

## **WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL**

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee held in the Council Chamber - The Guildhall, Marshall's Yard, Gainsborough, DN21 2NA on 24 July 2025 commencing at 6.30 pm.

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| <b>Present:</b>       | Councillor Owen Bierley (Chairman for the meeting)<br>Councillor Owen Bierley<br>Councillor Matthew Boles<br>Councillor Stephen Bunney<br>Councillor Ian Fleetwood<br>Councillor Paul Key<br>Councillor Jeanette McGhee<br>Councillor Mrs Lesley Rollings<br>Councillor Tom Smith<br>Councillor Trevor Young<br>Councillor Emma Bailey                                     |
| <b>In Attendance:</b> | Interim Head of Paid Service<br>Director of Finance and Assets (Section 151 Officer)<br>Assistant Director People and Democratic (Monitoring Officer)<br>Interim Director of Operational and Commercial Services<br>Business Support Team Leader<br>Democratic and Civic Officer<br>Homes, Health & Wellbeing Team Manager<br>Democratic Services & Elections Team Manager |
|                       | Bill Cullen<br>Peter Davy<br>Lisa Langdon<br>Alan Bowley<br>Sue Leversedge<br>Natalie Smalley<br>Sarah Elvin<br>Katie Storr  |
| <b>Apologies:</b>     | Councillor Paul Swift  |
| <b>Membership:</b>    | Councillor E Bailey was appointed substitute for Councillor P Swift  |

### **17 TO OPEN THE MEETING AND APPOINT A CHAIRMAN**

The Democratic and Civic Officer opened the meeting and explained that, as there was currently no Chairman or Vice Chairman of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee, the first item of business for the Committee was to appoint a Chairman for the meeting. Proposals were duly sought.

A Member of the Committee proposed Cllr Bierley, this was duly seconded.

A Member of the Committee proposed Cllr McGhee, this was duly seconded.

A Member made a request for a recorded vote, which was duly seconded.

With no other proposals forthcoming, on being put to the vote, votes were cast in the following manner:

**In favour of Councillor Bierley:** Councillors Bailey, Bierley, Bunney, Fleetwood, Key, McGhee, Smith.

**In favour of Councillor McGhee:** Councillors Rollings, Young.

**Abstain:** Councillor Boles.

With a total of seven votes cast in favour of Councillor Bierley, two votes in favour of Councillor McGhee, and one abstention, it was

**RESOLVED** that Cllr Bierley would be the Chairman for the duration of the meeting.

Cllr Young and Cllr Rollings gave notice that they would be leaving the meeting early to attend another online meeting.

## **18 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PERIOD**

There was no public participation.

## **19 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING/S**

The Chairman explained there were two sets of minutes, one for approving and one for noting.

Having been moved and seconded it was

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee held on Thursday 12 June 2025 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

With no comments or questions, the minutes of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee held on Thursday, 29 May 2025, and Thursday, 3 July 2025, were **NOTED**.

In response to a question about the membership of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee, the Deputy Monitoring Officer explained that the meeting in question was quorate in accordance with the Committee's terms of reference.

## **20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

## **21 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE**

In response to a question regarding the sharing of health and safety data, the Democratic and Civic Officer explained that the Committee would be updated in due course.

With no further comments or questions, the Matters Arising Schedule, setting out the

position of previously agreed actions as at 16 July 2025, was **NOTED**.

## **22 ASYLUM DISPERSAL IN WEST LINDSEY**

The Committee heard from the Homes and Health Team Manager, who explained that the purpose of the report was to consider the allocation of asylum dispersal funding currently held by the Council, totalling over £185,000. Committee Members were provided with an overview of the funding's purpose, and the current asylum position in West Lindsey. It was explained that the funding had initially been described as un-ringfenced, with the intention that it be used to mitigate new burdens on frontline Council services, particularly homelessness and housing. For this reason, the reserve had been held within the relevant service area.

