

**WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL**

MINUTES of the Challenge and Improvement Committee held in the Council Chamber at the Guildhall, Gainsborough on Tuesday 17 January 2012 commencing at 6.30 pm.

**Present:** Councillor Alan Caine (Chairman)  
Councillor Paul-Howitt-Cowan (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Owen Bierley  
Councillor David Dobbie  
Councillor Richard Doran  
Councillor Irmgard Parrott  
Councillor Judy Rainsforth  
Councillor Geoff Wiseman

**In Attendance:**

Manjeet Gill	Chief Executive
Russell Stone	Financial Services Manager
Alan Robinson	Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Manager
Grant Lockett	Housing, Renewal & Community Safety Manager
Chris Allen	Public Protection Services Manager
Glyn Pilkington	Operational Services Manager
Alex Reeks	Business Development Officer
Dinah Lilley	Democratic Services Team Leader

**53 APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor Malcolm Leaning

**54 MINUTES**

Meeting of the Challenge and Improvement Committee held on 29 November 2011.

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Challenge and Improvement Committee held on 29 November 2011 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

**55 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**56 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE (CAI.29 11/12)**

The Democratic Services Team Leader presented the Matters Arising Schedule and updated Members on recent changes.

Reference was made to the deferral of the Renewable Energy Statement the previous night by the Council meeting. Members felt that the statement had been unfairly criticised and the further amendments required were to the reasons for the statement rather than the statement itself. The Operational Services Manager clarified that he had been advised that the working group could continue with the actions as set out whilst the wording of the statement was being reconsidered. The Chairman expressed his thanks to the working group and officers for the excellent job they had done on the statement.

The Chairman made reference to a quarterly meeting which took place with himself and the Chairmen of the Prosperous Communities Committee and Policy and Resources Committee to discuss future work programmes and cross Committee issues. It had been suggested that the Challenge and Improvement Committee give consideration to Broadband, Budget Monitoring and a current topical issue of metal theft.

Member Development was to remain an agenda item but with preliminary discussions at the Member Forum, the next meeting of which was scheduled for mid February and would commence at 6.30pm to be more inclusive to all Members. Members commended the format of the Member Forum and commented on its usefulness.

Councillors questioned what progress had been made since Member Development had last been considered by the Committee. The Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Manager gave an update on behalf of the Human Resources Manager, stating that the policy was still work in progress and would in due course be submitted to the Policy and Resources Committee for approval.

**Note** Councillor Dobbie arrived at this point.

A request for information was made on the Entrepreneurial Council presentation which had been withdrawn from the Council agenda which had intended to address the matter of access to services across the district, as raised at a previous Challenge and Improvement Committee meeting. The Chief Executive replied to the question stating that the project had been within the remit of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Resources so there was no progress at present. Clarification was given as to what the Challenge and Improvement Committee were expecting from the matter and it was agreed that Access to Services would be reassigned and be brought back to the Committee at the first meeting of the new municipal year.

A report on the latest progress on Sharepoint was also still awaited and would be chased up.

**RESOLVED** that progress on the Matters Arising Schedule be noted.

## **57 PRESENTATIONS**

A series of presentations was given to the committee to provide updates on new and emerging legislation.

### **i) Welfare, Council Tax and Business Rates reforms**

The Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Manager showed slides which set out the impending changes in legislation under the Localism Act, which meant an 'age of uncertainty'.

In terms of Welfare Reform the main impacts would be: the reduced generosity of the Housing Benefit Scheme; the introduction of Universal Credit to be delivered by the DWP, but which would incur an administration subsidy of around £580,000; and a single Fraud Investigation team.

Changes to Business Rates were intended to incentivise Local Government to create growth – these would be set nationally but collected locally. Questions remained on the implementation and administration of the scheme. There was also a proposal that business rates collected from renewable energy projects would be retained in full by relevant local authorities.

Council Tax changes were summarised, some of which included; a referendum on proposed increases; direct debit and e-billing discounts; and the abolition of certain exemptions.

There were several matters on which it was not possible to predict the future outcome.

### **ii) The Localism Act**

The Housing Renewal and Community Safety Manager summarised the history of the Act, and its scope in both general terms and those specific to Planning. The National Planning Policy Framework meant an end to PPG/PPS and Regional Strategies, and the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CiL). The intention was to devolve more power and flexibility to community level and to encourage the production of Neighbourhood Plans.

Members asked about the assistance available to communities in the production of Neighbourhood Plans, as they were time consuming and costly to produce. Caistor had been fortunate to obtain funding as a pilot project. The Joint Strategic Planning Unit was asking the same questions as to how communities were to be expected to progress Plans. It was suggested that communities could undertake fundraising initiatives at a local level, and also

obtain advice from such organisations as Community Lincs as to how to draw down funding.

### **iii) National Housing Strategy**

The Housing Renewal and Community Safety Manager introduced the latest Housing initiatives: including help for homebuyers; secure loans on new build, changes to Right to Buy legislation. Proposals for helping house builders were also set out, along with matters affecting social housing and the private rented sector.

