

## 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 19 February 2015 commencing at 6.30 pm.

**Present:** Councillor Tom Regis (Chairman)  
Councillor Ian Fleetwood (Vice Chairman)

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

**In Attendance:**

Mark Sturgess	Chief Operating Officer
Tracey Bircumshaw	Group Accountant
Alison McCulloch	Revenues Team Manager
Grant White	Enterprising Communities Officer
Emma Redwood	Team Manager People and Organisational Development
Steve Anderson	Information Governance and Systems Development Officer
Kim Leith	Health and Safety Co-ordinator
Dinah Lilley	Governance and Civic Officer

**Also Present:** Councillor Paul Howitt-Cowan  
Councillor Jessie Milne

**Apologies:** Councillor Nigel Bowler

**Membership:** No substitutes were appointed

### 65 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

### 66 MINUTES

- i) **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on 15 January 2015 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

- ii) **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee 27 January 2015 be noted.

## **67 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The Reverend Councillor Cotton questioned whether all members of the Committee required a special dispensation to be able to vote on Item L, Provision of Members' IT Allowance. The Governance and Civic Officer advised that no Member was at any greater advantage than any other, and so no conflict of interest arose in relation to this item.

## **68 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE SETTING OUT CURRENT POSITION OF PREVIOUSLY AGREED ACTIONS AS AT 11 FEBRUARY 2015 (PR.44 14/15).**

Members gave consideration to the Matters Arising Schedule which set out the current position of all previously agreed actions as at 11 February 2015.

The Chief Operating Officer updated the Committee on the Youth Unemployment item which had been raised by Councillor Shore at the previous Meeting. The Council's Economic Development officers were working with providers and an Employment and Skills Officer would shortly be in post. Statistics on NEETS would be submitted through Progress and Delivery report and would be monitored. Councillor Shore requested that interested parties meet with the new officer when in post, to discuss the current situation and way forward. The Chief Operating Officer agreed to arrange this.

The Governance and Civic Officer gave an update on the Commercial Activity item - Commercial projects and activities would be reflected in relevant service business plans with progress reported through the Council's existing Progress and Delivery framework.

**RESOLVED** that progress on the Matters Arising Schedule as set out in report PR.44 14/15 be noted.

## **69 COMMUNITY GRANTS UPDATE (PR.45 14/15)**

The Chairman of the Prosperous Communities Committee reminded Members that the Community Grants report had been submitted to the previous meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee, having previously been approved and supported by Prosperous Communities, the report was then deferred for further information. Three options were set out in the report for the future of the scheme, which provided tremendous benefits and gave an injection of funds at grass roots level. There were difficulties in providing a clear financial outlook as some funding projects were still in progress, with applications pending, and some funding may not be claimed.

The Prosperous Communities Committee considered the shape of the scheme for the future and was in support of the Councillor Initiative Fund continuing, but that the Community Action Fund cease and be replaced by the Community Grants Fund. Councillor Bierley thanked the Enterprising Communities Officer for the work undertaken on this project. Statistics were set out in the appendix to the report.

Councillor Shore felt that he would like to see more details on grants awarded, and it was affirmed that the Impact Report would contain case studies and further detail at the end of the financial year, however it was requested that specific information on all grant funding awarded be included in the report, in order to assess the efficiency of the scheme or any disparity in distribution. It was also questioned whether the Challenge and Improvement Committee should scrutinise grant funding schemes.

The Chairman of the Governance and Audit Committee commented on the submission of late claims for funding, and wished for it to be placed on record that it was not always the organisation itself that was at fault.

**RESOLVED:** That having given consideration to, and commented on, the figures from existing grant schemes over the past three years including match/levered funding achieved, the carry forward of committed and remaining funds from existing grant schemes for the new community grant funding programme be approved.

## 70 **POLICY REVIEW - INDUCTION & PROBATION (PR.46 14/15)**

The Team Manager People and Organisational Development introduced the report which sought to update the Council's existing Induction and Probation Policy in line with legislation and best practice.

The main changes were summarised in the report.

The Chairman of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee affirmed that the report had been considered and supported by the JSCC and moved the recommendations.

**RESOLVED** that:

- a) the changes to the Induction and Probation Policy be approved and the reviewed policy be adopted for all employees of the council; and
- b) delegated authority be granted to the Director of Resources to make minor housekeeping amendments to the policy in the future in consultation with the chairmen of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee and Policy and Resources Committee.

## 71 **GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE REVIEW (PR.47 14/15)**

The Team Manager People and Organisational Development introduced the report which sought to update the Council's Grievance Policy which dated from 2009. The

reviewed Policy set out clear steps to be followed and procedures for collective grievances. Consultation had taken place with staff, unions and the JSCC.

The Chairman of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee affirmed that the report had been considered and supported by the JSCC and moved the recommendations.

**RESOLVED** that:

- a) the changes to the Grievance Procedure be approved and the reviewed procedure be adopted for all employees of the council; and
- b) delegated authority be granted to the Director of Resources to make minor housekeeping amendments to the procedure in the future in consultation with the chairmen of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee and Policy and Resources Committee.

