Minutes of a meeting of the **POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL** held in the Meeting Room 1, Council Offices, Priory Road, Spalding, on Tuesday, 25 November 2025 at 6.30 pm.

PRESENT

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

D Ashby	M Geaney	M Le Sage
P Barnes	M Hasan	J Whitbourn
A C Beal	J L Reynolds	

In Attendance: The Business Intelligence and Change Manager, the Group Communications and Engagement Manager, the Group Manager, Safer Communities, the Assistant Director - Regulatory, the Environment and Sustainability Officers, and the Assistant Director - Wellbeing and Community Leadership

Action By

45. MINUTES

1) That the minutes of the Policy Development Panel meeting held on the 23 September 2025 be signed as a correct record by the Chairman.

2) That both the open minutes and the restricted minute (at agenda item 19) of the Special Joint Performance Monitoring Panel and Policy Development Panel held on the 21 October 2025, be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

46. ACTIONS

Consideration was given to the update on actions which arose at the 23 September 2025 Policy Development Panel meeting and the tracking of outstanding actions.

AGREED:

That the update regarding actions be noted.

47. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS.

There were none.

48. QUESTIONS ASKED UNDER STANDING ORDER 6

There were none.

49. TRACKING OF RECOMMENDATIONS

There were none.

50. ITEMS REFERRED FROM THE PERFORMANCE MONITORING PANEL

There were none.

51. KEY DECISION PLAN

Consideration was given to the Key Decision Plan dated 14 November 2025.

AGREED:

That the Key Decision Plan be noted.

52. SHDC AND S&ELCP POLICY REGISTERS

Consideration was given to the SHDC Policy Register and the S&ELCP Policy Register.

Members considered the SHDC Policy Register, and the S&ELCP Policy Register and made the following comments:

- Members noted that the majority of policies had scheduled review dates in place and the registers were considered to be in good order overall. Members were informed that there had been a slight delay in the review of the Data Protection Policy and the Records Management Policy, which had originally been expected in November but had been rescheduled for February due to last-minute changes.
- Policies relating to Whistleblowing, Capital and Corruption were confirmed as being within the remit of the Governance and Audit Committee rather than the Policy Development Panel.
- The Street Art Management Policy was scheduled for February 2026.
- It was highlighted that several of the policies marked in orange on the register were financial and ICT-related, which typically aligned with the budget-setting process.
- Members raised concerns regarding the delay in reviewing the Data Protection Policy, given its importance.
    - It was explained that the policy was being aligned across the three councils within the partnership, and

feedback on the delay would be provided to the relevant officers.

AGREED:

That the SHDC Policy Register & the S&ELCP Policy Register be noted.

53. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) POLICY

Consideration was given to the presentation of the Business Change and Intelligence Manger who asked the members to review the Artificial Intelligence Policy one year from its adoption at Cabinet.

The Business Change and Intelligence Manger highlighted that:

- An AI Working Group had been established to oversee initiatives, share best practices, and ensure responsible deployment. Governance was supported by the ICT Strategy Board, which reviewed business cases for new AI applications.
- Regular briefings, workshops, and staff communications had been delivered to promote awareness and encourage the adoption of AI.
    - AI tools were being used to align policies across the partnership and to perform impact assessments more efficiently.
    - AI had assisted with triaging complaints, which in turn reduced delays and improved accuracy.
    - AI supported officers with sourcing data and evidence.
    - AI transcription and summarisation tools were being used to assist with the production of draft minutes and analyse trends.

- The Transformation Team was leading the partnerships AI adoption, ICT ensured secure deployment and integration; and Data Protection teams monitored compliance with GDPR.
- Further exploration of Microsoft Copilot would enable further development of methodologies to quantify efficiency gains and potential financial savings.

Members considered the update and made the following comments:

- Members asked how secure AI was when drafting policies

or processing sensitive information.
    - The Business Change and Intelligence Manager clarified that Copilot operated within the Microsoft 365 environment, which was as secure as SHDC emails and document systems. Public AI tools such as ChatGPT and Google Gemini were blocked for officers;
        - The Business Change and Intelligence Manager would confirm if this applied to Members.

