Minutes of a meeting of the **POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL** held in the Meeting Room 1, Council Offices, Priory Road, Spalding, on Tuesday, 26 November 2024 at 6.30 pm.

PRESENT

A R Woolf (Chairman)

D Ashby	R A Gibson	T Sneath
A C Beal	M Hasan	J Whitbourn
N Chapman	J Le Sage	
M Geaney	M Le Sage	

In Attendance: The Assistant Director - Wellbeing and Community Leadership, the Assistant Director - Regulatory, the Assistant Director - Corporate, the Chief Executive (PSPS) *virtua*l, the Chief Finance Officer (PSPS), the Head of ICT and Digital (PSPS), the Service Manager for Safer Communities, the Communications Lead, the Group Information Manager and Data Protection Officer, the Head of Procurement (PSPS) *virtual,* the Portfolio Holder for Strategic and Operational Housing, and the Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies for absence were received from or on behalf of Councillors J Avery, L J Eldridge, A Harrison, J L Reynolds and the Business Intelligence and Change Manager.

Action By

50. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS.

There were none

51. MINUTES

AGREED:

That the minutes of the following meetings be signed by the Chairman as a correct record:

a) Policy Development Panel 9 September 2024; and
b) Policy Development Panel 24 September 2024.

52. ACTIONS

Consideration was given to the update on actions which arose at the 24 September 2024 and the tracking of outstanding actions.

AGREED:

That the update to actions be noted.

53. QUESTIONS ASKED UNDER STANDING ORDER 6

There were none.

54. TRACKING OF RECOMMENDATIONS

There were none.

55. ITEMS REFERRED FROM THE PERFORMANCE MONITORING PANEL

There were none.

56. KEY DECISION PLAN

Consideration was given to the Key Decision Plan dated 15 November 2024.

AGREED:

That the Key Decision Plan be noted.

57. SHDC POLICY REGISTER AND S&ELCP POLICY REGISTER

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

The Assistant Director – Corporate introduced the report and stated that:

- All policies due for review (red) were in hand to come to the Policy Development Panel and partnership councils where the policies were joint;
- Policies highlighted in yellow were due for review within the next six months; and
- Policies highlighted in green were up to date at the current time.

Members considered the SHDC Policy Register and the S&ELCP Policy Register and no comments were made.

AGREED:

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

58. PROCUREMENT STRATEGY 2023-2026 - 1 YEAR REVIEW

Consideration was given to the report of the Assistant Director –

Corporate which asked the committee to review the progress and focus of the strategy, twelve months since initial implementation.

The Head of Procurement (PSPS) attended virtually to introduce the report and the following main points were highlighted:

- The report outlined the details of progress made in respect of the Procurement Strategy over the twelve-month period since its adoption;
- 69 actions were detailed on the action plan at Appendix 1, and the following information was included:
    - Progress made and anticipated timescale for completion of the 32 outstanding items; and
    - An outline of evidence regarding the 37 completed actions.

Members considered the report and made the following comments:

- Members congratulated officers on the work that had taken place and noted that achievements to date were ahead of the action plan expectations.

- Member noted that the strategy was working well across the partnership.

AGREED:

That member feedback based on the initial progress made since adoption of the Procurement Strategy 2023-2026, be noted.

59. CUSTOMER FEEDBACK POLICY

Consideration was given to the report of the Assistant Director – Governance (Monitoring Officer) which sought feedback on a draft updated Customer Feedback Policy for the Council.

The Group Information Manager and Data Protection Officer introduced the report and the following main points were highlighted:

- The Customer Feedback Policy was new to South Holland;
- A draft document had been fully reviewed, updated and was to be aligned across the partnership, and in so doing, provided a framework for the handling of complaints;
- The policy provided a clear definition of what constituted a complaint, how complaints would be addressed, and options for corrective action;
- Adoption of the policy ensured that the Council complied with the requirements of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and would facilitate service

improvements;
- The draft Customer Feedback Policy was at Appendix 1; and
- A diagram which presented the complaints process was at Appendix 2.

