

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee held in the Council Chamber at the Guildhall, Gainsborough on Thursday 24 September 2015 commencing at 6.30 pm.

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

Councillor Owen Bierley
Councillor Matthew Boles
Councillor Alex Bridgwood
Councillor David Cotton
Councillor Michael Devine
Councillor Giles McNeill
Councillor John McNeill
Councillor Reg Shore
Councillor Jeff Summers
Councillor Anne Welburn

In Attendance:
Ian Knowles Director of Resources
Penny Sharp Commercial Director
Sarah Troman Strategic Lead Housing and Regeneration
Alison McCulloch Revenues Team Manager
Angela Matthews Benefits Team Leader
Dinah Lilley Governance and Civic Officer

Apologies: Councillor Duguid

Membership: Councillor Giles McNeill substituted for Councillor Duguid

27 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

28 MINUTES

- i) **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee held on 29 July 2015 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

29 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor David Cotton declared that whilst he was in receipt of disability benefit he was not receiving Council Tax Support so his interest in Paper B was non-pecuniary.

30 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE SETTING OUT CURRENT POSITION OF PREVIOUSLY AGREED ACTIONS AS AT 15 SEPTEMBER 2015 (CPR.19 15/16).

Members gave consideration to the Matters Arising Schedule which set out the current position of all previously agreed actions as at 15 September 2015. The Governance and Civic Officer updated the Committee on the items showing as green. The item on the Progress and Delivery Reports had been updated and would show black on the next report.

The item on the Driving Policy remained pending as the report had been put back in the Forward Plan. The Chairman of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee stated that he hoped the report would be submitted to the JSCC at the next meeting.

RESOLVED that progress on the Matters Arising Schedule as set out in report CPR.19 15/16 be noted.

31 LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT (CPR.20 15/16)

The Revenues Team Manager introduced the report on Local Council Tax Support which sought agreement for minor amendments to the Scheme for 2016-17 to be subject to consultation with residents of the District.

It had been three years since any changes were made to the scheme, however due to changes in Government funding it was considered an appropriate time to review the scheme. The current contribution rate was 8% and collection rates remained good at 72%. An increase would be required in the future so small increments were felt to be better than a large rise at once. The final proposed scheme would be presented to the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee for approval at the January meeting, as this would need to be incorporated into the Medium Term Financial Plan, prior to the next financial year.

Members questioned who would be consulted on the proposals and whether this would include those most affected. It was noted that any increase which caused hardship would result in lower collection rates. Clarification was given on the consultation process which was to be conducted with the Citizens' Panel, which included a cross section of the population, including people in receipt of the benefit, and also via the Council's website. Neither process would incur any extra cost to the Council, as a survey would.

Claimants included 49% pensioners and those in receipt of disability benefit, both of which were protected from changes, and those on income support and job-seekers allowance. Members felt it would be useful to see a demographic breakdown of the types of claimants, and it was suggested that in surveying the Citizens' Panel a question be included to ask if they were in receipt of the Support.

It was felt that small increments would cause least hardship, and whilst creating minimal gain to the Council, would also create least risk to a reduction in collection rates. The change in Government Policy in 2012 was about transferring the risk from central to local government.

It was questioned whether getting rid of the scheme altogether would be financially viable and what was the cost of administering the scheme? The response was that the scheme ran alongside Housing Benefits and the claim form was for both, they were run on the same IT system and subject to the same calculations, and a grant was received for the administration, therefore there would be no saving to dispensing with one scheme.

RESOLVED that consultation with residents take place during late September, early October to ascertain their appetite for the proposed amendments to the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for West Lindsey District Council for 2016/17.

32 PROPERTY AND LAND MANAGEMENT STRATEGY (CPR.21 15/16)

The Commercial Director introduced the newly appointed Strategic Lead for Housing and Regeneration and set the context of the Property and Land Management Strategy which was previously known as the Council's Asset Management Plan. The new strategy was building on the understanding of the previous document and setting the framework for the way forward.

The Strategic Lead for Housing and Regeneration described the Council's asset portfolio of £15.6m which generated an income of £563k, which it was felt could be improved. A review of properties was underway to consider options to either increase their return or possible disposal.

A breakdown was included on page 9 of the Strategy and a property appraisal form template was set out which comprised three options. It was hoped to have made five assessments by the end of the year on a cross section of properties.

Members of the Committee congratulated the Strategic Lead for Housing and Regeneration on the work done so far on the Strategy. Questions were asked on such things as the difference between 'operational' and miscellaneous' car parks, and also why closed churchyards were included in the list of assets. Clarification was given that whilst the Council may not own all the properties listed it may have operational responsibility for some, or the assets may be leased and maintenance be the responsibility of the tenant. This assessment was work still needing to be completed.

The financial details making up part of the Medium Term Financial Plan were not felt to be self-explanatory, and needed simplifying and a clearer explanation of what income was being received.

Members stated that they would like to see a full breakdown of the assets owned by the Council and also receive notification of transactions. Some property had been council owned prior to the establishment of West Lindsey District Council, and a central database did not exist. Significant transactions were reported to the Committee as a matter of course, some requiring approval. Transactions were reported regularly through the quarterly financial report through the key performance indicators. An annual summary could be provided if Members so wished.

Some Members hoped that, in the right circumstances, assets could be transferred into community ownership.

RESOLVED that the Property and Land Management Strategy be approved.

33 COMMITTEE WORK PLAN (CPR.22 15/16)

The Governance and Civic Officer presented the Committee work plan which was self-explanatory and gave updates on those items added or moved since the report was published.

The Leader questioned the narrative on the Car Parking Strategy and stated that the remit had been extended. This would be updated.

RESOLVED that the Committee Work Plan be noted.

The meeting concluded at * pm.

Chairman