- Members asked if Copilot could be automatically installed on members' devices.
    - The Business Change and Intelligence Manager agreed this would be ideal and would check with ICT and would report back to the members if this could be arranged.

- Members questioned if it was safe to use ChatGPT on their Council iPads for tasks like risk assessments.
    - The Business Change and Intelligence Manager responded that members should avoid entering personal or sensitive data into ChatGPT. Copilot was recommended for work-related tasks as it was secure and integrated with Council systems.
        - The Business Change and Intelligence Manager would confirm the official position on ChatGPT access for members.

- Members discussed how accuracy was ensured when AI produced outputs such as risk assessments or social media posts.
    - The Business Change and Intelligence Manager explained that AI was an assistant, not an autonomous decision-maker. All outputs must be reviewed and signed off by a human officer with subject expertise. SHDC was not currently using AI for automated decision-making.

- Members suggested that if officers were required to check everything that AI produced, would this not duplicate work.
    - The Business Change and Intelligence Manager reiterated that AI would reduce background work and speed up processes, but human oversight would remain essential to maintain quality and compliance.

- Members asked how we ensured transparency when AI-

generated content was published externally.
    - The Business Change and Intelligence Manager answered that disclaimers for AI-generated content were under consideration and would be implemented for any material published externally.

- It was suggested that members would like to receive training and a demonstration on AI tools like Copilot.
    - The Business Change and Intelligence Manager confirmed that ICT had delivered staff training sessions and would check whether similar training could be arranged for members.

- Members asked how AI use was being monitored across the partnership services.
    - The Business Change and Intelligence Manager confirmed that an AI Use Case Register was being maintained by the working group, which captured all areas where AI was currently deployed and ensured data protection impact assessments were completed where necessary.

AGREED:

That the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy update be noted.

54. SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Consideration was given to the report of the Assistant Director – Corporate which asked the members to consider the Social Media Policy prior to its presentation to Cabinet.

The Group Communications and Engagement Manager presented the report and highlighted that:

The Policy was structured around three key elements:

- Reviewing how and why communications were delivered on social media, improving consistency, and reducing the current haphazard presentation caused by high volumes of content.
- Ensuring respectful behaviour online and maintaining inclusive conversations through standardised house rules across all three councils.
- Addressing the volume of comments and queries received on social media in a timely and consistent manner.
    - An audit had shown that a substantial number of

comments across social media platforms required a more structured response process.

Members considered the report and made the following comments:

- Members supported the need for a consistent approach and queried whether Artificial Intelligence (AI) could assist with managing social media content.
    - The Group Communications and Engagement Manager advised that AI could support research and certain tasks, but it was not a complete solution for strategic communications. Transparency was emphasised as essential when using AI-generated content, and any such content would need to be clearly identified to maintain trust with residents.

- A Member referred to page 69 of the report, noting that the policy stated that AI-generated content would not be used unless clearly attributed when shared from stakeholders.
    - The Group Communications and Engagement Manager confirmed this aligned with the outlined approach.

- Members queried demographic data, noting that most followers appeared to be female, and asked whether this was linked to the timing of bulletins.
    - The Group Communications and Engagement Manager confirmed that the split was approximately 60% female across all councils and suggested this may relate to early adoption patterns of Facebook and its social nature. Demographic insights would help with future targeting strategies.

- Members commented on the randomness of some posts and suggested a more structured approach, such as themed weekly summaries and improved website integration, allowing residents to easily find posts relevant to specific services. It was further suggested that AI could be useful for improving website navigation and content retrieval.
    - The Group Communications and Engagement Manager clarified that while AI could assist in website functionality, this was outside the scope of the Social Media Policy. AI implementation would require a well-structured and indexed website, which was currently under review as part of the wider transformation programme.

