

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of Council held in the Council Chamber, The Guildhall, Gainsborough, on Monday 2 March 2015, at 7pm.

Present: Councillor Malcolm Parish (In the Chair)
Councillor Sue Rawlins (Vice Chairman)

Councillor Owen Bierley	Councillor Pat Mewis
Councillor Ken Bridger	Councillor Jessie Milne
Councillor Jackie Brockway	Councillor Irmgard Parrott
Councillor Alan Caine	Councillor Roger Patterson
The Revd Councillor David Cotton	Councillor Judy Rainsforth
Councillor Stuart Curtis	Councillor Di Rodgers
Councillor Chris Darcel	Councillor Lesley Rollings
Councillor Chris Day	Councillor Reg Shore
Councillor Ian Fleetwood	Councillor Lewis Strange
Councillor Paul Howitt-Cowan	Councillor Jeff Summers
Councillor Burt Keimach	Councillor Mick Tinker
Councillor Angela Lawrence	Councillor Anne Welburn
Councillor Malcolm Leaning	Councillor Geoff Wiseman
Councillor Giles McNeill	

In Attendance:

Manjeet Gill	Chief Executive
Mark Sturgess	Chief Operating Officer
Ian Knowles	Director of Resources
Penny Sharp	Commercial Director
Alan Robinson	Strategic Lead for Democratic and Business Support and Monitoring Officer
Dinah Lilley	Governance and Civic Officer

Also Present 5 members of the public

76 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chairman noted that whilst a further meeting of the Council was scheduled for April, this may not take place, so this could possibly be the last meeting before the election. The Chairman thanked all Councillors for their support in the preceding year and the Leader of the Council responded by thanking the Chairman for his unstinting work as ambassador for the Council and the District.

77 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor Gillian Bardsley
Councillor David Dobbie

Councillor Richard Doran
Councillor Tom Regis
Councillor Trevor Young

78 PRESENTATION OF PETITION

Councillor Mick Tinker introduced Martin Thompson, local businessman of Drewery & Wheeldon, who presented the Chairman with a petition containing over 1,000 signatures which requested the reinstatement of parking provision in the Market Place. Mr Thompson asserted that it was necessary to provide limited parking in the Market Place to rejuvenate the shopping area. The Market Place had lost its vibrancy in recent years, meaning a fall in property prices and lack of shoppers. Whilst Marshall's Yard was a success for Gainsborough there was an impact on the old town and on non-market days the town was dead. The spiral of decline would continue if nothing was done. If limited parking was reinstated, to enable shoppers to access the shops, it would give the impression of activity and lead to an increase in confidence, thereby leading to an increase in occupancy and ultimately prosperity.

The statement from Mr Thompson was greeted with a round of applause in the Chamber. Many Councillors then spoke in support of the proposals, echoing the concerns raised. It was suggested that around two hours would be an appropriate limit for free parking, as 30 minutes would be insufficient, and wholly free would mean that spaces were taken all day by commuters. Similar problems had been experienced in other nearby towns and various initiatives implemented to resolve the issues. It was felt by some that other regeneration work was also needed to revitalise the market place, such as accommodation, and it was suggested that the new hotel would help to bring a feelgood factor.

The Chairman of the Challenge and Improvement Committee noted that a parking review was underway and that the Committee had asked for pre-scrutiny of the project. The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that a Parking Strategy was indeed in progress and that the petition and subsequent discussion would be fed into the research. Liaison would also be undertaken with the County Council.

Mr Thompson was thanked for his petition and presentation.

Councillor Tinker proposed that the petition be moved forward and work be undertaken to resolve the issues, this was seconded.

RESOLVED that the concerns raised by the petition be given due consideration.

79 COUNCIL MINUTES (PAPER A)

- a) **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 26 January 2015 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

80 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest. It was affirmed that all Councillors had an automatic dispensation in order to vote on the Council's budget report and the setting of the Council Tax for the District.

81 MATTERS ARISING (PAPER B)

The Chairman noted that all items were showing as black as having been completed.

RESOLVED that the Matters Arising be noted.