Empty homes were highlighted as an issue – and although there were around 2,000 in West Lindsey this was a comparatively small figure within the national figure of 700,000, so funding available for the worst areas was unlikely to be achieved by the Council. An Empty Homes Officer had been employed by the Council and would commence work shortly. Members questioned whether the majority of empty homes were social housing or private, and what measures could be taken to address the issue. Most of the properties were in private ownership and initial measures included advice and assistance, enforcement was seen as a last resort.

### **iv) Public Health Reforms**

The Public Protection Services Manager presented the strategy for a healthy district. The Health Outcomes Framework was set out in five domains to address different aspects of health protection, determinants, lifestyles, ill health prevention and life expectancy.

Primary Care Trusts were being abolished in 2013 with Public Health teams moving into County Councils. Lincs (Shadow) Health and Wellbeing Board established, comprising statutory members including Clinical Commissioning Groups (formerly GP consortia) and elected members. The Boards were to have three statutory objectives – to understand local needs through development of a joint strategic needs assessment, to develop a strategy to address priority needs, and to develop joint commissioning plans.

The challenges for West Lindsey were set out along with progress milestones. Progress was to be reported to the Prosperous Communities Committee.

Discussion ensued amongst Members, issues being raised as the incongruity of residents of one District having their health care providers in an adjacent District. Some Members also raised the matter of some GPs being difficult to access and the problems of obtaining appointments within a reasonable timescale. The Public Protection Services Manager confirmed that the regional working aspect was being considered, and that accessibility to GP services could be raised through the Lincs Health and Wellbeing Board.

## **58 COMMUNITY SAFETY AND STREETSCENE**

The Housing, Renewal and Community Safety Manager gave the presentation on Environmental Anti Social Behaviour. There were 50 different categories of such behaviour, the four key issues of these being: litter; fly tipping; graffiti and dog fouling.

A summary showing the numbers of the reported incidents was given. Although fly tipping showed a high level of incidents, the actual volume had decreased and there was less at domestic properties. The officers could only deal with those incidences that were reported. A list of the available tools and powers was shown, but a limited number of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) had been issued. The practicalities of recovering payments for FPNs meant that they were not always cost effective. It was relatively easy to train anyone to issue FPNs, however the delegation of powers was less straightforward, so delegations were not widespread.

One committee member asked whether powers had been delegated to a particular Town Council as it was known that the powers had been implemented and action taken. The Public Protection Services Manager affirmed he had no knowledge of such a delegation but that he would investigate the matter.

Details of action taken to date was shown, and proposals for the way forward under the Localism agenda. Several campaigns were under consideration involving working with communities and schools.

Details of contact information to report incidents were set out in the presentation.

## **59 PROPOSED BUDGET PLANS 2012-13 (CAI.30 11/12)**

The Financial Services Manager presented the report which set out details of the draft budget proposals for the period of 2012-13. It was noted that big savings had had to be made due to the £1.7m reduction in the formula grant in 2011-12, and a proposed further reduction of £0.826m in 2012-13.

Further work remained to be done, there was still uncertainty ahead with changes to legislation over which the Council had no control. Work was ongoing to maintain the Council's current robust position.

It was asked if the proposed crematorium project was still ongoing, however whilst this had not been factored into the budget proposals, options were still being investigated to consider a financially viable proposal.

Appreciation was expressed to officers for the savings already made by reducing costs and generating income. The Chief Executive emphasised how officers and Members were working together using creativity to come up with alternative solutions.

The report set out a number of efficiency suggestions for further savings, and the draft base budgets were listed in the appendix. The report would be submitted to the Policy and Resources Committee and full Council for final approval.

Members sought reassurance that there had been no reduction in services provided by the Council and requested that evidence be brought to a future meeting to substantiate this.

**RESOLVED** that the proposed budget plans for 2012-13 be noted.

#### **60 FORWARD PLAN (CAI.31 11/12)**

The Democratic Services Team Leader presented the Forward Plan which listed all those items pending for other Committees of the Council.

A Member requested an update on the governance audit of Gainsborough Town Council. It was suggested that the Member seek an update from the Monitoring Officer.

**RESOLVED** that the Forward Plan be noted.

#### **61 WORK PLAN (CAI.32 11/12)**

The Democratic Services Team Leader introduced the Workplan which set out those items scheduled for consideration by the Committee at future meetings.

It was noted that the Forward Plan and Work Plan both only listed items up to the end of the municipal year. As the Committee timetable had now been approved by the Policy and Resources Committee progress could be made on looking further ahead and setting dates for reports being submitted for approval.

Broadband and the Waste Strategy were both scheduled for the next Challenge and Improvement Committee meeting and it was proposed that Members form groups to consider these items.

**RESOLVED** that

- a) the workplan be noted;
- b) Councillors Wiseman, Tinker and Caine look at Broadband issues;
- c) Councillors Parrott and Doran look at waste issues;
- d) a Member of the Prosperous Communities Committee be invited to join both above groups.

The meeting concluded at 8.52 pm

Chairman