- A member referred to the objectives section and queried the review of X (formerly Twitter) and BlueSky usage, noting that engagement on X had been minimal, with no comments in the last six months and the last post dating back to May.
    - The Group Communication and Engagement Manager explained that engagement on X had declined steadily over the past 18–24 months. Changes to X's algorithms had negatively impacted public sector visibility, leading many organisations to reduce activity and explore alternative platforms. The partnership had paused activity on X pending further review.
    - The Group Communications and Engagement Manager added that BlueSky had not overtaken X in popularity and that Facebook remained the primary channel, with WhatsApp slowly developing as a managed platform. Nextdoor offered an initial advantage by granting access to a large user base; however, engagement levels had been low, and the platform had not met early expectations for hyper-local interaction.

- Members asked whether the Council intended to discontinue use of X.
    - The Group Communications and Engagement Manager responded that X had been retained for election-related communications due to high the engagement among politicians during that period. Outside of elections, engagement had been minimal, and continued use would be reviewed.

- Members observed that residents were more likely to visit the Council's Facebook page than its website, except for transactional purposes. They noted that South Holland's follower numbers were lower than Boston and East Lindsey.
    - The Group Communications and Engagement Manager explained that South Holland's Facebook page had been restarted in 2018 due to issues with the previous page, which accounted for the discrepancy in follower numbers.

- A member referred to page 12 of the policy, which stated that social media accounts would be monitored from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. They suggested amending the wording to "intermittently" to avoid implying constant

monitoring. The member also questioned the commitment to respond to queries within three working days and asked whether this applied to comments, given the lack of a Direct Message facility on Facebook.

- The Group Communications and Engagement Manager confirmed that Messenger was used for direct contact and that PSPS handled service-related queries.
  - The Members agreed that three working days might be too long for residents to wait for a response.
    - The Group Communications and Engagement Manager agreed to check whether the Facebook page included a direct messaging link and would report back to the Panel.

- Members referred to the objectives section, which stated that social media house rules would be shared in the file section of the social media pages. They asked whether it was possible to request that users should agree to these rules when following the page and suggested including a clause requiring passwords to be changed when staff with access leave the organisation.
  - The Group Communications and Engagements Manager agreed that password changes were already standard practice but confirmed this would be explicitly referenced in the policy. It was agreed to review whether pre-populated agreement questions could be implemented for pages, noting that if this was not possible, compliance would be implied through interaction with posts.

- Members queried whether dormant or ghost accounts among followers could be affecting engagement figures.
  - The Group Communications and Engagement Manager confirmed this was likely and noted that cleansing follower lists and monitoring for bots would be considered as part of future security measures.

AGREED:

1) That following consideration from the Panel the comments and feedback be noted and the recommendation of the draft Social Media Policy to Cabinet be supported.

2) That an update be presented to the Panel one year from its

adoption at Cabinet.

55. HOUSING STANDARDS POLICIES

Consideration was given to the report of the Assistant Director – Communities and Housing Services which asked that members to consider the update of the Housing Standards Policies prior to alignment of respective Policies across the Partnership.

The Group Manager, Safer Communities introduced the three draft Housing Standards Policies.

- Empty Homes Policy
- Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing Policy
- Enforcement Policy

The strategic objective of all 3 policies was to update and regularise existing policies across East Lindsey, South Holland, and Boston so that working practices and approaches were aligned.
These policies would be delivered within the partnerships existing resources.
The Group Manager, Safer Communities noted that the Councils current policies were fit for purpose and took into consideration the recently published “Private Sector Housing Strategy” previously discussed at PDP.

Empty Homes Policy

- The Group Manager, Safer Communities explained that the Empty Homes Policy would introduce a scoring and rating matrix to prioritise the properties of greatest concern to the Council. The policy would enable each individual council to utilise the powers and tools available to them, without committing all 3 Councils to the same activity, certain activities, such as compulsory purchase, could require a large resource commitment.

