

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of Council held in the Council Chamber at the Guildhall, Gainsborough, on Monday, 4 March 2013, at 7.00pm.

Present:

Councillor Jessie Milne (In the Chair)
Councillor Irmgard Parrott (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Gillian Bardsley	Councillor Giles McNeill
Councillor Owen Bierley	Councillor Malcolm Parish
Councillor Mark Binns	Councillor William Parry
Councillor Nigel Bowler	Councillor Roger Patterson
Councillor Ken Bridger	Councillor Judy Rainsforth
Councillor Jackie Brockway	Councillor Tom Regis
Councillor Alan Caine	Councillor Di Rodgers
Councillor Stuart Curtis	Councillor Sue Rawlins
Councillor Chris Darcel	Councillor Lesley Rollings
Councillor Richy Doran	Councillor Reg Shore
Councillor Ian Fleetwood	Councillor Lewis Strange
Councillor Paul Howitt-Cowan	Councillor Jeff Summers
Councillor Burt Keimach	Councillor Geoff Wiseman
Councillor Angela Lawrence	Councillor Trevor Young
Councillor Malcolm Leaning	

Apologies:

Councillor David Cotton
Councillor David Dobbie
Councillor Stuart Kinch
Councillor Mick Tinker
Councillor Chris Underwood-Frost
Councillor Anne Welburn

In Attendance:

Manjeet Gill	Chief Executive
Mark Sturgess	Director of Regeneration and Planning
Rachel North	Director of Communities and Localism
Russell Stone	Chief Finance Officer
Alan Robinson	Head of Central Services
Alex Reeks	Assistant Chief Executive
Katie Coughlan	Governance and Civic Officer

Also in Attendance: The Rev'd Phillip Wain 4 x Petitioners

Also Present: 2 x members of the public

93 PRAYERS

The meeting commenced with prayers by The Reverend Phillip Wain.

94 CHAIRMAN'S OPENING STATEMENT

In formally opening the meeting, the Chairman addressed all Members, making reference to recent experiences at Council meetings and reminding them of the need to be respectful to one another and to Officers.

95 COUNCIL MINUTES (Paper A)

In reference to Minute 82 and the response which had been provided by the Leader of the Council to the question submitted by Councillor Rainsforth, the Leader of the Opposition stated that the figures quoted in the minutes did not reflect the response which had been given on the night.

Furthermore Councillor Darcel, made reference to a point he had made in the meeting on 28 January 2013, but which had not been reflected in the minutes and indicated his wish for this to included.

In respect of the latter, the Monitoring Officer advised that minutes were not a verbatim record, rather a summary of the main points made and the key decisions. Anyone wishing to hear or view the meeting in its entirety could do so by watching the webcast. However, in respect of the former, Officers undertook to amend the minutes accordingly to reflect the inaccuracy cited by the Leader of the Opposition and on that basis it was: -

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 28 January 2013 be confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the required amendment.

96 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest at this point in the meeting.

97 MATTERS ARISING (Paper B)

The Governance and Civic Officer introduced the Matters Arising Schedule which set out the current position of all previously agreed actions as at 22 February. It was noted that all actions had been completed on target.

Members made reference to the comment included in the green action and indicated that this was in fact inaccurate as the next Member Forum had been designated to look at the Members' Extranet. Officers apologised for the

oversight and advised that at the time the report had been produced this had been the intention. The session on the Council's Constitution and Protocol on Operational Conventions would now be moved to the next Members Forum and Members would be advised of a date in due course. Although an initial discussion on the formatting of the necessary work would be raised at the Members Forum on the 13th March.

Referring back to the forthcoming Members' Forum on the Extranet a Member commented that she was unable to attend as this clashed with a long standing appointment and expressed her disappointment at this. Officers undertook to arrange a second session in order to enable as many Members as possible to attend and again indicated that Members would be advised of the date in due course.

RESOLVED that progress on the Matters Arising Schedule, as set out in Paper B, together with the verbal update provided at the meeting, be received and noted.