Members of the Committee were informed that a modest increase had been observed in the number of individuals presenting as homeless following receipt of their asylum decisions. Consequently, it was proposed that the majority of the funding be allocated to homelessness support, in order to safeguard frontline services and prevent overstretching of existing budgets. Attention was also drawn to the lack of structured support for community integration of asylum seekers and refugees, which had thus far been addressed informally by voluntary and community sector (VCS) groups. The Manager proposed that a portion of the funding be made available through the Council's community grants mechanism, enabling collaboration with the VCS to deliver support services that promote community cohesion and assist individuals transitioning from asylum accommodation.

It was noted that the Prosperous Communities Committee had already approved the use of the community grant funding process for the distribution of this funding at its meeting held on 15 July 2025. Therefore, the paper presented to the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee sought formal approval for the allocation of £125,295 from the asylum dispersal reserve to homelessness functions, as detailed in the report, and for the remaining £60,000 to be used for community activities supporting asylum seekers and refugees within the district.

The Chairman thanked the Manager for the introduction and invited questions and comments from the Committee.

A Committee Member enquired about the management of language barriers for asylum seekers approaching the Council for housing. In response, it was confirmed by the Manager that the Council currently utilised LanguageLine services and was exploring additional software solutions to improve communication. It was acknowledged that while asylum seekers represented a small proportion of those requiring language support, improvements could be made to better serve all customers.

Concerns were expressed by a Member of the Committee regarding the broader issue of English language provision in the district. It was noted that the Gainsborough Multicultural Group had identified a significant gap in structured ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) services. Existing provision was described as informal and insufficient to meet demand. In response, the Manager confirmed that discussions had taken place with the multicultural group regarding the potential use of funding for ESOL provision. It was acknowledged that this area had not previously been considered from a skills perspective, but it was agreed that further exploration with skills providers could be undertaken if deemed

a priority by the Council.

The Chairman acknowledged the Committee Member's point and referred to a recent report presented to the Prosperous Communities Committee. The report had been considered helpful in outlining how the skills and contacts available to the Communities Team could potentially be utilised to improve accessibility and advance service delivery. In response, a Member of the Committee reminded Councillors that detailed decisions regarding expenditure would be undertaken by the Prosperous Communities Committee.

With no further comments or questions, and having been proposed and seconded, it was unanimously

**RESOLVED** that

- a) the allocation of £125,295 from the Asylum Dispersal Grant to the Homelessness functions as detailed in table 1 for the financial years 2025/2026 and 2026/2027, be approved; and
- b) the allocation of the remaining Asylum Dispersal Grant funding £60,055 to be utilised for community activity supporting asylum seekers and refugees, be approved.

**23 BUDGET AND TREASURY MONITORING QTR 1 2025/26**

Members of the Committee heard from the Business Support Team Leader concerning the budget and treasury management for the first quarter of the 2025–26 financial year. It was explained that the report covered the period from the end of May 2025, and as anticipated at this early stage of the financial year, few budget variances had been identified. The Officer stated that there was a forecast net underspend of £19,000 against revenue budgets; within the figure, significant offsetting variances were highlighted. The Committee were informed that a salary underspend of £94,000 was forecast due to existing vacancies across the Council; this forecast had been based on a 3% pay award included in the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP). However, it was confirmed that a 3.2% employer pay award offer had been accepted, which would further reduce the underspend by approximately £27,000. Further reductions were expected as vacant posts were filled.

The Officer highlighted that a housing benefit subsidy pressure of £150,000 was forecast, attributed to supported accommodation placements involving unregistered landlords. It was noted that one such landlord was seeking registration, although the process was acknowledged to be lengthy. For reference, a subsidy loss of £86,000 had been incurred during the 2024–25 financial year. For the current year, this pressure was being partially offset by forecast savings of £23,000 in housing benefits administration.

The Officer outlined the recommendations to the Committee. It was stated that an amendment to the fees and charges schedule for markets, was being proposed, with a new fee of £50 for stalls and pitches for event traders only, as detailed in the report. Two capital programme amendments were also proposed. It was stated that an increase of £31,000 in the food waste collection budget was requested to reflect the cost of vehicles and caddies already received or expected before year-end, to be funded by the Defra grant. Additionally, a carry-forward of £188,000 was requested for the Gainsborough Heritage Regeneration

Scheme to enable project completion in the following financial year.

