

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Prosperous Communities Committee held in the Council Chamber - The Guildhall, Marshall's Yard, Gainsborough, DN21 2NA on 19 March 2019 commencing at 6.30 pm.

Present: Councillor Mrs Sheila Bibb (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Gillian Bardsley (Vice-Chairman) and
Councillor John McNeill (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Owen Bierley
Councillor Christopher Darcel
Councillor Michael Devine
Councillor Steve England
Councillor Paul Howitt-Cowan
Councillor Malcolm Parish

In Attendance:
Mark Sturgess Executive Director of Operations and Head of Paid Service
Michelle Carrington Strategic Lead Customer First
Andy Gray Housing and Enforcement Manager
Katie Coughlan Senior Democratic & Civic Officer

Apologies: Councillor Mrs Pat Mewis
Councillor Mrs Lesley Rollings
Councillor Trevor Young

Membership: No substitutes were appointed for the meeting.

76 CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME

This being the last meeting of the civic year and current electoral cycle, the Chairman opened the meeting by thanking all Committee Members for their participation throughout the year. The year had seen some interesting meetings and discussions take place with a number of important decisions taken. Each Member's input was valued.

In response, Committee Members paid tribute to Councillor Bibb and her Vice-Chairmen for their very able chairmanship and inclusive approach throughout the year.

77 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

78 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

- (a) Meeting of the Prosperous Communities Committee – 29 January 2019.

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Prosperous Communities Committee held on 29 January 2019 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

79 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE

Members gave consideration to the Matters Arising Schedule which set out the current position of all previously agreed actions as at 11 March 2019.

It was noted that all actions had either been completed or were not yet due for completion.

RESOLVED that progress on the Matters Arising Schedule, as set out in the report be received and noted.

80 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

81 CUSTOMER FIRST 6 MONTH UPDATE

The Strategic Lead for Customer First introduced an update report regarding the progress of the Customer First Strategy since the Strategy had been approved in June 2018. It was reiterated that the Strategy was a three year programme with phased projects of differing sizes. Since the Strategy's approval, there had been 25 projects commenced, some of which had been completed already and some of which would be ongoing. The Strategic Lead explained that, rather than trying to cover all of these projects, she would highlight the key issues for Members but she was happy to take questions on any aspect of the Strategy. It was highlighted that, through the report, Members were asked to comment on the progress made so far, confirm whether they were satisfied with the direction of travel and the outcomes achieved.

One of the key projects had been the rollout of digital registration for the green waste subscription. The focus had been on encouraging digital methods of signing up with almost 60% of applications being completed online. As the service entered the second year, over 80% of communication had been through digital methods meaning messages could be tailored to individuals' needs rather than a blanket mailshot, and savings had been made with reduced paper usage and postage costs. It was clear, however, that this did not preclude anyone from registering over the phone or in person.

Another key project had been streamlining the payments process for market stall holders. Previously stall holders had been invoiced after attending market which had been administratively intensive and also open for errors and disputes. In order to resolve these issues, 'on the day' payment had been introduced where stall holders were required to pay

on the day they were attending market. Members heard this had proved very popular and all but one stall holder had signed up, although this was due to reasons outside of the stall holder's control. By enabling payments to be taken directly, some stall holders had chosen to pay in advance, some were able to pay off owed monies and it had also significantly reduced the administrative processes.

Members heard that, in relation to the Trinity Arts Centre, there had been difficulties for customers trying to make bookings as the opening hours for the booking office had been limited. There had been a trial period of Customer Services taking bookings and this had proved so successful it had now become a permanent function within the team. There had also been changes made to the 'call queuing' system which had introduced improved menu choices, redirection to the correct services if it was not for a West Lindsey District Council query (for example highways) and the means to monitor peak call times. This monitoring had had a positive impact for staffing rotas and ensuring there were sufficient staff members on shift to answer calls at the times of high demand.

Debate ensued and in response to Members' questions, the Strategic Lead for Customer First gave assurance that ensuring systems were integrated was a primary focus. Officers were currently reviewing the number of systems used across the Council with a view to reducing and consolidating these. This in turn reduced integrations costs and risks, citing examples of how this would be achieved.

Whilst digital kiosks were initially to be piloted in the Guildhall, if successful it would be possible to look at rolling these out further subject to sourcing suitable partners to host such sites and ensuring assistance was available at such sites if required.

It was also confirmed that Trinity Arts Centre bookings were available on-line 24 hours a day, and had been the case for a while, it was the manned phoned bookings that had been extended and Officers continued to work with the Centre Manager to further investigate other options and technologies to extend this further, such as web based chats, out of hours for example.

Officers confirmed the Council did use a number of public service bespoke applications, some of which would be part of those rationalised as mentioned earlier, some of which would be retained as they were specialist applications. Some elements of these were currently used within the website citing examples of the payment system and the planning system which were specific to the public sector. The website was planned for renewal in 2020 and was due out for procurement shortly, the focus would be on ensuring the website displayed information the customer wanted answering, as opposed to the information the Council wanted to tell the customer which was not always the same. There were plans to develop a customer portal which in effect would allow each customer to have their own account, similar to, for example Amazon.

A Member spoke of his improved experience of signing up to the green garden waste service this year and welcomed the improvements that had been made. He sought indication as to whether there was an intention for all payments to be taken through the same system as they currently appeared to be different. Officers confirmed the payments were actually taken through the same system but accepted that the screens which users viewed did look different, part of the planned work was to standardise the format where possible.

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A number of Members confirmed they were impressed by the progress made to-date and noted that the report had been submitted to the Challenge and Improvement Committee. Views were sought as to what the view of that Committee had been.