Members considered the report and made the following comments:

- Members queried whether a process was in place to identify any training needs or required changes to procedures following the conclusion of a complaint,.
    - The Group Information Manager and Data Protection Officer responded that learning was collected through a 'complaints clinic' which steered necessary improvements within the wider context of service areas.

- Members queried the number of complaints received each month and asked how this compared with data for the last five years.
    - The Group Information Manager and Data Protection Officer confirmed the receipt of 63 complaints at stage 1 for the year. The comparative data would be investigated and circulated to members after the meeting.

- Members asked for details of the service areas which received the most complaints.
    - The Group Information Manager and Data Protection Officer responded that a significant area of complaints were received regarding Neighbourhood Waste and Planning.

- Members referred to the complaints journey on Appendix 1 and queried the onward journey where a response had not been provided to the customer within 20 days. The journey currently ended with 'record reason for delay'.
    - The Group Information Manager and Data Protection Officer responded that whilst the complaint handling process continued throughout, the recording of the 'reason for delay' served to inform the complaints clinic of the reason for the overdue response. This complied with good governance and prepared the council for any challenge from the LGSCO.

- Members queried whether the complaints process would

be used when a customer disagreed with the response provided following a freedom of information (FOI) request.
    - The Group Information Manager and Data Protection Officer responded that:
        - The complaints process could only be utilised where the issue in question was not dealt with under any other existing process. For example, Planning decision challenges were subject to a specific process and therefore the complaints process would not be appropriate; and
        - The FOI act compelled organisations to have a legal process in place to deal with any challenges to provided information, and this mechanism was utilised regularly.

- Members queried whether adequate resources were in place to respond to FOI requests within timescales.
    - The Group Information Manager and Data Protection Officer responded that the Information Governance team was adequately resourced. The team directed complaints to service managers where responsibility was held for the investigation of the complaint and provision of the response. The resource burden was therefore shared across departments as applicable.

- The Assistant Director – Wellbeing and Community Leadership concluded that, whilst the interpretation of and dealing with a complaint could be challenging, ultimately the process provided a good opportunity for learning and development. The ownership and oversight of the process increased the understanding of customers' needs and helped to create improvements and efficiencies.

AGREED:

a) That following consideration of the draft Customer Feedback Policy at Appendix 1, the policy be noted and recommended to Cabinet for approval; and

b) That the Policy Development Panel be presented with an update on the Customer Feedback Policy, one year from its adoption at Cabinet.

60. PARTNERSHIP COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Consideration was given to presentation of the Assistant Director – Corporate, to review progress of the Partnership Communications Strategy one year from adoption.

The Communications Lead introduced the presentation which outlined:

- That the council had implemented the local government standard 'CORE' purpose communication model across the following four areas of work:
    - Strategic communications;
    - Media management;
    - External communication; and
    - Internal communication.
- An update on progress made since adoption of the strategy; and
- An outline of work still to do.

Members considered the presentation and made the following comments:

- Members queried SHDC's approach regarding 'media management'. It was felt negative feedback should not be ignored and that responses which challenged/corrected misinformation posted by the public onto SHDC's social media feeds were required.
    - The Communications Lead responded that:
        - Social media comments were viewed by the Communication Team. Where it was evident that a news story posted on SHDC's social media had been misinterpreted, the Communications Team would address this with the release of further information;
        - Reponses were given to questions posted on SHDC's social media platforms but not on third party pages such as Spotted Spalding. SHDC's approach was not to respond to each and every comment but only when considered appropriate. Regarding inaccurate public comments made on social media platforms, each example was assessed on a case-by-case basis however consideration of a response would be made which may lead to a widely published article to address the points raised;
        - Messages posted on the SHDC Facebook page which included certain words, such as profanity, were filtered out and abusive comments directed at the council/officers could be hidden from public view. Negative comments were not hidden