The Chairman thanked the Officer for the introduction and invited comments and questions from the Committee.

A Committee Member began by querying the benefits of landlord registration for tenants. The importance of registration was emphasised in safeguarding tenants, and it was suggested that referral practices could be used to encourage compliance among landlords. Another Member of the Committee requested data on the number and trend of individuals seeking supported accommodation, citing an observed increase in housing difficulties. It was agreed that further information on this matter would be circulated to the Committee following the meeting.

The complexity of the issue was highlighted by Members of the Committee, including the role of subletting arrangements, the impact of Universal Credit on rent payments, and the increasing costs involved for landlords.

A Committee Member sought clarification on whether the discussion pertained to intensive housing management costs, suggesting that the issue was linked to registered providers of supported housing and the associated management expenses. In response, the Chairman noted that workshops had previously been held on housing-related topics, including landlord registration, funding, and support. It was suggested that consideration be given to holding a future workshop to address the issues raised during the meeting. It was confirmed that further details regarding housing benefit matters would need to be provided by the relevant Officer, with information to be circulated to Members of the Committee, and wider Members of the Council if appropriate.

A procedural clarification was provided by the Monitoring Officer regarding recommendation C. It was stated that while the Committee held authority to approve amendments to existing fees and charges, any new fees and charges would require referral to full Council for approval. This clarification did not affect the substance of the recommendation.

With no further comments or questions, having been proposed and seconded, and with the understanding that any new fees would need to be recommended to full Council for approval noted, it was unanimously

**RESOLVED** that

#### **REVENUE**

- a) The forecast out-turn position of a £0.019m net contribution to reserves as of 31st May 2025 (see Section 2) relating to revenue activity, be accepted; and
- b) the use of Earmarked Reserves approved by the Chief Finance Officer using Delegated powers (2.4.1), be accepted; and
- c) the Committee approves the amendment to the fees and charges schedule for 2025/2026 and **RECOMMENDS** the new fee to full Council for approval (2.3.2).

## **CAPITAL**

d) The current projected Capital Outturn position of £13.228m (Section 3), be accepted; and

e) the amendments to the Capital Schemes as detailed in 3.2, be approved.

## **TREASURY**

f) The report, the treasury activity and the prudential indicators (Section 4), be accepted.

## **24 BUDGET CONSULTATION & LGR ENGAGEMENT PROPOSAL 2025**

The Committee heard from the Section 151 Officer concerning the Budget Consultation and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) engagement proposal for 2025. It was reported that the Budget Consultation would inform the budget-setting process for the 2026–27 financial year and would be conducted throughout the remainder of the calendar year. A range of engagement methods was proposed, including both online and in-person formats. The S151 Officer noted that market stall events had previously proven popular with residents, with high levels of engagement and questionnaire completion. However, in-person events held in Caistor and Nettleham had experienced low or no attendance and were therefore proposed for removal from the schedule. The Gainsborough event, which had been well attended, was proposed to continue in the same format as the previous year.

With regard to LGR, it was explained that the LGR exercise would be conducted alongside the Budget Consultation. Questions relating to this exercise were included in the report and would inform a subsequent report to be presented to Council in early September.

A Member of the Committee expressed support for the proposed approach, describing it as sensible and well considered.

However, Members of the Committee raised concerns regarding the effectiveness of budget consultations, suggesting that they often amounted to a token gesture. Queries were raised regarding the framing of questions within the LGR consultation, particularly question nine, which asked respondents to indicate a preference for future groupings of local areas. It was suggested that if the responses were unlikely to be actionable, the question should be narrowed to reflect more realistic scenarios.

A Committee Member suggested that a visual aid, such as a map, be included to clarify terms like “central Lincolnshire,” to avoid confusion with broader regional designations such as Greater Lincolnshire.