The Chairman of that Committee indicated that on the whole his Committee Members had too been impressed by the improvements made but would like to see website improved, but had been accepting of the fact that this work was in the plan.

RESOLVED that the progress through the Customer First Strategy be supported and achievements to date be noted.

82 PROGRESS AND DELIVERY PERIOD 3 2018/2019

Members gave consideration to a report which assessed the performance of the Council's services through agreed performance measures, as at the end of Period 3. Members were asked to review performance and recommend areas where improvements should be made, having regard to any remedial measures already included within the report.

The report summary was structured to highlight those areas that were performing above expectations, and those areas where there was a risk to either performance or delivery.

Section 2 of the Executive Summary included comparison tables showing a summary of performance across the three periods to-date, as well as the direction of travel over the three periods. These were brought to Members' attention.

Areas described as performing well included:

- * Benefits
- * Economic Development and Town Centre Management
- * Trinity Arts Centre
- * Street Cleansing
- * Waste

Those areas described as risks included:

- * Enforcement
- * Home Choices
- * Licensing
- * Local Land Charges
- * Markets

Further information was given on each of the above.

In response to the Chairman's comments regarding difficulty sometimes comparing data in the absence of the target the Director of Operations advised this would be fed into the current review and introduced for 19/20.

Making reference to the summary information in relation to Council Tax and NNDR contained on Page 52 of the reports pack, in response to a Member's question, the Director

of Operations confirmed this would not resolve the matter pertaining to the Lincolnshire Showground. Whilst he did not wish to go into detail regarding this matter, within the Committee arena, following further questions Members were advised this was a complex matter with much legal advice being sought. Questions around the Show Ground's charity status had arisen due to the nature of some of the business and activities carried out on the site.

Members welcomed the Action Plan appended to the report which related to improving the way in which data was collected and presented to allow easier comparison going forward. Officers were praised for their continued attempts at improving the report and its ease of comparison and looked forward to further improvements. In response, the Executive Director of Operations advised P and D reporting had been in place since 2012 and a number of improvements had been made over the years. The reports had been drastically improved since their introduction. The ongoing work of the P and D working group was outlined and assurance was offered that this refinement, both of the targets and the way in which data was presented, with the involvement of Members would continue.

Members indicated they would welcome more detailed information and a greater breakdown of the footfall and usage figures of the Leisure Centre in future reports.

In response to comments, the Executive Director of Operations confirmed that the data collected for progress and delivery without doubt was being used to feed and drive service improvement. It enabled Team Managers to have early warning of potential issues within their service and put in place mitigating actions. It also provided Team Managers with data and evidence to request additional resources from Management Team where mitigating actions had not resolved the issue identified.

RESOLVED that having critically appraised the performance of the Council's services and key projects through agreed performance measures, and having had regard to the remedial measures suggested in the report, and the information provided in response to Member questions, no further formal action be requested at this stage.

Note: Councillor Gillian Bardsley declared a pecuniary interest in the following item of business as she was a landlord and withdrew from the Chamber prior to the item being debated.

83 HOUSING CIVIL PENALTIES POLICY AMENDED

In May 2018 the Prosperous Communities Committee had approved a Civil Penalties Policy which had enabled powers to impose civil penalties for certain offences under the Housing Act 2004. A summary of the civil penalties issued under the Policy to-date were included in Section 2 of the report.

The Policy had now been in place for around a year and as a result it was considered some minor amendments were required as a result of tribunal decisions, best practice and practical experience in dealing with matters covered by the Policy. The revised Policy was included at appendix 1 of the report.

Section 3 of the report detailed the proposed amendments and reasoning for each. The proposed amendments did not affect the legal status of the Policy, but sought to ensure it was fit for purpose and effective, with the main change being point 5, a reduction of the penalty for S.72 and S.95 offences.

The reduction of the penalty for such offences had been informed by a number of matters. The original penalty amount within the Policy was £10,000, which meant that for basic licensing offences (even those that were not deliberate) the penalty had to commence at £10,000 and the previous policy offered no discretion for this to be reduced. It was felt that this figure was not reflective of the offence.

The revised scoring matrix in Table 3 now made additional provision for culpability and track record, which along with the other factors included, ensured that those more severe offences could be issued with a larger penalty.

The lowering of the penalty for the two offences was considered less likely to lead to appeals in relation to the offence, particularly from those landlords who were at the lower end of the scoring matrix. This would therefore reduce the amount of Officer and legal time needed to deal with these matters and make the policy more effective.

Members commented that the fines were quite high and questioned whether this in fact could put a smaller landlord out of business. Officers advised the policy now provided justification of why a fine may be at the lower or higher end of the scale. These offences were breaches of legal obligations but the amended Policy now had allowance to recognise those landlords that may simply be uneducated around their responsibilities compared to those who systematically flouted the law and took advantage of vulnerable people.

Financial position was a mitigation considered, however, the majority of landlords did have means to pay fines due to them owning assets and receiving an income.

In response to Members' comments, Officers confirmed that tribunal decisions would allow for further learning and could set future precedents. It was therefore suggested that Members may wish to include a delegation to Officers to amend the policy in light of case law or tribunal decision, however this was not supported.

RESOLVED that the Revised Policy in regards to Housing Act Civil Penalties be approved to become effective from 1st April 2019.

Note: Councillor Gillian Bardsley returned to the Chamber following consideration of the above item of business.

84 WORKPLAN

Members gave consideration to the Committee Work Plan.

RESOLVED that the workplan as set out in the report be received and noted.

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The meeting concluded at 7.12 pm.

Chairman