

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Prosperous Communities Committee held in the Council Chamber - The Guildhall on 10 September 2019 commencing at 6.30 pm.

Present: Councillor Owen Bierley (Chairman)
Councillor Paul Howitt-Cowan (Vice-Chairman) and
Councillor John McNeill (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Stephen Bunney
Councillor Liz Clews
Councillor Christopher Darcel
Councillor Michael Devine
Councillor Mrs Jessie Milne
Councillor Jim Snee
Councillor Mrs Mandy Snee
Councillor Robert Waller
Councillor Mrs Anne Welburn
Councillor Trevor Young

In Attendance:
Ian Knowles Executive Director of Resources, Head of Paid Service and S151 Officer
Andy Gray Housing and Enforcement Manager
Rachel Parkin Home Choices Team Manager
Katie Coughlan Senior Democratic & Civic Officer

Apologies: Councillor Tracey Coulson

Membership: No substitutes were appointed for the meeting

23 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

24 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

(a) Meeting of the Prosperous Communities Committee – 16 July 2019.

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Prosperous Communities Committee held on 16 July 2019 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

25 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE

Members gave consideration to the Matters Arising Schedule which set out the current position of all previously agreed actions as at 2 September 2019.

It was noted that all outstanding actions were marked as completed. Members' attention was particularly drawn to the action entitled "RSN Campaign – Letters of Support". A response had now been received from the Government Minister; this had been circulated via the Members Newsletter. Members were encouraged to sign up to the newsletter if they had not already done so, as this was now a recognised method by which such information would be communicated.

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

26 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Jessie Milne declared personal interest in agenda item 6 i) (Modern Slavery Statement) as she had previously considered the report at the Joint Staff Consultative Committee on 5 September 2019.

27 MODERN SLAVERY STATEMENT

Members gave consideration to a report which sought to implement a Modern Slavery Statement across all working practices of the Authority.

In March 2015 the Modern Slavery Act gained royal assent which enabled enforcement agencies to pursue allegations of modern slavery under one piece of legislation instead of several different complicated ones. It gave prominence to the offence and meant statutory guidance was issued in how to identify victims and the type of services to be offered to victims.

October 2019 would see the publication of the Serious Adult Review (SAR) into Modern Slavery across Lincolnshire. This would include the involvement of West Lindsey District Council (WLDC) during the criminal prosecutions related to Operation Pottery, which included offences relating to activities on the Drinsey Nook site within West Lindsey as well as further involvement of all agencies across the broader term of modern slavery across Lincolnshire.

As a result of the SAR a list of recommendations would be published to ensure future learning was taken on board within agencies who may come into contact with modern slavery. Part of the recommendations would be a modern slavery charter, the modern slavery statement would form part of the charter and ensure that West Lindsey District Council was committed to identifying and working with partners to prevent and stop practices of modern slavery.

The statement ensured that there was a formal commitment by West Lindsey District

Council to acknowledge the crime and impact of modern slavery within the District, whilst ensuring the Authority did not unwittingly support or further any acts of modern slavery. The statement would also ensure that all services operated, and all policies initiated by the Authority had reference to understanding any potential risks to the Authority in regards to practices of modern slavery.

Debate ensued and Members questioned whether the word “appropriate staff”, in respect of training, was adequate enough or whether in fact it should simply state “all staff”, as in their view it was important all staff received all training. In responding Officers clarified that there would be different levels of training dependent on an employee’s role within the organisation, outlining the varying roles and the varying levels of engagement with the public each role had, to demonstrate why different levels of training were appropriate.

In response to Members’ questions Officers advised that as the Statement affected all corporate policies and staff, it would also be submitted to Corporate Policy and Resources Committee for approval. Officers also confirmed that the requirements of the Statement would form part of any due diligence undertaken by the Council in respect of commercial investments and appropriate action would be taken against any contractor or partner, for example, who failed to meet the requirements.

In response to suggestions the Council was not doing enough to identify modern slavery it was stressed that the Statement, the proposed training and all actions on the action plan would lay the foundations to ensure all staff were well trained and well placed to identify and know where to report such concerns.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) the Modern Slavery Statement be supported and **RECOMMENDED** to the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee for formal adoption across all operations of West Lindsey District Council; and
- (b) Delegated authority be granted to the Executive Director of Resources to make minor housekeeping amendments to the policy in the future, in consultation with the Chairman of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee and the Chairman of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee.

28 HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY REVIEW

Members gave consideration to a report which sought approval of a revised Housing Assistance Policy.

The West Lindsey Housing Assistance Policy was approved in 2018. The policy had two different elements; the Independent Living Grants which were funded through the Better Care Fund Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), received from Lincolnshire County Council (LCC), and the Capital Grant works, funded via the Council’s Private Sector Renewal Capital Budget.

When the policy had originally been devised, criteria was included to ensure that funding was allocated to the most in need for both grant types. the policy was now a year old and a

review was required to ensure that the criteria was still relevant and to look at how more can be done to assist those in need.

Section 4 of the report detailed the revisions made to the Policy and offered rationale for the changes having been made.