**Note:** Councillor Shore requested that when policies are amended in the future those changes be highlighted in the report.

**72 DATA QUALITY POLICY (PR.48 14/15)**

The Information Governance and Systems Development Officer introduced a new policy to improve the quality of data stored by the Council. This was in compliance with the Annual Governance Statement and applicable principally to managers' procedures, with Councillors being the main customers. Better quality data would aid the decision making process.

The policy document provided an overarching, corporate approach to managing data quality and had been developed in response to an Annual Governance Statement commitment.

The Chairman of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee affirmed that the report had been considered and supported by the JSCC, and moved the recommendations.

**RESOLVED** that:

- a) the Data Quality Policy be approved for formal adoption; and
- b) delegated authority be granted to the Senior Information Risk Owner to make minor house-keeping amendments to the policy in the future, in consultation with the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee.

**73 FIRE SAFETY POLICY (PR.49 14/15)**

The Health and Safety Officer presented a new Fire Safety Policy. The policy had been consulted on with all relevant parties (safety champions group, property services, fire marshals, staff and union representatives) and complied with health and safety regulations.

It was questioned if regular fire drills took place for Guildhall staff and this was affirmed, and a drill had also recently taken place during a Planning Committee meeting which involved both Councillors and members of the public.

Councillor Welburn suggested that a meeting point be designated for contractors. The Health and Safety Officer agreed to add some appropriate wording.

**RESOLVED** that:

- a) the Fire Safety Policy be approved for formal adoption; and
- b) delegated authority be granted to the Strategic Lead officer responsible for Public Protection (pending the outcome of the ongoing restructure) to make minor house-keeping amendments to the Policy in the future, in consultation with the Chairmen of the Policy and Resources Committee and Joint Staff Consultative Committee.

**74 LAND AND PROPERTY INVESTMENT POLICY (PR.50 14/15)**

The Chief Operating Officer described how the Land and Property Investment policy set out the Council's approach to investing in land and property, and was intended to align with the Corporate Plan.

Maximising the use and effective management of assets had become even more central to the way local authorities were seeking to deliver services and provide value for money. Members recognised that targets were needed to aid the delivery of the policy which would then be monitored through the progress and delivery process.

**RESOLVED** that the Land and Property Investment Policy be approved.

**75 COMMERCIAL STRATEGY FIRST DRAFT (PR.51 14/15)**

The Chief Operating Officer reminded Members of the extensive workshops which had taken place in the preparation of the Commercial Plan, in order to keep Members informed of its progress. The workshops were recognised as good practice in helping to give Members an understanding of the issues before they had to make a formal decision on the strategy. There was a recognition that targets needed to be set through the annual delivery plan and monitored through the progress and delivery process.

The proposed Commercial Plan focused on four themes:

- Increasing income from Council services
- Increasing external funding to the Council and the district
- Increasing capital and revenue income from supporting housing and economic growth
- Strengthening the Council's commercial culture and capability.

Members of the Committee agreed with the principles of the plan and felt that it was appropriate to move towards a sustainable Council less dependent upon government funding. Whilst some concerns were expressed it was noted that achievements were dependant on the country's economy, but that cutting services or staff was not an option.

Reference was made to external funding and in particular the paragraph at 3.3.2 of the Plan – 'Developing a pipeline of strategic projects that can secure external funding' and it was suggested that it would be good practice for targets to be set. The Chief Operating Officer affirmed that these would be included in the Annual Delivery Plan.

**RESOLVED** that:

- a) the draft Commercial Plan for further development be endorsed and its role in contributing to closing the future funding gap be noted; and
- b) the draft Commercial Plan be recommended for approval by Council.

**76 BUDGET AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT MONITORING – QUARTER 3 2014/15 (PR.52 14/15)**

The Group Accountant presented Members with the Quarter 3 monitoring report of the Budget and Treasury Management. The Revenue Budget was projected to be in a surplus position of £484,000 by the end of the financial year, and the capital programme was progressing well and was expected to result in a £461,000 surplus.

There had been no breaches of Prudential Indicators. Traditional cash investments were doing well and interest being received was above the benchmark.

An update was given on Escrow and all ISK had now been sold, and dealing with Icelandic Banks closed.

The revised Capital budget of £3.346m incorporated both carry forwards approved from 2013/14 and those approved to be carried forward to 2015/16 in addition to any amendments to the Capital Programme previously approved by this Committee. It also included the following amendments to the Capital Programme which were subject to approval by the Committee, further details of which were set out in the report.

- £10,000 - Flood Defence scheme.
- £15,000 – Customer Self Service Pod.
- £350,000 – Loan support to John Coupland Hospital.

Some Councillors expressed reservations regarding the hospital loan and questioned whether a local authority should be financially supporting the NHS. However this was a commercial transaction, but which would also help support

the health and well-being of the district. The proposal had been through the necessary due diligence to establish the general power of competence and a full business case would be worked up and brought through the Council processes before any loan was made.

The Leader of the Council then posed a number of questions around such subjects as Pension Fund deficit, the level of the Council's liabilities, and the Council's financial commitment to the Lincoln Eastern Bypass. The Group Accountant responded to each of the questions in turn, and the Leader showed the meeting an item in the press which appeared to condemn the Council with unjustified claims.

