



Promoting excellence in public services in the East Midlands

MINUTES OF THE EAST MIDLANDS SOLACE BRANCH MEETING FRIDAY 16 DECEMBER 2005 AT MELTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

Present:	<p>Duncan Kerr Simon Bovey James Gravenor Keith Beaumont Peter Murdock Barbara Ding Lynn Aisbett Duncan Sharkey Mark Lovell Craig Bonar Ruth Hyde Ben Williams Peter Murphy Janet Ward Alf Dewis David Myers</p>	<p>South Kesteven District Council Daventry District Council North East Derbyshire District Council Rushcliffe Borough Council Gedling Borough Council East Northamptonshire Council Melton Borough Council West Lindsey District Council East Northamptonshire Council Mansfield District Council Oadby & Wigston Borough Council High Peak Borough Council ODPM/GOEM Local Government East Midlands Consultant Local Government East Midlands Cabinet Office, Central Government</p>
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ACTION

1. **Notes of Last Meeting**

Agreed as accurate.

2. **Matters Arising**

Branch Website Update

Simon Bovey advised that positive progress on website development had been made with national SOLACE and with Local Government East Midlands, the former being at no cost to the Branch. Approaches have also been made to GOEM and De Montfort, partly to check their acceptance of a Branch website association via logos.

Agreed: Branch website be developed via National SOLACE and site links made with LGEM website (currently in transformation). Responses to be pursued from GOEM and De Montfort in anticipation of endorsement (without need for financial commitment).

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3. **Consideration of Strategic Partnership with De Montfort University**

Duncan Kerr reported fruitful rapport with the Dean of De Montfort. Letter from De Montfort confirmed their will to pursue strategic partnership with the Branch on a one-year trial basis. To help embed such arrangements it was **Agreed** Branch and De Montfort enter into a one-year trial partnership. **Agreed** that De Montfort be invited to host the 26/5/06 meeting and be invited to suggest agenda items of mutual interest for that meeting.

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4. **Shared Services/Local Area Agreements**

David Myers – Cabinet Office

David Myers of the Cabinet Office gave a 'Shared Services' presentation that emphasised the need for joined-up and shared services, not service duplication. [David will be moving into PM's Delivery Unit to help deliver such an agenda.] He advocated the application of such arrangements to any service, by convergence of back office infrastructure in particular. Examples include Blackburn with Darwen, Rotherham and Liverpool where top quartile performance and cost efficiencies arose. HR and Finance seen as ripe for saving opportunity in central government and Customer Access highlighted at local level. Links were made with the proposals to integrate services in East Midlands (ref: last meeting minutes) which was seen as necessary – East Midlands is bit of a vacuum nationally in terms of shared services David advised. Website is available for those interested in pursuing shared services – see Delivery Unit site www.cio.gov.uk/shared_services/index.asp. David invited applications to him if authorities were interested in pathfinder financial assistance. Political buy-in nationally evident via Cabinet 6/10/05 deliberations. Tony Blair and Gordon Brown are behind this agenda. There is a need to stop the trend of a plethora of small-scale shared service arrangements that are geographically limited though overall local government is leading the public sector.

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Contributions from the floor cited existence of blockers to shared services, particularly on HR (David cited the challenge being overcome at Blackburn with Darwen); the potential for extension of shared services in East Midlands; concern that reorganisation agenda will affect the pace of change; the need to retain service ethos for customer benefit, such that shared services can still be localised; the advantage of using private sector hosts as contractors, countered by concerns about privatisation and union reaction. David reiterated the benefits to customers and retained staff in the Blackburn with Darwen example, and in that regeneration area the benefits of local employment/upskilling. Message for David Myers from Labour councils was the objection to what is seen as privatisation, and the need for Government to politically respond to this feeling – secondment was seen as one such response.

James Gravenor – North Derbyshire

'North Derbyshire' presentation illustrated sharing services of internal audit, e-procurement, building control, corporate services. He saw the need for bottom-up issues to be acknowledged as not just 'blockers' but based on 'necessity', reality and local pride. James pointed to a track record of localised working together, including when political colours 'clashed'. He highlighted the tactical benefits of shared services for CPA and Gershon. Some of the chosen

services were prompted for sharing due to opportunism (staff vacancies) and non-political consequences. Sharing is of staff or assets. Regular high-level officer liaison in early stages, plus support officer groups, between the councils. Joint scrutiny is also established. Important need for simultaneous briefing of councils' staff and councillors. Protocol is guide for working relationships. Centre of Excellence funding of £10,000 kick started process. Gateway Reviews taken place as some service sharing is still in development. Approach has been to join with councils where there is close relationship. Outcomes so far are better inter-council working; better agenda response eg diversity; some savings, with more anticipated. Scorecard to evaluate possible outcomes/target used by each council, to enable comparison and decision on need for continued progress.

Keith Beaumont and Peter Murdock – Gedling and Rushcliffe

'Gedling and Rushcliffe' presentation identified the importance of positive Chief Executive endorsement, particularly where authorities are similar and could be seen by others as local government reorganisation candidates. Focus is on customer service outcomes, not processes via joint or host delivery. Need for exact business case was demonstrated. Similar services and issues to North Derbyshire have been tackled in Gedling and Rushcliffe. Key to partnership was to focus on what prospective partner councils have in common – situation by edge of city and impacts arising; size; functions; 'family' profile; CPA rating; desire to work together. Difficulties and differences are to be expected – culture, governance, terms and conditions, politics sometimes. Service areas discussed include strategic housing; depot services; crime and disorder; health and safety; support office functions inc procurement. Helps to be able to start from scratch ie where no incumbents. Communication is critical. Need also to be clear about time allocations of shared staff, who is the employer, and so on. It takes time! Desire is to get bigger partnerships. Joint Board arrangement is formally established, meeting quarterly to make recommendations to their respective Cabinets.

Ben Williams – High Peak and Derbyshire Dales

'High Peak and Derbyshire Dales' presentation shared experience of affordable housing address. Strategic housing functions being shared with drivers including the desire for one sub-regional voice to Regional Housing Board. Derbyshire Dales host the team, High Peak second some staff. Simple Service Level Agreement used and Exit Strategy exists. Again, differences exist but are not to be hindrances. Added value extends beyond councils to partners, for example, fewer bodies to contact for RSLs; significantly twenty fold increase in Housing Corporation funding also secured. Big message was 'keep it simple' in arrangements and have business case.

Contributions from the floor noted the plethora of good practice this showed in the East Midlands, which David Myers was impressed with. Protocols were asked to be shared with David. Key drivers for wider roll-out were the need to win hearts and minds in local government; be clear on success criteria for customers; show relevance to all partners; seeing links to Gershon and CPA; being focused on outcomes. David Myers advised that he might invite such presentations to be made to the Government's advisory groups.

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The Chairman thanked all speakers for their excellent material and thanked attendees for their numerous contributions.

5. **Date of Next Meetings**

Dates of next meeting was noted, with 26/5/06 meeting also having the precursory AGM. It was advised that joint conference acceptance was awaited, but once received information would be circulated. **Agreed** Joint Conference be pursued.

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