98 ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chairman of the Council

The Council Chairman informed the meeting that during her civic engagements on 9 February 2013, she had attended a sponsored wall climb held by the Air Training Cadets to raise funds in memory of a soldier, and former air cadet, killed in action in Afghanistan. Those taking part scaled the height of Mount Everest by 3.30 pm in the afternoon and so far had raised funds totalling almost £2,000. Later that day she had attended at HM Lord Lieutenant's Reception for Reserve Service Personnel at Prince William of Gloucester Barracks in Grantham and wished to place on record her thanks to all employers who allowed employees to undertake such duties, without which this country would not have the army it has.

Finally, the Chairman made reference to the Charity "Bit of a Do" she had jointly hosted with the Chairman of the County Council at Hemswell Court on 14 February. The event had been very well attended and had allowed Hemswell Court to showcase the hospitality they had on offer, with many of the guests having been very impressed with the evening.

Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council announced that he had been privileged to meet "Mary Queen of Shops" (Mary Portas), in Market Rasen, and she had been very impressed with the town, which was one of 12 across the country which had been awarded £100,000 towards regeneration and business support. She had congratulated the Council on continuing to support the Scheme both financially and with access to officer advice as needed, and the Leader made reference to a flagship building which had previously been an eyesore but had

now been restored. He also indicated of Mr Big's (Market Rasen Business Improvement Group) future plans to further regenerate the town and forthcoming planned events and pledged that the Authority would continue support their ventures in any way possible.

Head of Paid Service

The Chief Executive advised January had been a busy month in preparation for the setting of the Council's budget. She also indicated a number of meetings she had recently attended at a national level regarding future grant settlements and future changes to Local Government funding.

The SPARSE Group had met and with support from local MPs had been lobbying the Government regarding the rural settlement. Limited success had been achieved with an adjustment of approx £5-6 million (across the country) having been made. However the original request had been in the region of £70 million and more lobbying was planned for next year.

The Chief Executive had also attended a meeting through the District Councils Network attended by DCLG. There had been some acknowledgement from the DCLG of the key role District Councils could play in the growth and economic development agenda, given their closeness to local communities. It was hoped that future funding decisions would reflect this fact. It had also been implied that the New Homes Bonus would continue into the foreseeable future, whilst it was considered the recent changes to NNDR funding was something that would develop over coming years and was something which would need to be monitored carefully and the risks assessed.

Finally mention was made of the recent MOD summit event. This had been a wonderful event, and had left people feeling inspired and motivated, particularly in respect of the positive partnership relationships displayed.

99 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions from the public.

100 PRESENTATION OF PETITION – WHITTONS GARDENS

The Chairman welcomed the petitioners to the meeting and invited them to make their presentation to Council, in doing so they outlined the reasons for them having started the campaign. It was stressed that they were not opposed to the building of a hotel in Gainsborough but opposed to the proposed siting of the development. They were of the view that Whitton's Gardens belonged to the people of the town and should remain for their use. They disputed the financial business case, citing a number of nearby grot spots they considered were ripe for developing and in the ownership of the Council. Concern was again expressed at the lack of public engagement and consultation which had been undertaken regarding the project and it was also

stated that the concept had considerably changed since it had been first proposed. The petition cited some 800 signatures and Mr Mills considered this indicated the level of feeling amongst the towns people regarding the Project. In concluding Mr Mills indicated that he had recently met with senior Officers and Members of the Authority regarding the way forward and West Lindsey District Council had made an alternative offer, regarding identifying an alternative green space located with the South West Ward for public use. Mr Mills indicated that he would be happy to meet with Members and Officers again to further discuss the proposals over coming months.

The Chairman of the Prosperous Communities Committee outlined the nature of the discussions which had taken place with the petitioners and commented on the positive and constructive nature of the meeting. In essence, the outcome had been that assurances had been given that the Council would review its assets list with a view to identifying an alternative green space within the Ward, followed by a degree of public consultation during the Summer after which time the intention was to invite the petitioners back for further discussions.

