

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held in the Council Chamber at the Guildhall, Gainsborough on Thursday 15 January 2015 commencing at 6.30 pm.

Present:

Councillor Tom Regis (Chairman)
Councillor Ian Fleetwood (Vice Chairman)

Councillor Owen Bierley
Councillor Nigel Bowler
The Revd Councillor David Cotton
Councillor Chris Darcel
Councillor Giles McNeill
Councillor Reg Shore
Councillor Jeff Summers
Councillor Anne Welburn

In Attendance:

Ian Knowles	Director of Resources
Mark Sturgess	Chief Operating Officer
Alan Robinson	Strategic Lead for Democratic & Business Support
Alison McCulloch	Revenues Team Manager
Andy Gray	Team Manager Housing and Communities
Grant White	Enterprising Communities Officer
Dinah Lilley	Governance and Civic Officer

Also Present:

Councillor Geoff Wiseman

Apologies:

Councillor Ken Bridger

Membership:

No substitutes were appointed

The Leader of the Council commented that it was good to see Councillor Regis back after his recent illness.

49 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

50 MINUTES

- i) **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on 6 November 2014 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

- ii) **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee 9 December 2014 be noted.

51 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Reverend Councillor David Cotton declared a pecuniary interest in Item G – Fees and Charges, as the burial fees for Springthorpe were included in the report, Springthorpe now being within his parish.

52 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE SETTING OUT CURRENT POSITION OF PREVIOUSLY AGREED ACTIONS AS AT 7 JANUARY 2015 (PR.31 14/15).

Members gave consideration to the Matters Arising Schedule which set out the current position of all previously agreed actions as at 7 January 2015.

All items were shown as having been completed.

RESOLVED that progress on the Matters Arising Schedule as set out in report PR.31 14/15 be noted.

53 COMMUNITY GRANTS (PR.32 14/15)

The Enterprising Communities Officer presented the report to the Committee setting out the three existing schemes and proposals for the future management of the schemes.

All three schemes were due to end in March and varying amounts of money remained in each scheme for future projects, some of which was allocated but which may or may not be spent.

It was recommended that the Councillor Initiative Fund continue as before with £2,000 available for each Councillor to allocate within their wards. The proposal was that the Community Chest and Community Action Fund (CAF) merge, using the best parts of each scheme and become the West Lindsey District Council Community Grant, with three separate levels of grant funding available.

Councillors raised concerns about the affordability of such a scheme in these difficult economic times, and some felt that funding was being used on occasion for projects which should be under the jurisdiction of the Parish or County Council.

Note Councillor Welburn declared a personal interest at this point as being a member of the CAF board.

Members also raised concerns at the management costs of the external management of the Community Chest and CAF schemes. Favourable comments were made regarding the Councillor Initiative Fund and it was felt that this should

remain, but the perhaps the other schemes should be discontinued. Questions were asked regarding the amount of leverage that had been achieved through the CAF, however the information was not readily available.

In the absence of the figures and as Members felt they wanted more detailed information it was felt best to defer the report until the following meeting. It was pointed out that it was the principle of the funds which needed revisiting and the vision for the future, not just the presentation of further information.

This was moved, seconded and voted upon.

RESOLVED that the item be deferred to allow for further information to be presented to the Committee along with proposals for the future.

54 DFG AND INDEPENDENT LIVING UPDATE (PR.33 14/15)

The Team Manager Housing and Communities reminded Members that the Disabled Facilities Grants service had been brought back in house the previous year and gave statistics outlining the past year's performance, and sought approval for the distribution of the remaining funding.

The Committee commended the excellent work done by the team and the recommendations were moved, seconded and voted upon.

RESOLVED that:

- i) the content of the report be noted;
- ii) the ongoing work regarding alternatives to Disabled Facilities Grants and the proposals for taking this forward, be noted; and
- iii) the proposals for the distribution of the remaining funding available for DFG alternatives as shown at paragraph 6.2 of the report as recommended by Prosperous Communities Committee on 16 December 2014, be approved.