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing Policy

- The Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing Policy would move away from a flat fee structure and would introduce a new fee structure separated in to 2 parts:
    - Part A for the application,
    - Part B would generate a fee per individual room.
- The policy would see the alignment of amenities and standard conditions and would introduce a risk rating for generating periodic inspections.
- The 3 appendices that accompanied this policy were:
    - License conditions

- Amenity and space standards
- Fit and proper persons

Enforcement Policy

- The Enforcement Policy had been updated to reflect new schemes such as “Homes for Ukraine.”
- Accommodation inspections, along with the revision of fixed penalty amounts, would reflect the national model which was being steered by the Renters’ Rights Act that had just gained royal assent.
- The policy had revised the fee structure, by introducing a set fee for the service of a notice, followed by an additional fee for each hazard.
- The policy brought in an increase of fees attached to the service of Civil Penalty Notices which steered away from a matrix approach, by introducing set fees per offence this would align with the Justice for Tenants national model.

Members considered the report and made the following comments:

- Members expressed their frustration regarding the number of empty homes and the negative impact on neighbourhoods and stressed the importance of bringing those properties back into use to maximise the Councils housing stock.
  - The Group Manager, Safer Communities confirmed that the scoring matrix would prioritise properties causing the greatest concern or located in areas of high demand.
  - Properties that were likely to return to use naturally (e.g., probate cases) would not be prioritised.
  - Enforcement options would be considered where intervention was necessary.

- Members raised concerns about the size of this report (327 pages) and whether documents could be split or be provided earlier to allow sufficient time for review.
  - The Chairman acknowledged the concern and explained that the three policies were presented together for efficiency, as they were interlinked. Statutory publication requirements limited the flexibility on receiving agendas early.
    - Members emphasised that the issue was not the content but the short time frame for review. They requested that, where possible, future policies should be circulated earlier, or snapshots provided to assist preparation.

- Members asked for confirmation that enforcement applied to private properties as well as rented accommodation as it was unclear in the report.
    - The Group Manager, Safer Communities confirmed that it would apply to both private and rented properties and agreed to review the wording in the report to make it clearer.

- Members asked if the council could purchase empty properties, particularly those in probate, to bring them into the housing stock.
    - The Group Manager, Safer Communities explained that such decisions would fall under the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and strategic housing functions, which operated separately from enforcement. The suggestion would be fed back to the strategic housing lead.

- Members raised concerns about properties that were left empty for years and asked how residents could report those properties and what steps the Council could take to investigate ownership or occupancy.
    - The Group Manager, Safer Communities confirmed that once adopted, the policy would provide a clear route for reporting and investigation. The team could use tools such as Council Tax records and risk assessments to prioritise cases.
    - Options available ranged from advice and engagement through to compulsory purchase, depending on risk and feasibility.
        - Members stressed the importance of managing expectations for residents, noting that while powers such as Compulsory Purchase exist, they were rarely exercised due to financial and resource constraints. Members requested that the adopted policy clearly outlined what was realistically achievable and what enforcement options were available.
            - The Group Manager, Safer Communities explained that across the partnership, baseline data on empty homes was limited beyond headline figures. Initial work would focus on building a comprehensive dataset to inform prioritisation and future interventions.

- Members commented that the policy should not only set standards but also ensure adequate resources to implement them.
    - The Group Manager, Safer Communities acknowledged this and confirmed that feedback would be provided to Cabinet regarding resource implications.

- Members noted that GDPR restricted the sharing of personal information and requested guidance on what could be disclosed to residents.
    - The Group Manager, Safer Communities would confirm GDPR compliance and what data could be shared with residents.

- Members expressed concern that while the policy was comprehensive, it might lack practical impact without sufficient resources. Members stressed the need for the Council to demonstrate tangible outcomes, such as bringing empty homes back into use, and requested that progress be reported after implementation.
    - The Group Manager, Safer Communities advised that baseline data should be compiled within three months, with prioritisation completed within six months.
        - Members offered to assist by providing details of empty properties in their wards to accelerate the process.
            - The Group Manager, Safer Communities welcomed this support.

- Members agreed that bringing empty homes back into use was preferable to building new homes and emphasised the need for Cabinet to consider resource implications to ensure the policy could be delivered effectively.