On that basis it was moved and seconded that the matter be referred to the Prosperous Communities Committee to oversee.

However, there was an opposing view expressed with some Members feeling this was not about the land or hotel but was in fact a matter of principle and about how the Council should operate when embarking on large scale / sensitive proposals. It was also considered the alternative offer of land was not comparable to what was being lost considering its riverside location and its use during major events within the town, one being the Riverside Festival.

The Leader of the Opposition raised various points regarding the bidding process, changes to the development, the lack of public consultation which had been undertaken and apparent disregard of resident's views and needs.

It was proposed and seconded that the Scheme should be put on hold, pending the holding of a public meeting / consultation event to ascertain the views of the towns people prior to the Scheme moving to the next stage. However on being put to the vote the motion was declared lost.

On that basis it was: -

RESOLVED that the matter be referred to the Prosperous Communities for further investigation with a view to identifying an alternative green space within the South West Ward.

101 QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 9

Councillor Lewis Strange submitted the following question to the Chairman of Council: -

Chairman

Are you aware of the work our Housing team do? Would you join with me in thanking, Mr Andy Gray and his housing team in the work they have done in relocating a disabled lady, into a new property. Obviously the lady's identity has to be protected, however there were other distressing details in the case, which had to be sorted out quickly. These are rarely easy to solve as it also involved our housing partners, however an excellent outcome that both the family concerned, Cllr Jeff Summers and myself are extremely thankful, to our housing team, for an excellent outcome.

My question is would you personally thank them on behalf of the Council?

The Chairman responded as follows: -

Thank you Councillor Strange for your question.

Like you I am also aware of how well our people work in our housing section. Their tasks are not always easy, in fact almost all of the requests they receive are difficult as empty properties are few and far between.

Their job is going to become even more difficult now with the empty bedroom tax about to come into force, as one bedroom properties are at a premium and there is already great concern amongst residents as they will have to pay for any bedrooms that are not in use.

The problem is managing people's expectations, it is assumed that a property can just be plucked out of the air, which of course it cannot.

Having had some experience of dealing with these people myself I know just what our staff have to go through at times. So I am delighted to pass on to our housing staff your message of thanks and I am sure all Councillors would wish to join you also in expressing their thanks for the great work that is done to help make the lives of our residents as easy as possible during difficult times and ask for this to please be minuted.

Thank you

Councillor Lewis Strange submitted the following question to the Leader of the Council: -

Leader,

As a result of the county council adopting its Wind Energy Position Statement on the 22nd February at their full council, what measures as a member of the Joint Planning unit and Leader of this council will he take,

in reinforcing the view as a result of the County questionnaire showing 87.1% of those responding, opposing further wind farms in areas affecting West Lindsey residents.

Further what are his views on the request that the County Council's new guidelines should be taken into consideration by local planning authorities and developers when deciding where to locate developments.

Thank you,

The Leader of The Council, in responding, stated: -

As a member of the Central Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee I will be in a position to review the content of the Core Strategy before it is submitted to the Secretary of State for examination in July this year. In doing that I will – along with the rest of the Joint Committee – critically assess all the policies in the Core Strategy to ensure that they meet the needs of the residents of Central Lincolnshire.

The policies with regard to the renewable energy will need to have regard to the evidence base considered by the Committee (the energy study) and national and regional policy (conformity with the National Planning Policy Framework).

With regard to the County Council's policy statement, this is capable of being a material consideration when planning applications for wind energy proposals are considered; however it will carry very little weight in the planning process.

102 RESULT OF THE GAINSBOROUGH EAST WARD BY ELECTION – 14 FEBRUARY 2013 (Paper C)

The Chairman and all Members congratulated Councillor Mark Binns on being elected a West Lindsey District Councillor, and welcomed him to the Chamber.

Councillor McNeill asked for his thanks to be recorded to all West Lindsey officers on duty on polling day.

RESOLVED that the result of the Gainsborough East Ward by Election held on 14 February 2013 be received and noted.