as a matter of course since all opinions, if not factually incorrect or abusive, were welcomed;
    - The ability of the public to post comments on Facebook could be removed however this would only be considered in very specific circumstances and had not yet been deemed necessary;
    - Members were encouraged to report any unresolved inaccuracies or untruths posted on the SHDC social media sites direct to the team via communications@sholland.gov.uk; and
    - Following processes in place at East Lindsey, a solution was being explored to unlock further engagement activity capacity for South Holland;
- The Assistant Director – Corporate confirmed that:
    - Decisions to respond to public comments on SHDC's social media platforms were assessed by the team on a case-by-case basis however engagement would not take place on third party sites;
    - It was expected that a response would be made where an identified inaccuracy had been posted to a SHDC platform however responses to comments relating to specific service areas required the input of relevant officers;
    - Where a public comment on a SHDC platform exceeded allowable standards, the comment could be deleted, hidden, or be responded to where necessary; and
    - The need for a social media policy had been identified to provide a framework for officers and would be presented to the Policy Development Panel in due course.
- Members welcomed future pre-scrutiny of a new social media policy, with particular interest expressed regarding action to counteract the spread of untruths.

- Members referred to the recruitment of two apprentices to the Communications Team and noted that one apprentice had been appointed to officer level within a ten-month period. Did the council usually attract such high-quality candidates or had this been a particularly impressive cohort.
    - The Communications Lead responded that apprenticeship recruitment considerations for school-leavers strongly focussed on aptitude, enthusiasm and pro-activity, with the view that technical skills would be learnt on the job. The

appointed officer had excelled in these areas.

- Members welcomed advances in the digital sphere, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), but were concerned that traditional communication formats remain available for those who relied on such methods.
    - The Communications Lead responded that:
        - Traditional communication methods remained crucial to the council;
        - Communication methods would only be removed where a purpose was no longer being served. This was currently being considered for 'X' (Twitter) where public engagement was not forthcoming; and
        - The utilisation of AI assisted with 'back-end' processes which therefore released capacity for 'front-end' officer engagement activity.

- Members stated the importance of the member intranet site to provide information, such as relevant officer contacts. When would the site be reinstated?
    - The Communications Lead responded that the aim was for a new partnership member intranet site to be available by the end of December 2024. The site would include contact books, reporting tools, policies, an intelligence hub for ward level data, and quick links to other documents such as the policy registers and risk registers. Member feedback would help shape future development of the site; and
    - The Assistant Director – Corporate added that:
        - Members were invited to take part in a member reference group to provide feedback on the member intranet prior to launch.
            - Cllr Gibson requested to be included in the member reference group; and
        - An updated contact book was due to be reissued in the New Year which would include the addition of senior officer contact information, and the contact details of Boston officer Alison Hull, the designated point of contact for members across the partnership for relevant officer information.

- Members had identified a public misconception regarding the remit and responsibilities of councillors. A communications piece was requested to clarify the

difference between the powers of executive members, non-executive members and officers, and which differentiated between parish, district and county council responsibilities and common civil matters.

- The Communications Lead welcomed the suggestion and would look to release a piece on the matters raised to coincide with the Local Government Association's annual spring national campaign regarding local councillors.

- Members requested information regarding the 'Neighbourhood' WhatsApp channel.
  - The Communications Lead advised that:
    - WhatsApp 'channels' were distinct from WhatsApp 'groups' in that they were used solely for content output where subscribers received real-time information via newsfeeds;
    - WhatsApp channels were deemed to be an effective tool in disseminating information especially in crisis situations; and
    - Whilst the WhatsApp channel would be utilised district-wide, the council also utilised the Nextdoor App to relay information at ward level.