Councillor J Reynolds left the meeting at 8.05pm

AGREED:

1) That following consideration from the Panel that the recommendation of the Housing Standards Policies to Cabinet be approved.

2) That the Policy Development Panel be presented with an update on the Housing Standards Policies one year after adoption at Cabinet.

56. PARTNERSHIP ENVIRONMENT POLICY

Consideration was given to the report of the Assistant Director – Regulatory which asked that members review the Partnership Environment Policy one year from its adoption.

The Assistant Director – Regulatory introduced the report and highlighted the following key points:

- The Partnership Environment Policy provided the overarching framework for delivering environmental priorities set out in the Partnership Sub-regional Strategy (2024–2029).
- The policy sought to balance sustainability with economic and social considerations and demonstrated the Council's commitment to environmental leadership.
- Four key themes underpinned the policy:
    - Protecting and recovering the natural environment.
    - Mitigating and adapting to climate change.
    - Protecting and enhancing the built environment.
    - Ensuring sustainable waste and resource management.

- Since adoption, the policy had shaped several strategies and plans, including the Sustainable Products Policy, Tree and Hedgerow Strategy, and the Carbon Reduction Plans.
- A Climate Change and Environment Impact Assessment tool had been introduced to evaluate environmental impacts consistently as part of the decision-making.
- Performance monitoring was achieved through the Partnership's Annual Delivery Plan and the South and East Lincolnshire Climate Action Network (SELCAN).
- The Assistant Director - Regulatory explained that the policy remained fit for purpose and proposed that the next review should take place in 2028/29 to align with the Sub-regional Strategy.

Members considered the report and made the following comments:

- Members asked if the partnership was achieving everything that the policy had set out.
    - The Assistant Director - Regulatory confirmed that the delivery of actions aligned with the policy's principles and that progress was being made through associated strategies and plans.

- Members expressed concern that recycling waste rates

appeared to have fallen over the past year. How did this policy influence waste and recycling performance.

- The Assistant Director - Regulatory explained that recycling performance was largely driven by national policy, which the Council had limited influence over. However, local waste collection policies and service improvements were influenced by the Environment Policy. Planned changes, such as how food waste would be collected, would support improvements over time.

- Members noted that the policy had been in place for a year, yet recycling rates remained low. Did this mean that the policy was ineffective.
  - The Assistant Director - Regulatory noted that the policy had set long-term strategic goals, and changes to waste regimes required significant investment and time. The policy provided the framework for decisions, but measurable improvements in recycling would take time to materialise.

- Members asked whether there was a risk that the policy was just a high-level document without real impact.
  - The Assistant Director - Regulatory acknowledged the concern but emphasised that the policy supported operational strategies and projects. It was not intended to deliver immediate results but to guide sustainable decision-making across all services.

- Members asked why the next review was scheduled for 2028/29, and should the Policy be brought back to the Panel before this.
  - The Assistant Director - Regulatory explained that the review date aligned with the Sub-regional Strategy to ensure consistency between strategic documents. Bringing the policy back earlier would likely result in the same discussion, as changes would take time to implement.

- Members wanted assurance that the policy was committed to minimising single-use items.
  - The Assistant Director - Regulatory agreed this was a valid point and noted that the Sustainable Products Policy, which sat under the Environment Policy, was driving changes in purchasing behaviour. However, changes across the

partnership would take time to implement.

- Members asked how progress on reducing single-use products and paper usage was measured.
    - The Assistant Director - Regulatory confirmed that audit work on purchasing behaviours was ongoing and that data would be provided to the panel at a future meeting.

Councillor M Le Sage left the meeting at 8.26pm.

AGREED:

1) That the content of the report be noted.

2) That the Environment Policy is next reviewed in 2028/29 in line with the Sub-Regional Strategy to ensure that the two documents continue to be aligned in their focus and ambition.

Councillor J Whitbourn left the meeting at 8.28pm

Councillor D Ashby left the meeting at 8.29pm

57. TREE & HEDGEROW STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

Consideration was given to the report of the Assistant Director – Regulatory which asked members to consider the proposed Tree and Hedgerow Strategy Action Plan prior to its adoption at Cabinet.