Further discussion ensued regarding LGR, with a Committee Member stating that decisions would ultimately be made by Central Government, regardless of local feedback. It was suggested that the Council be transparent about its limited influence, while still valuing public opinion and ensuring it was communicated to decision-makers.

The Interim Head of Paid Service provided an update to the Committee based on recent

discussions held with other Chief Executives across Lincolnshire. It was reported that various consultation and engagement activities were underway across the region, including in areas not submitting formal proposals. It was confirmed that West Lindsey would not be submitting its own proposal but would engage with those that were active. The Interim Head of Paid Service highlighted that a key takeaway from the Committee discussion could be to request Officers to focus on identifying priorities for residents, communities, and businesses in West Lindsey that should be reflected in any future bid.

The Chairman supported this approach and noted that face-to-face engagement remained valuable in fostering understanding and dialogue between the Council and its residents.

A Member of the Committee proposed that a question be included in the consultation asking whether residents supported LGR. It was also suggested that if residents were asked to indicate a preferred area for grouping, a free-text box should be included to allow respondents to explain their reasoning. The Member of the Committee noted that preferences might be influenced by factors such as employment, education, or family connections, and that understanding this context would be beneficial.

A query was raised by a Committee Member regarding question three of the consultation, which referred to pausing fees at the current level and increasing them by inflation the following year. It was noted that the current rate of inflation had not been specified within the consultation materials. A request was therefore made for this information to be included to assist respondents in making informed decisions, along with any forecasted changes to inflation.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer clarified that if the Committee were minded to do so, an additional recommendation could be added which delegated authority to the Head of Paid Service to agree the final questions prior to launch, in accordance with the Committee's comments.

Having been proposed and seconded, and with the additional recommendation included, it was unanimously

**RESOLVED** that

- a) the Budget Consultation process for 2025, be agreed; and
- b) the intention to run a public engagement exercise on Local Government Reorganisation alongside the 2025 Budget Consultation be noted.
- c) the Head of Paid Service be granted delegated authority to agree the final questions prior to launch, in accordance with the Committee's comments.

**25 RECOMMENDATION FROM JSCC: REVIEW OF THE COUNTER FRAUD, CORRUPTION AND BRIBERY POLICY**

Members of the Committee heard from the S151 Officer, who presented the report. It was confirmed that the policy had been reviewed following an Internal Audit recommendation concerning the Council's fraud function. The S151 Officer explained that the revised policy had been approved by the Joint Staff Consultative Committee and was brought before the

Corporate Policy and Resources Committee for final approval.

It was stated that while fraud could not be entirely eliminated, the associated risks could be managed and minimised. High-risk areas had been identified, and appropriate measures had been implemented to mitigate exposure. The importance of ethical conduct among staff and members was emphasised, with mechanisms in place for reporting concerns to designated officers. Regarding benefit fraud, it was confirmed that the Council participated in the National Fraud Initiative and employed an Officer to analyse data in collaboration with the Department for Work and Pensions.

A Member of the Committee raised a number of points regarding Member conduct and transparency. It was noted that, under the Localism Act 2011, powers to disqualify members for breaches of the Code of Conduct had been removed. Concerns were expressed about the limited sanctions available and the potential for misconduct in areas such as expenses. A suggestion was therefore made that Councillor expenses be published more frequently and prominently, such as on individual profile pages on the Council's website, in order to promote transparency.

In response, it was confirmed by the Deputy Monitoring Officer that all Member expenses were already published annually in accordance with statutory requirements. In addition, the Monitoring Officer added that expenses were subject to Freedom of Information requests and that the Council's remuneration scheme was overseen by an independent panel, although the feasibility of publishing expenses quarterly would be reviewed.

The Monitoring Officer also confirmed that the Council had a refreshed Whistleblowing Policy, which had recently been approved and promoted internally, providing an additional mechanism for reporting concerns. It was reiterated that the Code of Conduct and other relevant policies were also in place to support ethical standards and transparency; the Interim Head of Paid Service later added that the Council's approach was consistent with some other councils, and likely a range of councils across Lincolnshire.

The Chairman expressed reservations about increasing the visibility of personal information, noting that many Members had opted not to publish details such as home addresses due to concerns over personal safety.