In opening the debate, the Opposition Leader expressed concern at the length of time DFG applications took to complete, suggesting that a large number of people died waiting for the adaptations. Whilst he acknowledged that the lengthiest delay was as a result of the time taken to secure an Occupational Therapist (OT) visit, he questioned why the Authority, despite being aware of the situation did not appear to be putting any pressure on the County Council to try and resolve this situation.

It was questioned whether there were other options the District Council should be considering for example procuring the OTs direct on an ad hoc basis. Opposition Members were strongly of the view that the most vulnerable people were being failed, and these lengthy delays had impacts across a number of other areas of the NHS.

In response, Officers' offered assurance that the District Council's element of the process was being progressed as quickly as possible, and strongly refuted the allegation that a large percentage of people passed away whilst waiting for the grants. Officers were aware of the delays with OT appointments, but again stressed that this was a statutory function of the County Council, and the District Council's role was to influence where possible.

Officers indicated they could provide the number of cases open within the District but not across the County, this was county data not accessible by all.

By way of re-assurance the Chairman of the Committee advised he was a member of the Housing Health and Care Delivery Group and outlined some of the work the group were undertaking. The Group were fully aware of the issues surrounding OTs and had already taken some steps to address the matter.

The reasons for the underspend in this area were explained and this was fundamentally as a result of referrals not being made quick enough. The District could only commence an adaptation on referral from the County.

In respect of the Private Sector Renewal element of the grant, some councillors expressed concern at the means testing and suggested this should be scrapped, as there was concern this limited eligibility. The Policy had been amended 18 months ago to increase eligibility and for West Lindsey based grants, this was a financial assessment, as opposed to a full means test, again meaning the number of people eligible was increased. With regard to land charges against properties the Council issued very few of these, and these were usually only relevant when a large extension had been completed, for example, as arguably this increased the house of the property and it was important the Council recovered monies where appropriate.

There was a view that there needed to be better tracking of the effectiveness and impact of the Policy. It was suggested revised measures should be considered by the new Performance and Delivery group.

Referring to the empty property grants, Members sought an update. Officers advised the empty property grants had been successful and really popular and for the first time the Council had been able to reduce the number of empty properties to under 100 in the South West Ward. Around 35 properties were in progress with 15 completed. Feedback received had also allowed Officers to streamline the process and make it easier to apply. The Empty property grants were not currently part of the P and D measures and therefore Officers indicated they would include further narrative in the next quarter report as the scheme had been popular. The report also proposed that the scheme now be widened outside of just Gainsborough as it would be the most cost effective way to deal with some problem properties as opposed to Compulsory Purchase, for example. However the grant would not be offered district wide due to the numbers it would likely involve.

In response to questions, Officers confirmed all works undertaken were inspected and signed off and grants were only awarded on this basis. There had been a few issues with the quality of the work but these had been dealt with and resolved.

The Ward Member disputed the scheme was working well, delivering its outcomes or being a success. He felt the number of applications was too low and was of a view that just as many, if not more, homes were boarded up. He did not feel the grant Scheme was addressing the problems, and reported of a number issues people who had applied for the grant had experienced. The whole programme needed greater promotion, and the quality needed to be much improved.

In responding to the comments, Officers advised the amendments to the scheme were all aimed at widening the scope and increasing interest and eligibility. It was not suggested that this would resolve all the housing issues the Ward experienced however it was one such way the Council could try to offer assistance to realise improvements.

In light of the comments made it was proposed that the policy be further reviewed in six months' time, this was duly seconded.

Concern was expressed that this would be insufficient time to monitor any change in position and a report in year's time was more reasonable.

Whilst the desire to move swiftly was much appreciated, other Members were of the view that it would very difficult for Officers to produce a much different report in such a short timescale and provide evidence or otherwise that the revised grants were having the desired impact. Undertaking a review needed to be a worthwhile exercise that would deliver results. Other Councillors were urged to reconsider the timescale given this fact.

The proposal for a review in 6 months' time was withdrawn and it was proposed the report be brought back in May 2020.

Clarity was sought from Officers as to the exact nature of the report Members were requesting to be re-submitted and differing views were shared.

The Executive Director of Resources summarised the discussions and views expressed and suggested that any report brought to the May 2020 meeting should be a position statement as at the end of March, so in effect, would be a six month review,

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The report would take the form of an update report on progress against all the grants identified within the Policy, including up-take and impact. This could then be used as an enhanced performance report against the Policy, and used to inform any further Policy revisions which were deemed necessary in the proceeding six month period.

Members all indicated their agreement to this suggestion and an amendment to that effect was moved and seconded.

On that basis it was **RESOLVED** that:

- (a) the revised Housing Assistance Policy 2018 -2022 be approved; and
- (b) a further report providing a position update on progress against all the grants identified within the Policy, including up-take and impact, as at the end of March 2020, be submitted to the Committee's May 2020 meeting and the content of the report be used to inform any further Policy revisions required in the proceeding six months.

29 WORKPLAN

Members gave consideration to the Committee Work Plan.

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

The meeting concluded at 7.47 pm.

Chairman