82 ANNOUNCEMENTS

i) Chairman of the Council

The Chairman highlighted some of his recent engagements, the full list having previously been circulated around Members. Councillor Parish had stated at the beginning of the Civic year that he wished to visit schools and businesses in the District, this had been achieved throughout the year and further visits had taken place in the preceding month, including De Aston and the Gainsborough Academy where pupils had shown great interest in the work of the Council. Local businesses had also shown enthusiasm for taking on apprentices.

Several Charity events had also been attended, which were an opportunity to meet and work with other organisations and local authorities. There was a duty on the role of Chairman to promote the District. A visit had also taken place to Gainsborough Trinity FC where the Chairman was presented with a club tie.

ii) Leader of the Council

Councillor Summers informed the meeting that he had recently attended a Tourism Conference at the EPIC Centre, which had a good turnout and interesting speakers, and which he hoped would be beneficial to local businesses. Rail meetings had also been attended, where there was extensive discussion and good representations, which it was hoped would lead to improvements.

There was little to report at present on the work of the CLJSPU, however offers of potential development sites were currently being evaluated.

iii) Head of Paid Service

The Chief Executive, in the event that this was to be the last Council meeting of the year, thanked all Councillors for being a pleasure to work with over the last four year term of office. Highlights were noted as being the Extraordinary Council on the Local Plan which had been productive. What was particularly notable was the commitment

and passion expressed by all Councillors. Councillors had worked in various ways outside their committees and Council attendance to champion or ensure effective decisions.

Other notable work included that on the South West Ward, the Trinity Arts Centre and the Community Action Fund as examples of the time and energy of the Councillors in their duties.

Councillor Strange then thanked the Chief Executive for being a 'breath of fresh air' and a pleasure to work with.

83 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions from the public.

84 QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO. 9

Question from Councillor Lewis Strange

Mrs Gill.

You will be aware that concern has been raised on the Look North programme, regarding East Yorkshire district council and alleged ability of their officers having insight of councillors emails.

This matter was raised during questions to portfolio holders at the Lincolnshire County council, full council meeting held on 20th of February, where councillors were assured that only Councillors P/As would have that ability or other specified officers if a councillor so wished.

Chief executive, for the sake of peace of mind, can you give all councillors at West Lindsey that at this council, no officer has access to a councillors email account without that councillors permission.

Thank you

Lewis Strange.

The Strategic Lead for Democratic and Business Support and Monitoring Officer responded by assuring Councillors that unless they had given specific permission to any particular officers to access their email accounts, this would not be possible. The Council's ICT team, as Domain Administrators could, if necessary, access West Lindsey email accounts, but only under the provisions of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act.

85 FINANCIAL STRATEGY AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2015/16 to 2019/20 (PAPER C)

The Director of Resources and Chief Finance Officer introduced the report stating that this set out the financial strategy for the authority over the next five years. Members were asked to approve the Medium Term Financial Plan and in particular the budgeted expenditure and Council Tax levels for 2015-16.

The document was in two parts, the covering report outlined the Corporate Plan Priorities, how the services intended to deliver against those priorities over the coming year and summarised the context and approach to developing the MTFP.

Details around the financial principles, and the risks and mitigation taken into account when developing the budget and MTFP were set out in the report. Section 5 provided an overview of the financial context and challenges facing the Authority in setting a balanced budget for 2015/16 and reflected on the implications of the economic environment.

Compared with other authorities overall West Lindsey was well positioned, although it suffered from an asset perspective in comparison to those with Housing Stock. The nature of the area with regard to deprivation also impacted on the assessment of future potential.

The implications of being an Entrepreneurial Council and delivering the Commercial Plan were covered in section 7 of the report and the current position set out in section 8 outlined the actions taken to deliver a bottom line improvement of £1.5m which continued to allow the Authority to set aside New Homes bonus for investment purposes. The New Homes Bonus 2015/16 award was due to provide £2.6m over the next 6 years (£7.5m from 2015/16 to 2019/20.)