The Environment and Sustainability Officer attended virtually and highlighted the following key points;

- That trees and hedgerows played a vital role in addressing biodiversity loss and climate change, providing resilience against extreme weather events, and supporting community protection.
- The Tree and Hedgerow Strategy Action Plan set out short, medium, and long-term targets to deliver the ambitions of the strategy, to ensure appropriate management, protection, and enhancement of trees and hedgerows across the sub-region.
- Planting must follow the principle of “right tree in the right place” and would include the maintenance of existing trees and hedgerows.
- South Holland and parts of Boston were predominantly

Fenland landscapes which had a naturally lower tree coverage.
- The plan would align with the forthcoming Lincolnshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy, expected in late 2026, and a light-touch review would follow to ensure complementarity.
- The recommendation was for the Panel to consider the proposed action plan, provide feedback, and recommend adoption to Cabinet.

Members considered the report and made the following comments.

- Members asked how the plan would address concerns about large numbers of trees attracting pigeons and impacting farmland.
    - The Environment and Sustainability Officer explained that in South Holland, planting would focus mainly on urban areas, community orchards, and woodlands. Hedgerow schemes for farmers would also be available. A project team would be established to identify suitable sites and consider surrounding land use.

- Members enquired how inappropriate planting near drainage ditches or pipes would be avoided.
    - The Environment and Sustainability Officer confirmed that the project team approach would be used to include a team of technical officers to ensure planting did not compromise drainage infrastructure.

- Members asked if the action plan linked in with existing planning policies, particularly those regarding large solar installations that removed trees and hedgerows.
    - The Environment and Sustainability Officer stated that planning and biodiversity net gain (BNG) were referenced in the action plan. Conditions would be applied to planning approvals to mitigate biodiversity loss. BNG mechanisms aimed to offset impacts, though off-site mitigation was possible under current rules.

- Members asked what planting was anticipated for South Holland, and when would targets be set.
    - The Environment and Sustainability Officer explained that targets would be established within two years, following site investigations and funding

assessments. Likely projects would include community orchards in urban areas, with other opportunities being considered.

- Members queried if the Tree and Hedgerow Strategy Action Plan applied only to Council-owned land or did it apply to all land within the district.
    - The Environment and Sustainability Officer confirmed that the strategy applied to both Council-owned land and other sites where landowners expressed an interest.

- A question was raised if there was sufficient resources for planting and maintenance.
    - The Environment and Sustainability Officer advised that external funding would be sought. Volunteer support and engagement would also be utilised. Maintenance plans, including stakes and guards would be included within the funding bids to ensure that the trees and hedgerows planted would be protected.

- Members asked could support be provided, such as pruning advice, for parish councils that had received trees under previous schemes.
    - The Environment and Sustainability Officer agreed to provide practical support and would run ‘help and support’ sessions if required.

- A question was asked relating to the status of the Council-owned land near Pinchbeck that had been earmarked for tree planting.
    - The Environment and Sustainability Officer confirmed this would be investigated, and an update would be provided to the Panel.

AGREED:

1) That following consideration from the Panel the comments and feedback be noted.

2) That the recommendation to Cabinet for adoption of the Tree and Hedgerow Action Plan be supported.

58. NET ZERO ACTION PLAN

Consideration was given to the report of the Assistant Director –

Regulatory which asked the Panel to provide input into the draft Net Zero Action Plan prior to its adoption at Cabinet.

The Environment and Sustainability Officer attended virtually and highlighted the following points:

- The draft Net Zero Action Plan supported the Council's commitment to achieve net zero by 2040.
- It set out a pathway which included potential projects and actions;
    - Fleet decarbonisation: Transition to electric vehicles would be in line with the government's zero-emission mandate. Clarification was noted that the ban applies to the sale of non-EV HGVs (under 26 tonnes by 2035, over 26 tonnes by 2040), not their operation.
    - Exploration of alternative fuels such as Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) and technologies such as solar mats for vehicle hydraulics.
    - Improvements to operational buildings, including EV charging points, HVAC upgrades, and solar panels.
    - Work on social housing retrofits and to be energy efficient at sewage treatment works and pump stations.
    - Behavioural changes, engaging with staff, and creating a Green Champions group.