Committee Members expressed the view that additional publication of Member expenses data was unnecessary. It was stated that Members undertaking substantial duties, including travel for meetings and training, were entitled to claim expenses, and that Officers applied rigorous checks to all claims. It was suggested by another Member of the Committee that the process could be further improved through the adoption of electronic systems for travel claims, which would automatically calculate distances and enhance efficiency. Similarly, another Committee Member requested that the current expenses process be reviewed to assess whether it represented value for money, given the time and effort required of Officers.

Praise was then given to the Officer responsible for processing Member expenses, with recognition of the volume of work and the efficiency with which it was handled. The Chairman concurred and acknowledged the Officer's contribution as exemplary.

In response to a query regarding the process for handling allegations of inappropriate



expense claims, the S151 Officer explained that an Annual Whistleblowing Report was submitted to the Governance and Audit Committee. It was stated that while data protection considerations limited the level of detail provided, the number of cases could be reported. It was noted that no whistleblowing incidents had been recorded in the most recent report.

With regard to further training, a Committee Member suggested that Members of the Council, in addition to staff, should receive training on anti-bribery and corruption.

A Member of the Committee expressed concern that local Councillors had been unfairly treated, despite receiving modest remuneration and generally exercising restraint in expense claims. It was noted that while some Members chose to make their addresses public, others had valid reasons for withholding such details. The importance of individual judgement and public accountability through democratic processes was emphasised.

Cllr Bridgwood, Visiting Member, noted that fraud could be difficult to detect and often remained hidden due to organisational complacency. The importance of maintaining vigilance and robust procedures was emphasised, with systems in place to verify claims and detect irregularities.

The Monitoring Officer highlighted that potential updates on changes to the standards regime were being monitored, and Members were to be kept informed. It was proposed that training be offered to Members in conjunction with the Section 151 Officer, following the adoption of the revised policy.

Having been proposed and seconded, it was unanimously

**RESOLVED** that

- a) the recommendation from the Joint Staff Consultative Committee, be accepted, and the revised Counter Fraud, Corruption and Bribery Policy, be approved; and
- b) minor housekeeping amendments be delegated to the Section 151 Officer following consultation with the Chairmen of the JSCC and CP&R Committees.

## **26 COMMITTEE WORK PLAN**

With no comments or questions, the Committee Work Plan was **DULY NOTED**.

## **27 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 involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 & 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

**Note:** The meeting entered closed session at 7.57pm

## **28 GAINSBOROUGH LEISURE PROVISION**

**Note:** Councillors Bailey, Key, and McGhee left the meeting at 7.57pm and returned at 8.00pm.

Members heard from the Interim Director of Operational and Commercial Services who presented the Gainsborough Leisure Provision report. It was explained that the Committee was being asked firstly to note the initial feasibility works completed to date and secondly, agree the creation of an evidence based/needs assessment. In addition to this, the Committee was being asked to agree the establishment of a Member/Officer working group, with Terms of Reference to be drafted by Officers; the group would then agree a scope for phase two feasibility works, which would subsequently be brought before both Prosperous Communities and Corporate Policy and Resources Committee. The Director stated that although the original recommendation presented in the report pack recommended that Members agree to the establishment of Member/Officer Working Group, if Members were content in agreeing to the amendment, the Officers advised that the group should instead be a Member/Officer Task and Finish Group. Lastly, the fourth and final recommendation was to agree to tender for phase two feasibility works, following agreement of scope.

It was explained by the Director that the work done to date had provided a solid baseline from which the Task and Finish group would then be able to set the scope and objectives of the project.

Members of the Committee thanked the Director for his introduction and emphasised the importance of taking a holistic approach in exploring options for the both the inside and outside of the Gainsborough Leisure Centre.

A Member of the Committee stressed the value of public consultation, stating the need for the community buy-in.

Responding to discussion about future options for the facility, a Committee Member suggested that Members should be able to visit other nearby leisure centres such as those in Harrogate and Knaresborough for further information on how to utilise outdoor spaces. The Interim Head of Paid Service agreed, adding that Officers would be happy for members of the Task and Finish Group to facilitate visits to other leisure centres to ensure freedom of scope.