55 COUNCIL TAX DISCRETIONARY RELIEF (PR.34 14/15)

The Revenues Team Manager described the Section 13A policy on Council Tax Discretionary Relief, which was different to, and not to be confused with, Council Tax Support. Section 13A was about special circumstances in which relief was discretionary and approval was sought for delegation to be given to the Director of Resources to be able to make the decisions on individual applications.

One Committee Member questioned the morality of the Council subsidising the expenditure of residents such as prisoners, or those with high credit card bills. However it was explained that the questions on the application form were simply a standard means test to assess an applicant's financial position. Exemption for prisoners was national policy.

Members stated that it would be useful to see examples of grants agreed and it was suggested that certain information could possibly be provided subject to Data Protection legislation, to the Leader on a periodic basis. It was also suggested that a ceiling to cap expenditure on this would be useful. Research would need to be undertaken as to the feasibility of this.

The Strategic Lead for Democratic and Business Support informed the Committee that the ability to make an application already existed but that the Council needed to have a policy for its own protection. High usage was not anticipated, and no awards had been made in the last year, however it was important that there was a policy to enable a speedy response in special circumstances e.g. severe flooding.

RESOLVED that the Policy and Resources Committee recommend to full Council that:

- i) the Section 13A Policy, to determine whether a reduction in Council Tax should be granted in the case of individual applications for reductions in Council Tax, be approved;
- ii) that individual applications for Section 13A Discretionary Relief be determined by the Director of Resources under his delegated powers; and
- iii) in the event of an appeal, it be heard by the Housing Appeals Board.

56 LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2015/16 (PR.35 14/15)

The Strategic Lead for Democratic and Business Support introduced the report, reminding Members that the scheme replaced Council Tax Benefits three years ago. The recommendation was that the current scheme be maintained, but that the minimal Government prescribed changes be built into the 2015/16 scheme (these being legislative changes that had occurred since April 2013 and the annual increases in allowances that came into force every April). Members agreed that this was working well and moved that the report be agreed for recommendation to full Council to approve.

Note: The Reverend Councillor David Cotton declared a personal interest in that he was in receipt of disability benefit, relevant to the report.

RESOLVED: that

- i) the content of the report be noted; and
- ii) the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for West Lindsey DC for 2015/16 be recommended to full Council to approve.

Note: The Reverend Councillor David Cotton removed himself from the Committee having declared a pecuniary interest in the following item.

57 FEES AND CHARGES 2015/16 (PR.36 14/15)

The Director of Resources introduced the report which had been considered by the Prosperous Communities Committee and which recommended an increase of around 2.4% to the Council's fees and charges, other than those which were prescribed by statute.

Some increases were clarified as being higher than 2.4%, however these were of public benefit and which would generate income. It was acknowledged that charges that were of a modest amount, even a small increase generated a high percentage.

Councillors expressed concerns as to the impact of some of the increases, particularly car parking, however this was being considered through a review being submitted to the Prosperous Communities Committee.

The recommendations were then moved, seconded and voted upon.

RESOLVED that:

- i) the proposed fees and charges detailed in Appendix A of the report be recommended to full Council for approval; and
- ii) the proposed fees and charges detailed in Appendix B of the report as recommended by the Prosperous Communities Committee be recommended to full Council for approval.

Note: The Reverend Councillor David Cotton returned to the Committee.

58 COLLECTION FUND SURPLUS AND COUNCIL TAX BASE (PR.37 14/15)

The Director of Resources presented the report which set out the declaration of the estimated surplus on the Council's Collection Fund relating to Council Tax at the end of March 2015 and how it was shared amongst the constituent precepting bodies. It also set out the Council tax base calculation for 2015/16. The tax base was a key component in calculating both the budget requirement and the council tax charge.

The calculations and the Parish Tax Base were set out in the appendices, and the method of calculation described in the report. Councillors welcomed the good collection results and moved that the recommendations be agreed.

