

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Challenge and Improve Committee held in the Council Chamber - The Guildhall, Marshall's Yard, Gainsborough, DN21 2NA on 9 January 2018 commencing at 6.30 pm.

Present: Councillor Paul Howitt-Cowan (Chairman)
Councillor Lewis Strange (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Angela White (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Bruce Allison
Councillor David Bond
Councillor Mrs Jessie Milne
Councillor Roger Patterson
Councillor Mrs Diana Rodgers
Councillor Mrs Lesley Rollings
Councillor Thomas Smith
Councillor Mrs Anne Welburn

Councillor Mrs Gillian Bardsley
Councillor Mrs Sheila Bibb
Councillor Michael Devine
Councillor Mrs Pat Mewis
Councillor Mrs Maureen Palmer

In Attendance:
Mark Sturgess Chief Operating Officer and Head of Paid Service
Michelle Howard Wellbeing and Health Manager
Grant White Enterprising Communities Manager
Ele Durrant Democratic and Civic Officer

Apologies: Councillor Malcolm Parish

55 CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME

The Chairman commenced the meeting by welcoming all in the room including Officers and several visiting Members. He also welcomed Mr Jonny Goldsmith, Operations Manager for P3 in Lincolnshire, who was joining Michelle Howard, Wellbeing and Health Manager, for the presentation on homelessness in the district.

The Chairman also wished all present a very happy New Year.

56 MEETING OF THE CHALLENGE AND IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 14 NOVEMBER 2017

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2017 be approved and signed as a correct record.

57 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at this point in the meeting.

58 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE

The Committee gave consideration to the Matters Arising Schedule, setting out the current position of previously agreed actions, as at 28 December 2017.

The Democratic and Civic Officer advised Members that of the outstanding items, the matter concerning the response to the housing consultation had since been completed.

RESOLVED that the Matters Arising Schedule as at 28 December 2017 be received and noted.

59 PROPOSED REVISIONS - PUBLIC REALM WORKING GROUP

The Enterprising Communities Manager presented a report to Members regarding the ongoing work of the Public Realm Working Group. He explained that at the meeting of the group on 14 November 2017, Members had discussed the key approaches and methods to be used to complete the rural public realm report and a Delivery Plan 2018-2019 had been endorsed by the group at this meeting. The Enterprising Communities Manager also explained that the group had agreed to recommend a number of changes to the Terms of Reference to reflect the nature of this work and to provide updated and achievable timescales. Members were asked to agree the updated version of the Rural Public Realm Task and Finish Group Terms of Reference and to agree the Delivery Plan 2018-2019. The Head of Paid Service noted that the final report would make recommendations to the relevant policy committee for possible implementation or inclusion in council policies and it was important that the timescales for completion of this work were realistic in order to be able to make informed and relevant recommendations to that policy committee. This would be in accordance with good practice in the operation of overview and scrutiny committees.

A Member of Committee enquired about whether there was any scope to look at aspects of towns and villages that incorporated such things as public artwork or fountains. It was suggested that these could be looked at as street furniture or as part of the overall street scene. It was highlighted that the purpose of the Working Group was to look at provision of services but that it might be possible to undertake a separate piece of work to look specifically at grants available for improvement of area through public artwork or installations. It was requested that this be noted as a future work point.

The Committee agreed that this was an opportunity to engage with the district and to

ascertain where improvements could be made. It was explained that there would be a comprehensive survey distributed to all Town and Parish Councils and it would be important to have the support of Members in order to maximise the response rate. The Enterprising Communities Manager assured Members there would be further communication with them about the survey in due course.

Following further discussion about consideration of regeneration as well as tackling persistent issues such as dog fouling and grass cutting, it was

RESOLVED that:

- a) the updated version of the Rural Public Realm Task and Finish Group Terms of Reference be agreed; and
- b) the Delivery Plan 2018-2019 for the Rural Public Realm Task and Finish Group also be agreed.

60 PRESENTATION ITEM - HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS SERVICE

Members were introduced to a presentation about homelessness in the district. The Wellbeing and Health Manager explained that the presentation had been designed to inform Members about the increasing demand on services, subsequent pressure on performance targets and the legislative change in April 2018 which would have significant impact on services. The presentation had been shared with Members at the start of the meeting and Members were invited to ask questions as they arose.