103 APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEES (Paper D)

RESOLVED that, in accordance with the provisions of section 16 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and the wishes expressed by political groups, Members be appointed to serve on the Council's committees for the remainder of the 2012/13 civic year as follows:

Licensing and Regulatory Committee (11 members)

Councillor Jessie Milne (Chairman)
Councillor Irmgard Parrott (Vice Chair)
Councillor Owen Bierley
Councillor Mark Binns
Councillor David Cotton
Councillor Chris Darcel
Councillor Richy Doran
Councillor Roger Patterson
Councillor Judy Rainsforth
Councillor Lewis Strange
Councillor Anne Welburn

Taxi & General Licensing Sub-Committee (10 Members)

Councillor Owen Bierley (Chairman)
Councillor Anne Welburn (Vice Chair)
Councillor Mark Binns
Councillor Jackie Brockway
Councillor David Cotton
Councillor Burt Keimach
Councillor William Parry
Councillor Judy Rainsforth
Councillor Diana Rodgers
Councillor Geoff Wiseman

Joint Staff Consultative Committee (four Members and four Reserves)

Councillor Bowler
Councillor Brockway
Councillor Cotton
Councillor Welburn
Councillor Binns (reserve)
Councillor Darcel (reserve)
Councillor Parish (reserve)
Councillor Summers (reserve)

Housing Appeals Board

Councillor Binns
Councillor Parish
Councillor Parry
Councillor Rainsforth
Councillor Rawlins
Councillor Welburn

Chief Officer Employment Committee

Councillor David Cotton
Councillor Alan Caine
Councillor Ian Fleetwood
Councillor Burt Keimach
Councillor William Parry

Councillor Roger Patterson
Councillor Lesley Rollings
Councillor Reg Shore
Councillor Chris Underwood Frost

**104 FINANCIAL STRATEGY AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN
2013/14 – 2017/18 (THE BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX
SETTING) (Paper E)**

Prior to consideration of the written paper, the Chief Financial Officer gave a presentation which encapsulated the salient points. The presentation updated Members on future funding mechanisms, provided context around future decision making and sought views on further involvement.

The different types of funding were described: Administration (e.g. Housing benefits); Collection authority (e.g. Council Tax and Business rates); Capital and Revenue Reserves and Operating budget. There had been recent legislative changes to such mechanisms such as Business Rates Retention and Council Tax Benefit Support, which placed a greater onus on local rather than national government. The principles of the New Homes Bonus were also described.

In presenting the report the CFO set out his view that estimates are sufficiently robust and that the level of reserves and balances are adequate. A modest increase of 1.5% Council Tax was proposed to partially address the projected deficit. Those savings which had been relatively easy to achieve had been completed and more difficult decisions were now needed in order to make savings of around £3m. Strategies including both internal and external focus and projects which would generate significant income were being considered. Future plans included public consultation and Member engagement, but it was acknowledged that there were more difficult times ahead.

The Leader of the Council addressed the meeting and made his Budget Statement, noting the current state of the country's economy and the problems that all Councils faced in terms of funding cut backs and radical reforms of public services. He went on to state how this would affect local authorities over future years, Funding for local government was projected to fall by 3.9 per cent in 2013/14 and a further 8.5 per cent in 2014/15. This meant that the grant to local government would drop by 33 per cent in real terms over the current Spending Review period, revealing a funding gap of £16.5 billion by 2019/20 if reductions in support continued on the current trends.

In presenting his budget to Council the Leader stated: -

“The budget for 2013/14 proposes an increase in Council Tax of around 5p per week for the majority of homes in West Lindsey. This increase, the first for three years, will mean services to local people can be protected.

It means residents will pay an extra 1.5 per cent for the district council's share of the overall bill in 2013/14, an increase of £2.60 per year for a Band D property.

