl window treatments needed to be understood, and not assumed, through the collation of data; and
    - Work involving the treatment of shop windows could be incorporated into wider community projects which looked at town centre safety.
- The Chairman concluded the discussion by acknowledging the Panel's desire to investigate the subject of shop frontages and to this end it was requested that:
  - the topic be included in the Work Programme of the 11 October 2023 Policy Development Panel meeting in order to discuss a potential Street Scene Policy Task Group; and
  - to assist the initial process, a briefing note come forward from the Head of Planning which outlined any relevant areas of enforcement covered by existing Planning law/conditions.
- Members asked whether a Volunteers Policy currently

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existed.

- The Assistant Director - Wellbeing and Community Leadership responded that although a Volunteers Policy did not currently exist, she was keen that one be developed to acknowledge and support the many volunteers in the district.

**AGREED:**

- a) That the Policy Development Panel Work Programme 2023/2024 be noted; and
- b) That the development of a Street Scene Policy Task Group be discussed at the 11 October 2023 Policy Development Panel meeting.

13. **ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT.**

There were none.

(The meeting ended at 8.14 pm)

(End of minutes)