- The plan was dynamic with certain projects being removed or added following feasibility studies.
- External funding would be sought to support delivery, by having an approved plan this would strengthen funding bids.
- Approval of the plan did not commit the Council to immediate financial obligations.

Members considered the report and made the following comments;

- Members asked how other local authorities were progressing with solar mats for fleet vehicles.
    - The Environment and Sustainability Officer confirmed that West Lindsey had trialled them, but early results were less positive than expected. Once further feedback was gained the members would be updated.

- It was noted that the electric vehicle (EV) range for waste collection vehicles was poor, especially in adverse

weather. How would this be addressed.
  - The Environment and Sustainability Officer acknowledged the issue and explained that technology was improving. Government deadlines allowed some flexibility, and future advancements should improve the range of electric vehicles.

- Members asked if SHDC currently sourced green energy.
  - The Environment and Sustainability Officer would confirm with procurement and update the plan accordingly.

- Members asked why new waste collection vehicles had been purchased as diesel rather than electric. Members expressed concern that this contradicted the net zero ambition.
  - The Environment and Sustainability Officer explained that the technology for larger vehicles was not yet sufficient for operational needs, infrastructure limitations also influenced decisions. Where possible, greener features such as electric bin lifts had been included.

- Members asked if hydrogen had been considered as an alternative fuel.
  - The Environment and Sustainability Officer confirmed that hydrogen was referenced in the plan but was still at an early stage of development. Further investigation would be undertaken.

- Members enquired what the strategy was for recycling or disposing of EV batteries.
  - The Environment and Sustainability Officer acknowledged this was a valid concern and committed to investigating regulatory requirements and best practice for battery disposal and would report back to the Panel.

- Members asked if the plan included battery storage for solar energy at depots and offices.
  - The Environment and Sustainability Officer noted that battery storage was being considered, but current technology had limitations during power cuts unless advanced systems (e.g., Tesla Powerwall) were used. This would be explored further as part of feasibility work.

AGREED:

1) That following consideration of the draft Net Zero Action Plan, the feedback of the Panel be noted.

2) That the recommendation to Cabinet for the adoption of the Net Zero Action Plan be supported, in line with the Council's commitment to achieve Net Zero by 2040.

59. POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to the report of the Assistant Director – Governance (Monitoring Officer) which set out the Work Programme of the Policy Development Panel.

The Chairman introduced the report to members:

a) Appendix A listed the schedule of meetings for 2025/26 with expected items populated against each meeting.
b) Appendix B outlined the task groups of the Panel.

Members considered the current Work Programme and discussed forthcoming items.

- Members noted that the Waste Policy was scheduled for a future meeting and emphasised the importance of thorough scrutiny.
- Members requested early sight of the draft Waste Policy to allow adequate time for review.
    - The Democratic Services Officer advised that statutory requirements required agendas to be published at least five working days before the meeting, earlier publication could be explored where possible.

- Members stressed that the Panel should not be expected to "rubber stamp" policies without proper scrutiny. Members agreed that if they were not satisfied with the content, they would refer the policy back for further work.

- The Panel noted that a session on budget savings was scheduled for 13 January 2026. Members queried whether Portfolio Holders would attend to enable direct scrutiny.
    - The Democratic Services Officer confirmed that arrangements were still being finalised.

- Members discussed the Business Frontage Task Group,

which had now largely been incorporated into the Spalding Town Centre Strategy.

- It was agreed to keep the item on the work programme for awareness, given ongoing issues with vinyl signage and enforcement limitations.

AGREED:

That the Work Programme of the Policy Development Panel be noted.

60. ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT.

There were none.

(The meeting ended at 9.15 pm)

(End of minutes)