If we are even moderately observant shoppers we will have seen prices steadily increase since the start of the credit crunch. It is therefore wholly reasonable to expect our services to undergo at least a prudent rise. Keep in mind, and it has been pointed out many times, and as I have said before, that we have frozen West Lindsey tax for the last three years in the face of inflationary pressures and massive government cuts in funding. But even with this measure “We are devoting £300,000 to vulnerable communities to help with fuel poverty, youth unemployment and rural services. As well as investing £1.6 million into the housing infrastructure and £2 million boosting the economy and encouraging jobs growth.”

Despite the multiple issues facing local government the Leader was of the firm belief that a balanced budget was being proposed for the financial year 2013/14, however going forward further savings would need to be found and he set out strong reasons as to why using the Council's reserves to prop up the deficit would be wholly inappropriate and ultimately cause bigger problems rather than solutions in future years. He considered the positive action taken by the Authority meant it was relatively well placed to respond to these challenges. However, he warned unprecedented times were ahead and it was therefore essential that the Council continued to take proactive and sustained action, as without this the Council's financial position would not be sustainable in the longer term.

The Leader of the Council expressed his thanks to the Chief Finance Officer and his team for their assiduous work on the Council's finances, and also gave thanks to Officers and Members for the maintenance of essential services to the District.

The Leader therefore moved, with pride and confidence, that the recommendations in the report be approved and this was duly seconded.

The Leader of the Opposition then addressed the meeting and set out an alternative budget proposal, based on radically changing the current direction of the Authority.

In essence he proposed that West Lindsey District Council should work with neighbouring authorities in order to create unitary partnerships, and outlined his rationale for believing such and the significant savings he considered could be achieved as a result.

It was acknowledged that the process would be lengthy and challenging and thus made the following proposal for consideration, which was duly seconded:

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That there be a zero increase in Council tax and that use be made of the present revenue reserves to fund the Council over the next few years whilst the necessary resources are invested into seriously entering

negotiations with other Councils in the area and indeed across Lincolnshire, to seek unitary solutions to the long term funding shortfall.

Lengthy debate ensued with Members acknowledging that all councils were facing the same difficulties through no fault of their own and that West Lindsey District Council was better off than many. Therefore the general consensus was that a small increase was unavoidable and was a more palatable option than a steep increase in future years. Members commented that a positive outcome of the recent austerity was a notable increase in community spirit and a number of community groups were now very active.

There was also some appetite for the more radical approach suggested by the Leader of the Opposition, but on being put to the vote the proposal was declared lost.

At the request of two Members a recorded vote was taken on those recommendations proposed in the report

For: Councillors Bardsley, Bierley, Bowler, Brockway, Caine, Curtis, Doran, Fleetwood, Howitt-Cowan, Keimach, Lawrence, Leaning, McNeill, Milne, Parish, Parrott, Parry, Patterson, Rawlins, Regis, Rodgers, Strange, Summers, Wiseman

Against: Councillors Binns, Bridger, Darcel, Rainsforth, Rollings, Shore, Young.

With a total of 24 votes for and 7 votes against the motion was declared carried.

On that basis it was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) the external environment and the severity of the financial challenges being faced as detailed in the Financial Strategy, be recognised and noted;
- b) the Medium Term Financial Plan be approved;
- c) the Revenue Budget, as detailed in Appendix A be set;
- d) the Fees and Charges 2013-14, as detailed in Appendix B be approved;
- e) the Capital Programme 2013/14 to 2017/18 as detailed in Appendices D-F be set;
- f) the Treasury Management Strategy be approved and the Investment Strategy, the detailed Counter Party criteria, the Treasury and Borrowing Prudential Indicators as detailed in Appendix G, be adopted;

- g) the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy as contained in the Treasury Management Strategy (Appendix G) be approved;
- h) the Council Tax , as detailed in Appendices H-L be approved; and
- i) the 2013/14 Pay Policy Statement as detailed in Appendix M be approved.

105 TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS PUBLISHED SINCE THE LAST COUNCIL MEETING ON 28 JANUARY 2013.

RESOLVED that the minutes of Committee meetings published since the last Council meeting on 28 January 2013 be received.

The meeting concluded at 9.18 pm.

Chairman