- Members queried how digital communication was released during a critical incident, such as loss of power.
  - The Assistant Director – Corporate responded that:
    - The county-wide 'Lincolnshire Resilience Forum' was in place to deal with both the effects of and the output response during emergency scenario emergencies;
    - The services of the BBC were embedded within the forum;
    - The forum regularly advised how the public should prepare for emergency scenarios such as the benefits of obtaining a 'wind-up' radio, and ensuring battery life on mobile phones; and
    - Traditional communication methods would also be utilised in emergency scenarios such as posting to local noticeboards and the cascading of information into communities by elected members.

- Members were grateful for the weekly 'member update' emails which were considered very helpful.

- Members thanked the Communications Lead for the update at the meeting and progress made.

AGREED:

That the progress of the Partnership Communications Strategy one year from adoption, be noted.

61. S&ELCP PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STRATEGY

Consideration was given to the report of the Assistant Director – Wellbeing and Community Leadership which set the context as to how the Council intended to meet the private sector housing challenges and opportunities which confronted the service and to set out the key priorities for action and delivery.

The Service Manager for Safer Communities attended to present the report and the Portfolio Holder for Strategic and Operational Housing attended to support the item.

The Service Manager for Safer Communities introduced the report and highlighted the following main areas:

- Background to the report, including that:
    - Following a decision supported by Full Council at a meeting held on 15 May 2024, the three Housing Standards Teams from BBC, ELDC & SHDC were brought together to operate as one single team across the partnership area with shared working arrangements;
    - The service realignment had provided resilience within the partnership. Working processes were also being aligned; and
    - The Private Sector Housing Strategy being considered at the current meeting represented the next stage of development for the service.
- The report outlined the strategy's four key priorities and four outcome-based commitments at points 2.1 and 2.2 respectively;
- The S&ELCP Private Sector Housing Strategy was at Appendix 1; and
- Guidance and definitions were at Appendix 2.

Members considered the report and made the following comments:

- Members welcomed the clarity and content of the document particularly regarding empty properties and queried whether the strategy would support such

properties being brought back into use.

- The Service Manager for Safer Communities responded that:
  - A document to be presented across the partnership would provide wide-ranging options for each of the three councils in respect of empty properties and any impact directly correlated with the ambitions and commitments of each sovereign council;
  - A mapping exercise to identify empty properties was to take place throughout the partnership which would involve liaising with Council Tax colleagues, members and communities; and
  - The council would have an extensive toolkit to deal with the unique circumstances of each case.

- Members queried the processes to be used to ensure that rogue landlords were identified.
  - The Service Manager for Safer Communities responded that:
    - With the exception of licenced Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) where a duty of inspection prevailed, there was no legal requirement for landlords to register with the local authority. Non-registered properties would therefore only be inspected as a result of a complaint or where concerns relating to other properties belonging to the same landlord came to the council's attention;
    - The Safer Communities team worked closely with internal service areas, such as Planning, Waste Services, Homelessness and Environment Health, and external partners such as the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Police, estate agents, Fire and Immigration Services to assist with the identification of rogue landlords;
    - Any landlord identified as rogue would be registered as such. A number of enforcement tools were available to prevent such individuals from becoming landlords in the future; and
    - Through the utilisation of a strict criteria assessment process, two rogue landlords had been identified across the partnership area during the previous four-month period.

- The Portfolio Holder for Strategic and Operational Housing added that:
  - The Safer Communities Team were working hard in this area and took all reports from residents very seriously. The team were trained to investigate reports objectively which had resulted in action being taken; and
  - A communication piece had been issued to advise private tenants of the role that the local authority played in respect of private rental matters.
- The Assistant Director – Wellbeing and Community Leadership added that:
  - Good landlords were very much supported by the council and in this regard, South Holland had instigated a Landlords Forum which was highly valued;
  - There was a need for an increased supply of decent and healthy homes for residents and good landlords needed to be encouraged; and
  - A damp and mould trial across the partnership was being undertaken which would create opportunities for objective conversations with residents regarding issues and solutions.