Councillor Shore proposed an amendment to the recommendations that the £350,000 to be set aside in the Capital Programme for the loan to John Coupland Hospital, be removed. The motion was seconded, however on being voted upon the motion was lost.

The original recommendations were then moved, seconded and voted upon.

**RESOLVED** that:

- a) the forecast out-turn position as at 31 December 2014 be accepted;
- b) the amendments to the Capital and Revenue Budget be approved;
- c) the property acquisitions to be added to the Asset Register be noted;
- d) the Treasury Management position for the nine months to 31 December 2014 be recognised; and
- e) the report, the treasury activity and movement in the prudential indicators be accepted.

**Note** Reverend Councillor Cotton requested that it be recorded that he had voted against the recommendations.

**77 FINANCIAL STRATEGY & MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (PR.53 14/15)**

The report was introduced by the Chief Operating Officer and Group Accountant and set out details of the Committee's revenue estimates for the period of 2015/16 – 2019/20 .

The purpose of the Financial Strategy was to update Members on the current operating environment together with the challenges being faced, the Council's approach to maintaining a sustainable financial position and progress to date.

Detailed financial plans were set out within the Medium Term Financial Plan the purpose of which was to set a robust overall framework for the Council's spending plans over the next five years in supporting the delivery of the Corporate Plan and underpins delivery of the Financial Strategy.

Brief discussion ensued and clarification given on the projections of the New Homes Bonus and its impact on the Council's budget position.

**RESOLVED** that:

- a) the Policy and Resources Committee Budget be approved;
- b) approval of the Financial Strategy and Medium Term Financial Plan be recommended to Council;
- c) the approval of the Capital Programme 2015-16 to 2019-20 be recommended to Council.

**78 PROVISION OF MEMBERS' IT ALLOWANCE (PR.54 14/15)**

The Governance and Civic Officer presented the report which sought to continue the current provision of an allowance for Members to purchase IT kit with which to undertake Council business, but which proposed an increase of £100, totalling £500 for the four year term of office, and a further increase of £5 per month for Broadband allowance. The allowance could be claimed at any point during a Councillor's term of office.

It was clarified that the two Independent Members be also granted the allowance in order for them to be paperless at Committee meetings in line with Council policy.

**RESOLVED** that:

- a) an increase from £400 to £500, for a four year term of office, for Members to purchase their own device, to a guideline specification provided by IT services, be approved; and
- b) a £5 increase per calendar month as reimbursement towards the cost of broadband connection be approved.

**79 REVISED COMMITTEE TIMETABLE 2015-16 (PR.55 14/15)**

The Governance and Civic Officer presented a report proposing a revised Committee timetable for 2015-16.

The timetable had previously been approved by the Policy and Resources Committee in June 2014, and meetings had traditionally been arranged on fixed days of the week at regular intervals. However it had transpired that this was not conducive to the undertaking of statutory business, therefore two alternative options were appended to the report, for Members to approve the most suitable.

Discussion ensued on the merits of having meetings in August, however this could lead to meetings being inquorate. Members felt that meetings in late July were also undesirable, however it was reasoned that in order to facilitate the necessary business, and also avoid other national and local events and holidays, there were limited options available, particularly given the preparation and lead in time



required for each meeting. It was agreed that there could be no solution that could suit everyone.

The timetable set out in Appendix B was moved, seconded and voted upon.

**RESOLVED** that the Committee timetable set out in Appendix B of the report be approved for implementation.

#### 80 **COMMITTEE WORK PLAN (PR.56 14/15)**

The Governance and Civic Officer presented the Committee work plan which was self explanatory, however pointed out that in light of the revised timetable having been approved all the dates in the Forward Plan would be amended accordingly.

**RESOLVED** that the Committee Work Plan be noted.

#### 81 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

**RESOLVED** that under Section 100 (A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

#### 82 **COUNCIL TAX AND BUSINESS RATES WRITE OFFS (PR.57 14/15)**

The Revenues Team Manager presented the report which sought approval to write off debts which had been deemed irrecoverable.

Set out in the report Appendix were the National Non Domestic Rates debts, Council Tax arrears and overpayment of Housing benefits, which were recommended for write off for the reasons detailed

Every effort was made to ensure that all amounts due to the council were rigorously pursued. At the end of each financial year a provision was set aside for those debts that were proving difficult to recover. Where debts were found to be irrecoverable it was the role of the Policy and Resources Committee to consider them for write off. Members were reminded that the writing off of these debts did not preclude the writing back should any further details come to light that may affect the accounts.

**RESOLVED** that:

- a) it be agreed to write off arrears of National Non Domestic rates to the value of £32,322.09;

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Subject to Call-in. Call-in will expire at 5pm on Monday 9 March 2015

- b) it be agreed to write off arrears of Council Tax to the Value of £4,588.43; and
- c) it be agreed to write off arrears of Housing Benefit Overpayments to the value of £25,648.57.

The meeting concluded at 8.18 pm.

Chairman