In response to a question from a Member of the Committee, the Interim Director of Operational and Commercial Services assured the Committee that no decisions regarding the scope of the project had yet been made. It was explained that the scope would be determined by the Task and Finish Group, with a work programme subsequently brought to both the Prosperous Communities and Corporate Policy and Resources Committees in order to show key stages in the process.

Officers responded to questions about the potential costs of the project; it was explained that definitive figures and public consultation were necessary but would come at a later stage in the process.

Several Members of the Committee considered the project's progress to date, noting how staffing changes within the Council had previously impacted the decision-making process. In response, the Director expressed hope that the Committee was now assured about the

plans to ensure proper levels of governance and scrutiny going forward.

Committee Members expressed support for the plans to renew the leisure centre in some format.

The Chairman concluded the discussion by seeking approval from the Committee to alter the wording of recommendation C from 'Working Group' to 'Task and Finish Group'; in response, the Committee indicated their consensus for the alteration to be made.

Having been proposed, seconded, and voted on, with the proposed wording change to recommendation C noted, it was

**RESOLVED** that

- a) the initial feasibility works completed to date be noted; and
- b) the creation of evidence base/needs assessment, be agreed; and
- c) the establishment of a Member/Officer task and finish group, be agreed. Officers to develop Terms of Reference for the group to be approved by the Committee at a future meeting. The group can then agree scope of works for phase 2 feasibility works to recommend back to Prosperous and CP&R; and
- d) tendering for phase 2 feasibility work be agreed to commence following agreement of the scope (referred to in C above).

**Note:** The S151 Officer and Interim Director of Operational and Commercial Services left the Chamber at 8.50pm prior to the Committee's consideration of the Market Street Renewal Ltd – 2025/2026 Business Plan item.

## **29 MARKET STREET RENEWAL LTD - 2025/2026 BUSINESS PLAN**

Members of the Committee heard from the Monitoring Officer who presented the Market Street Renewal Ltd – 2025/2026 Business Plan. An overview of the current financial situation was given followed by an overview of the involvement of WLDC Staff in Market Street Renewal. It was explained that the Committee was being asked to approved changes to WLDC Staff roles. The Monitoring Officer outlined the recommendations and invited questions from Members of the Committee.

**Note:** Cllr Rollings and Cllr Young left the meeting at 9.02pm

With no comments or questions, and having been proposed, seconded, and voted on, it was unanimously

**RESOLVED** that

- a) the contents of the Business Plan 2025/26 provided in Appendix 1 be noted; and

- b) the creation of a new company director post be approved; and
- c) Mr Alan Bowley be approved into the newly created Director Post; and
- d) Mr Comie Campbell be approved as the Company Secretary; and
- e) Mr Peter Davy be approved as the Council's shareholder representative on the company board.

**Note:** The S151 Officer and Interim Director of Operational and Commercial Services returned to the Chamber at 9.05pm following the Market Street Renewal Ltd – 2025/2026 Business Plan item.

### **30 THURROCK/APSE LITIGATION UPDATE**

The Committee heard from the Monitoring Officer who presented the Thurrock/APSE Litigation Update. It was explained that report was intended to update the Committee on the Council's current position regarding the litigation. An overview of the Council's involvement in the case was provided.

In response to questions about risk with respect to the Council's continued APSE membership, the Monitoring Officer stated that APSE had been in contact with the councils involved to provide reassurance that certain actions had been taken to ensure reduced risk in the future. The Committee was assured that if the Council's solicitors deemed future risk to be significant, then the Council's membership of APSE would be evaluated.

The Monitoring Officer outlined some of the advantages of APSE membership in response to questions from Members of the Committee, and a Committee Member suggested that the appropriate body within the Council conduct a review of APSE membership.

Members thanked the Monitoring Officer for the update, and with no requirement for a vote, the report was **DULY NOTED**.

The meeting concluded at 9.25 pm.

Chairman