- Members referred to rental properties that were managed by estate agents and queried the contact process where an issue was reported to the council.
  - The Service Manager for Safer Communities responded that:
    - In such circumstances the initial communication would be made with the estate agent however should enforcement action be required, notices would be served to both the estate agent and the landlord; and
    - The team had a good local knowledge of estate agents in the area and therefore were aware of the most effective approaches to be taken when issues were raised.
  - The Portfolio Holder for Strategic and Operational Housing added that:
    - Properties managed by estate agents on behalf of landlords effectively placed an added layer between the landlord and resident which at times resulted in delays to the resolution of an issue. Increased

mechanisms were needed to avoid delays in this regard; and
- The Safer Communities Team had a strong knowledge of legal powers which could be utilised as required on a case-by-case basis.

AGREED:

a) That after consideration by the Policy Development Panel, the South and East Lincolnshire Council's Partnership Private Sector Housing Strategy be noted; and

b) That a progress update of the South and East Lincolnshire Council's Partnership Private Sector Housing Strategy be presented to the Policy Development Panel one year from adoption at Cabinet.

62. STREET NAMING AND NUMBERING POLICY

Consideration was given to the report of the Assistant Director – Regulatory which introduced a Partnership Street Naming and Numbering (SNN) Policy.

The Assistant Director – Regulatory introduced the report which included the following main points:

- That Street Naming and Numbering was a statutory function;
- That SHDC had an existing SNN Policy in place which had been reviewed and was to be introduced/aligned across the partnership;
- The purpose of the SNN Policy and reasons for/benefits of the current review; and
- The draft policy was detailed at Appendix 1.

Members considered the report and made the following comments:

- Members raised the following points in respect of the street naming decision making process:
    - Regarding the naming of streets after people, outlined at point 6.2. of the Appendix, a member cited an example of a new development which had utilised female forenames as street names and it was observed that a proven connection to the land appeared to be unclear/loose. Clarification was sought regarding the timescale for which a 'historical' connection could be applied; and

- Members cited an example where concerns were raised regarding a developer proposal for a street name which was deemed inappropriate by the Parish Council and the community. Although the proposal was subsequently discarded, members sought clarification on the decision-making process.
    - The Assistant Director – Regulatory responded that:
        - The process for street naming was set out in the existing Street Naming and Numbering Policy which focused on a requirement for developers to consult with local communities and the Parish Council;
        - As part of the consultation process, it was advised that a pre-consideration process be undertaken where developers provided three options to Town/Parish councils for consideration. Where specific concerns existed, alternative options from Town/Parish Councils would be encouraged as part of the negotiation process;
        - Where an agreement between the developer and Town/Parish council could not be reached, SHDC was bound to uphold the objection and the decision would be referred to the Portfolio Holder;
        - Regarding the developer street name proposal which was discarded following concern expressed by the Parish Council, this represented a good example of the policy in action. Confirmation was given that developers did not have the overriding authority regarding street naming decisions; and
        - In respect of 'naming after people' evidence would need to be provided and considered as part of the process and assessed on a case-by-case basis. For a historical connection to be made, guidance stated that this be a ten-year period from the date of death.

- Members asked whether a register of potential street name options for developers was in place.
    - The Assistant Director – Regulatory agreed that the utilisation of a register which listed pre-approved road names within parishes would be helpful.

Enquiries would be made as to whether a register was already in place at South Holland. It was noted that members at Boston Borough Council had also suggested this approach during recent scrutiny of the policy.

- Members queried whether the charging of a fee to name an established property was a new policy. In addition, where an owner sought reinstatement of a lost or disused house name, would a charge still apply.
    - The Assistant Director – Regulatory responded that:
        - The application of a charge for the naming of properties was inherent to the existing policy; and
        - Discretion may apply regarding the reinstatement of lost house names however this would be investigated and reported back to the committee.