The second section of the paper set out the details of the proposals over the medium term and had specific budgets for 2015/16. There was no increase in Council Tax proposed for 2015/16.

Further details of interest set out in the report included: revenues investment proposals of £345k; the expected level of reserves as at 31st March 2016; proposed new earmarked reserves totalling £3.17m; the capital programme for the medium term and proposes expenditure of £21.6m with £9.7m expected to be spent in 2015/16; the Capital Programme also introduced the potential to borrow for investment purposes and the Treasury Management Policy set out in appendix I included this option.

The Authority was required to make a Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) which provided for repayment of borrowings. The policy provided an opportunity for MRP not to be set aside should assets acquired be held for re-sale. Any decision to not set aside a minimum revenue provision would be subject to business case and legal advice.

In conclusion, section 12 of the covering reports set out the statement of the Chief Finance Officer regarding the robustness of estimates, the adequacy of reserves and the affordability of the capital investments. The Director of Resources confirmed that in his opinion the estimates for the period were robust, the reserves position over the medium term was adequate, the capital investments were affordable and all risks had been taken into consideration. He therefore recommended the Budget for 2015/16 and the Medium term Financial Plan to Members.

Councillor Brockway sought clarification of the unemployment target of 7% which she believed to be out of date and sought assurance of safeguards being in place

particularly around the Bank of England Policy aligned to unemployment figures. Mr Knowles confirmed that this policy was now out of date and not applicable, and that the Council may choose not to recover full cost where this would mean unfair or inequitable treatment of individuals, and that the 2011 report informing the 2015/20 MTFP was the latest data available.

The Leader of the Council then presented the report for approval.

The report was the proposed five-year financial strategy. The one overriding theme of the strategy was that the Council would work strenuously to deliver all services as it had in the past, whilst developing both capital and revenue streams. These would be delivered through investment and development work across the district. Capital funds and physical assets would be put to use investing in programmes and projects to deliver financial and social benefits across the district. Council Tax would only be increased when commercialism failed to yield the required return. This would not be a programme of spend but a programme of investments for the people of West Lindsey.

Page 4 of the report covered the Medium Term Financial Strategy which included a balanced budget for the next year and was based around the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan and Priorities.

£2 million would be retained in reserves to protect the Council against any unforeseen expenses. At paragraph 5.3 was a chart illustrating how government funding was predicted to fall. The MTFP accommodated that projection, for at that final point of the five year strategy the aim was to be almost self-sufficient.

Risks were identified on page 22 with appropriate mitigation. National Non Domestic Rates were another financial strength acquired and by joining the Lincolnshire pool which had increased the Council's resilience.

Page 39 showed a pie chart which illustrated how it was proposed to invest £18.8 million in prosperous and enterprising projects. A clear indicator of the intention to assist a growing economy in West Lindsey.

At paragraph 11.4 on page 40 no council tax increase for 2015/16 clearly demonstrated the intention to protect the taxpayer where possible and make better use of resources. A band D Council Tax would be £1471.14p. Fees and charges were largely with no increases or very modest.

The balance of the MTFP related to Financial strategy principles; Financial management and decision making; the Investment Strategy; Capital Programme; Capital financing resources; Treasury Management Strategy; Investment Strategy; and the Pay Policy Statement.

The Leader commended the Mid Term Financial Strategy and 2015/16 budget to Council. He said that he believed it to be an excellent working document which would deliver appropriate outcomes and had been compiled with the interests of all West Lindsey residents uppermost.

The Leader then moved the 12 recommendations in the report. In the absence of the Policy and Resources Chairman the recommendations were seconded by the Vice Chairman of the Committee.

The Leader of the main opposition then responded to the Leader of the Council's speech. Whilst he acknowledged that it all sounded good, he noted that councils all over the country were struggling because of Government cuts. West Lindsey appeared not to have any problems, but what were the implications for no increase in Council Tax? It was possible that charging for green waste may commence after the election. Councillor Shore also questioned the loan made to Quickline in light of BDUK not now funding the roll out of broadband in West Lindsey and was this because the district had made alternative provision?