The presentation focussed on three areas of interest: Home Choices Service Demand and Performance, Implementing the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and Strategic Direction. Members were given specific details of numbers of requests made to the Home Choices Service and reasons behind why this might be. It was explained that where people were facing housing difficulties because they had been asked to leave their property, the reasons for this would be explored in detail with them so as to resolve any issues that might make this a recurring problem. It was also highlighted that a significant amount of work was undertaken with landlords to help address issues before they reached a point of asking a tenant to leave and Jonny Goldsmith, Operations Manager for P3 in Lincolnshire, explained that there were also other support services involved who worked closely with the Home Choices Service in such cases to ensure individuals accessed other areas of help such as for substance misuse or mental health problems.

A Member of Committee asked whether there was an issue with people presenting in other areas such as Lincoln, so although not homeless or rough sleeping in West Lindsey, they would otherwise be accessing services in the district. It was explained that the team in West Lindsey worked very closely with the other services in the area and that it was not a coincidence that homeless statistics are lower than in other areas. It was highlighted that there were several ways of reporting though to the team if Members or Officers felt there was someone sleeping rough in the district and this was also open to the public to report, for instance through social media. Members congratulated the Wellbeing and Health Manager on this work and the efforts put in across the board.

With regards to the legislative change in April 2018, the Wellbeing and Health Manager explained there would be a significant increase in demand on the service and this would generate significantly larger workloads within the team. She explained that the team in West Lindsey had been working to the moral standard of the new legislation, that is to say, working above and beyond the existing legal responsibility of the Council, but the main impact would be significantly higher numbers of people eligible for this level of help under the new Act. To assist with the increased workload, it was explained that the staffing structure was under review and new staff were being employed to take on other responsibilities.

The Committee enquired specifically about housing difficulties for those who had left the Armed Forces and also those who had been released from prison. It was explained that despite significant enquiries across the district there did not appear to be any individuals accessing support who were ex-forces personnel and this was not an area of concern within West Lindsey. With regards to those who had been released from prison, it was acknowledged that there were often difficulties such as not having an address to return to or prison services not notifying housing services of the individual being released. As a visiting Member, Councillor Bibb explained that the matter had also been discussed at the Lincolnshire Safety Partnership and she agreed to take forward the concerns of the Committee about lack of information on prison releases back to the Lincolnshire Safety Partnership.

At the end of the presentation, the Chairman thanked the Wellbeing and Health Manager, and Mr Goldsmith, for their work across the district and the dedication of their teams. He noted the importance of investing in people and the need to create homes for people, not simply provide housing, and congratulated the teams on their approach.

61 FORWARD PLAN

The Democratic and Civic Officer presented a report setting out the items of business due to be considered through the committee system. The Chairman noted that items identified by the Challenge and Improvement Committee for scrutiny had been incorporated into the workplan for the Committee.

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan be noted.

62 COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

The Work Plan for the business of the Challenge and Improvement Committee was presented. The Democratic and Civic Officer informed Members that following the agreement of the amendments to the Public Realm Terms of Reference, the Work Plan for Committee would be updated to reflect the extended timescales. Members were also advised that there would be a scrutiny training session prior to the committee meeting on 20 February 2018. The Head of Paid Service explained that there had been an APSE report distributed to Members at the beginning of the committee which set out amongst other things some of the principles which underpinned the operation of overview and scrutiny committees. The planned training would build on this best practice and give members of the committee enhanced and additional skills in carrying out the overview and scrutiny function

for the council.

RESOLVED that the Work Plan be noted.

63 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 paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

64 PREPARATION FOR SCRUTINY OF PARTNERSHIP WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

Note: Before discussion commenced, Councillor J. Milne declared that she sat as a representative for West Lindsey District Council with Acis Group Ltd. Councillor Bibb also declared her role as West Lindsey District Council representative with Acis Group Ltd.

Members were advised that as there would be a representative from the Acis Group Ltd at the Committee in February, it would be useful to assemble a list of questions from Members to share with the representative in advance of their attendance. The Head of Paid Service highlighted that these would act as a prompt in the first instance and would not preclude Members from asking other questions on the night to test the answers it was being given. The main purpose of providing questions in advance was to allow the representatives of the organisation to come prepared so the committee could make the most of the opportunity. It was discussed that there needed to be a certain level of scrutiny of the services provided across the district and Members were encouraged to use examples from constituents if appropriate. There was discussion about what expectations there were of housing providers and the need to balance commercial requirements versus social responsibilities. The Wellbeing and Health Manager suggested that a second representative from the Group be invited in order to respond to some of the more case specific queries.

Based on the questions circulated to Members it was

RESOLVED that the questions presented be used as a guide for Members to then ask supplementary questions as they wished.

The meeting concluded at 8.20 pm.

Chairman