- Members noted the policy of avoiding similar road names within the local authority area/town however it was felt that consideration should be extended to the names of streets outside of the district council borders but that were within a reasonable proximity of an adjoining neighbouring district.
    - The Assistant Director – Regulatory agreed with this suggestion and a point to this effect would be included within the draft policy.

AGREED:

That after consideration of the Partnership Street Naming and Numbering Policy at Appendix 1, the comments of the panel be noted.

63. 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 Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which included the following:

- Appendix 1 outlined meeting dates and respective scheduled items; and
- Appendix 2 outlined current and pending task groups.

The Chairman asked that members give thought to any subject

matter(s) they wished to be investigated through a task group.

Members did not have any further comments.

AGREED:

That the Policy Development Panel work programme be noted.

64. PUBLIC SECTOR PARTNERSHIP SERVICES (PSPS) BUSINESS PLAN 2025 TO 2027 AND THE COUNCIL/PSPS TRANSFORMATION AND SERVICE MODERNISATION PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to the report of the Assistant Director – Corporate which asked members to provide feedback on the proposed PSPS Business Plan 2025 to 2027 and the Council/PSPS Transformation and Service Modernisation Programme.

The Assistant Director – Corporate, the Chief Finance Officer (PSPS), the Head of ICT and Digital (PSPS) and the Portfolio Holder – Strategic and Operational Housing attended in person for this item, and the Chief Executive (PSPS) attended virtually.

The Assistant Director – Corporate introduced the item by highlighting the following points:

- Appendix A was the PSPS Business Plan 2025 to 2027 which, as founding shareholders of PSPS, was being considered at both South Holland District Council and East Lindsey District Council;
- Appendix B was the Transformation and Service Modernisation Programme which, due to commercial sensitivities to PSPS, was being considered in closed session at agenda item 19. Appendix B recommended future investment and as such needed to be considered by all three councils of the partnership;
- Member briefings had taken place across the partnership in respect of the content of the documents;
- Regarding the governance process, the documents had received relevant scrutiny and had been supported at both Boston Borough Council and East Lindsey District Council. Following scrutiny at the current meeting, the documents would be presented at SHDC Cabinet in January 2025.

The Chief Executive (PSPS) introduced Appendix A which included the following main areas:

- Context and background: that Public Sector Partnership

Services Ltd (PSPS) was a Local Authority Trading Company (LATCo) wholly owned by South Holland District Council, East Lindsey District Council and Boston Borough Council. In operation for fifteen years, PSPS was among the longest established and mature LATCos in the country, delivering both back-office and front-facing services for South Holland, East Lindsey and Boston councils for over 305,000 residents;

- Financing efficiencies;
- PSPS journey from 2009 to 2024;
- The strategic intention of PSPS;
- The services provided by PSPS including: customer contact, procurement and contracts, corporate services, revenues and benefits, HR, finance and ICT;
- The financial context;
- Governance and internal scrutiny;
- Priorities and people;
- Transformation plan;
- Commissioning and performance;
- Customer satisfaction and maturity assessment;
- Maturity model;
- Environmental commitment; and
- Growth.

Members considered Appendix A and did not raise any questions.

AGREED:

That the PSPS Business Plan 2025 to 2027 at Appendix A be noted.

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

There were none.

66. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public were excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

67. PUBLIC SECTOR PARTNERSHIP SERVICES (PSPS) BUSINESS PLAN 2025 TO 2027 AND THE COUNCIL/PSPS TRANSFORMATION AND SERVICE MODERNISATION PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to the exempt Appendix (B) from agenda item 16.

AGREED:

a) That the PSPS Transformation and Service Modernisation Programme at Appendix B, be noted; and

b) That ongoing scrutiny of the delivery of the Transformation and Service Modernisation Programme be included in the work programme of the Policy Development Panel, with the first update to be received in 18 months' time.

(The meeting ended at 8.55 pm)

(End of minutes)