The Director of Resources clarified that phase 2 of the BDUK forthcoming funding was being clarified with the County Council, because of issues with state aid. However the matter was complex and not straightforward. The Vice Chairman of the Governance and Audit Committee assured that all due diligence had been undertaken and was willing to discuss the matter further outside of the meeting.

Details were given of the Government grant funding received following not increasing Council Tax in recent years, and opposition Councillors suggested that this could lead to a large increase in the future in order to catch up.

In line with required legislation for the Council's budget report, a recorded vote was taken.

For: Councillors Bierley, Brockway, Caine, Curtis, Day, Fleetwood, Howitt-Cowan, Kinch, Lawrence, McNeill, Mewis, Milne, Parish, Parrott, Patterson, Rawlins, Strange, Summers, Tinker, Welburn and Wiseman.

Against: Councillors Bridger, Cotton, Darcel, Leaning, Rainsforth, Rollings and Shore.

Abstained: Councillors Keimach and Rodgers.

A total of 21 votes for, 7 against and 2 abstentions.

RESOLVED that:

- a) the external environment and the severity of the financial challenges being faced as detailed in the Financial Strategy be recognised;
- b) the Statement of the Chief Finance Officer on the Robustness of Estimates and Adequacy of Reserves be accepted;
- c) the Medium Term Financial Plan 2015/16 to 2019/20 be approved;
- d) a Mid-Year Review of the Medium Term Financial Plan during 2015/16 be received;
- e) the Revenue Budget at Appendix A be set;

- f) the Fees and Charges Policy and set the Fees and Charges 2015/16 at Appendices B and C be set;
- g) the Investment Strategy at Appendix E be adopted;
- h) the Capital Programme 2015/16 to 2019/20 at Appendix F be approved. (The Capital Financing Resources and projected Capital Receipts were detailed in Appendices G-H);
- i) the Treasury Management Strategy 2015/16 be approved and the Treasury Investment Strategy, the detailed Counter Party criteria, the Treasury and Borrowing Prudential Indicators at Appendix I be adopted;
- j) the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy as contained in the Treasury Management Strategy at Appendix I be approved;
- k) the Council Tax at Appendix J-N be approved; and
- l) the 2015/16 Pay Policy Statement at Appendix O be approved.

86 COMMERCIAL PLAN (PAPER D)

The proposed Commercial Plan was presented by the Commercial Director who stated that it complemented the Financial Strategy and met the Council's Priorities in aiming to close the £2.5m funding gap.

The Plan had been developed through discussion at workshops with Councillors.

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

The Plan set a target of generating a revenue surplus of £1m per annum and it was necessary to get the foundations right in order to achieve this.

The Commercial Director corrected some typographical errors within the document, in particular the insertion of the word 'appropriate' on page 18 of the appendix, as the Council had to be guided by legal constraints.

It was recommended that a Member Steering Group be approved with membership derived from the Policy and Resources Committee and Prosperous Communities Committee, for which nominations would be sought at the Annual Council meeting.

The Plan was a high level framework and it was proposed to submit the annual delivery programme and income projections along with budget reports to full Council. The Leader noted that this was a working document.

Discussion ensued and whilst some Members expressed reservations, the majority of Councillors supported the proposals. The Vice Chairman of the Governance and Audit Committee urged all Members to become involved and gain a greater understanding,

and assured all that due diligence and governance had been met and risk management undertaken.

It was stressed that it was important to appoint the Members with the appropriate expertise to the steering group.

RESOLVED that:

- a) the Commercial Plan for 2015-2020 be adopted;
- b) a cross party Commercial Steering Group as outlined in Section 4 of the report, be approved and the Policy and Resources and Prosperous Communities Committees nominate two Members each to be appointed at Annual Council; and
- c) a Delivery Plan with priority projects, target income and other actions to be submitted to Council by September 2015.

87 TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS PUBLISHED SINCE THE COUNCIL MEETING ON 26 JANUARY 2015.

RESOLVED that the minutes of Committee meetings published since the last Council meeting on 26 January 2015 be received.

The meeting concluded at 8.58pm.

Chairman