



PRCC.38 11/12

Prosperous Communities
Committee

28 March 2012

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Subject: "Are We Open for Business" – Request for a Member to serve on the Working Group Established by the Challenge and Improvement Committee on 28 February 2012.

Report by:

Director Of Resources

Contact Officer:

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Purpose / Summary:

To seek a nomination for a Member of this Committee to serve on the "Are We Open for Business" –Working Group Established by the Challenge and Improvement Committee on 28 February 2012.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

- 1) That Members nominate a Member of this Committee to serve on the "Are We Open for Business" –Working Group Established by the Challenge and Improvement Committee on 28 February 2012.**

IMPLICATIONS

Legal: None

Financial : None

Staffing : None

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights : No impact.

Risk Assessment : None

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities : None

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

Call in and Urgency:

Is the decision one which Rule 14 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?

Yes

No

Key Decision:

Yes

No

1. **Background and Introduction**

1.1 At the Committee's meeting on 1 February 2012, Members considered a report in respect of income and expenditure streams in the Building Control, Planning and Land Charges Functions.

1.2 The relating minute and resolution is set out below:

ANALYSIS OF INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STREAMS IN THE BUILDING CONTROL, PLANNING AND LAND CHARGES FUNCTIONS (PRCC.28 11/12)

Members gave consideration report which provided an analysis of income and expenditure streams in respect of the Planning and Local Land Charges functions, as requested by the Committee at its meeting of 2 November 2011.

Lengthy discussion ensued and a Member re-iterated those points previously expressed at the Committee's meeting on 2 November 2011 namely of concerns that the decision to introduce a fee for pre-application planning advice from April 2011 had not had the desired effect and could be a contributing factor to the current budget position.

Previously, Members had expressed a view that the need to ensure the Council's services were competitively priced was vital, if income levels in these areas was to improve in the future and Councillor Kinch indicated comparative research of those charges levied by a number of neighbouring authorities had been undertaken by officers of his company. With the permission of the Chairman the findings arising therefrom were introduced to the Committee.

In light of the information, Members cited a number of possible avenues, with the income generation potential, that they considered would be worthy of further exploration and / or making representations to Central Government on, including:

- developers paying to renew their existing planning permissions when they expire thus preventing developers digging foundations for the first property in order to retain the planning permission permanently; and
- Roof Top Taxing.

The Committee made reference to the Authority's commitment of being an "Entrepreneurial Council", and there was general consensus that those suggestions made would assist and support the Council in achieving such. Furthermore Members were of the view that fees and charges across the Authority needed to be set accordingly to support this ethos and spirit.

Taking into consideration all of those points and suggestions raised during the debate, Officers suggested, this matter may be something Members wished to consider requesting the Challenge and Improvement Committee to further investigate and make recommendations back to this Committee in due course based on their findings. The headline title of "How open are we for business " was further suggested and considered broad enough to encompass not only those points raised but other wider factors also.

Members unanimously supported and welcomed the proposed way forward and on that basis it was **RESOLVED** that:

- (a) the contents of report PRCC.28 11/12 be noted; and
- (b) in the light of comments and suggestion made throughout the course of the debate the Challenge and Improvement Committee be requested to undertake a review of the Council's activities in order to determine "How open are we for business" and report their findings and any recommendations arising there from back to a future meeting of the Prosperous Communities Committee for further consideration, in accordance with the adopted Overview and Scrutiny Procedure rules.

Note: Councillor Stuart Kinch declared a personal interest in the above item of business as the owner / manager of a local development company.

1.3 In connection with resolution (b) above, the Challenge and Improvement Committee at its meeting on 28 February 2012 consider the request from this Committee.

1.4 The relating minute and arising resolution are set out below: -

68 RECOMMENDATION FROM PROSPEROUS COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

The Prosperous Communities Committee had resolved on 1 February 2012:-

"Members unanimously supported and welcomed the proposed way forward and on that basis it was **RESOLVED** that:

- (a) the contents of report PRCC.28 11/12 be noted; and
- (b) in the light of comments and suggestion made throughout the course of the debate the Challenge and Improvement Committee be requested to undertake a review of the Council's activities in order to determine "How open are we for business" and report their findings and any recommendations arising there from back to a future meeting of the Prosperous Communities Committee for further consideration, in accordance with the adopted Overview and Scrutiny Procedure rules."

The Democratic Services Team Leader had circulated the Prosperous Communities Committee report and minutes to the Challenge and Improvement Committee Members to clarify the matter. The report had been an Analysis of Income and Expenditure Streams in the Building Control, Planning and Land Charges Functions, and it was proposed that the Challenge and Improvement Committee further consider how helpful, or otherwise, the Council was in the provision of its services. Are we competitive with other Councils, whilst also giving consideration to the quality of the service provided?

The Chief Executive had recommended that the committee spend some time considering the objectives of the group and recommended the following for consideration:

1. that the committee invite a member of the prosperous community committee to join the working group

Proposed Objectives

1. Survey businesses to understand how they feel and what the issues are,
2. Understand the regulations to see whether or not we enforce in a customer friendly way. This should include other forms of regulation is well such as Lincolnshire County Council trading standards.
3. Look at forms of business support that we offer and what is available from central government and how our offering benchmarks against other councils, as suggested by the P&R committee.

It was recommended that the group also get offset support from a member of the regulatory service team.

The group should consider in their final recommendations:

1. How West Lindsey and other regulators can make improvements, and
2. Proposed changes to feed into the central government review of better regulation.

It was agreed that the project could be a big task, and it was suggested that Members of the Challenge and Improvement Committee, also be assisted by Councillor Kinch as well a further Member from the Prosperous Communities Committee.

RESOLVED that Councillors Bierley and Patterson, along with Councillor Kinch and an additional Member from the Prosperous Communities Committee form a working group to consider “How open are we for business?”

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 Members are asked to nominate a Member of this Committee to serve on the “Are We Open for Business” –Working Group Established by the Challenge and Improvement Committee on 28 February 2012.