On being seconded and voted upon it was **RESOLVED** that:

- i) it be noted that the estimated surplus of £711,000 be declared as accruing in the Council's Collection Fund at 31 March 2015 relating to an estimated Council Tax surplus;
- ii) the Council use its element of the Collection fund surplus in calculating the level of Council Tax in 2015/16;
- iii) the calculations of the Council's tax base for 2015/16 as set out in Appendix A be approved, and that in accordance with the Local Authorities' (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1993 (as amended), the tax base for each part of the Authority's area shall be as set out in Appendix B; and
- iv) the report be referred to Council for approval.

59 LEASE MANAGEMENT POLICY (PR.38 14/15)

The Director of Resources presented the report of the Commercial Director for approval of a Lease Management Policy for the Council. The Council did not currently have a Lease Management Policy in place. The proposed policy set out the strategic and operational requirements of leases to be entered into and would act as a reference point for officers handling leases. It provided a model Heads of Terms and ensured that the Council was risk aware.

Members moved, seconded and voted upon the recommendation.

RESOLVED that the Lease Management Policy be approved.

60 PROGRESS AND DELIVERY WORKING GROUP CLOSURE REPORT (PR.39 14/15)

The Chief Operating Officer reminded Members that the Challenge and Improvement Committee had formed a working group to give consideration to making Progress and Delivery reporting more effective. The revised format reports were on the agenda for this meeting.

The Chief Operating Officer informed the Committee that he would like to meet with group members one final time to check the measures used and to introduce some new measures, and would welcome any Member feedback on suggestions for improvement.

The recommendations from the working group were set out in the appendix to the report and the status of the progress of each.

RESOLVED that:

- i) the recommendations set out in the report be agreed by the Policy and Resources Committee in accordance with the recommendation of the Challenge and Improvement Committee on 28 October 2014; and
- ii) it be agreed that the working group should now be closed.

61 PROGRESS AND DELIVERY - PERIOD 2 (SERVICES) (PR.40 14/15)

The Chief Operating Officer informed the meeting that due to the timescales involved the Progress and Delivery Services report covered the two month period up to November, in order to give timely information. Future reports would be quarterly.

The tables in the report gave colour coded information, for those items showing as red performance was off track, however green items were showing good performance. Amber items were to be included within the main report.

The whole progress and delivery report would be available to Councillors by the end of the financial year and would be accessed through the Members' Extranet.

Further discussion ensued on those items shown as off target, and comments passed on those that were on schedule.

Concerns were expressed regarding the youth unemployment and more information was requested. A post of skills and employment officer had been established. The gap between West Lindsey and the national average was widening, which needed action.

It was difficult to set targets for some measures to make them meaningful. It was important to understand trends and take preventative measures. Progress and Delivery was no longer to be a box ticking exercise.

RESOLVED that having examined the areas where service performance was off target assurance was sought and received from officers that the rectifications proposed would deal with the issues identified.

62 PROGRESS AND DELIVERY - PERIOD 2 (PROJECTS) (PR.41 14/15)

The Chief Operating Officer introduced the Progress and Delivery report for Projects and reminded Members that the two Progress and Delivery reports were to report by exception.

The report fed back on projects which were aimed at the delivery of the corporate plan. As with the associated services progress and delivery report this dealt with part of a reporting period and was brought to councillors now due to the risk of data being out of date once the full reporting period information was available later in the month.

The Services report and full details would also be available to Councillors by the end of the financial year and would be accessed through the Members' Extranet.

Three projects were highlighted as being at risk of not delivering within their target time along with the measures being taken to address the slippage:

- Empty Homes
- Land Charges Automation
- Gainsborough Young Persons Supported Accommodation

Trade Waste Service was highlighted as having been successfully completed up to the benefits realisation process.

RESOLVED that having examined the areas where project performance was off target assurance was sought and received from

officers that the rectifications proposed would deal with the issues identified.

63 COMMITTEE WORK PLAN (PR.28 14/15)

The Governance and Civic Officer presented the Committee Work Plan which set out those items for future Committee consideration.

A report was requested from the Commercial Director, following the workshops recently held, to feed back on commercial reporting. However the Director of Resources noted that the Commercial Plan would be presented to the Committee as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan.

RESOLVED that the Work Plan be noted.

The meeting concluded at 8.25 pm.

Chairman