

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee held in the Virtual Meeting - MS Teams <https://west-lindsey.public-i.tv/core/portal/home> on 18 June 2020 commencing at 6.30 pm.

Present: Councillor Giles McNeill (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Anne Welburn (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Owen Bierley
Councillor Matthew Boles
Councillor Stephen Bunney
Councillor David Cotton
Councillor Michael Devine
Councillor Ian Fleetwood
Councillor Paul Howitt-Cowan
Councillor John McNeill
Councillor Mrs Mandy Snee
Councillor Robert Waller
Councillor Trevor Young

In Attendance:
Ian Knowles Chief Executive
Alan Robinson Monitoring Officer
Tracey Bircumshaw Strategic Finance and Business Support Manager
Ellen King Senior Performance Officer
Sue Leversedge Business Support Team Leader
Katie Storr Senior Democratic & Civic Officer
James Welbourn Democratic and Civic Officer

Apologies: None

Membership: No substitutes were appointed

1 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PERIOD

There was no-one registered to take part in the public participation item.

2 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 February 2020 were approved as a correct record.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

4 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE

The Democratic and Civic Officer introduced this item and informed Members that there had been responses provided by Officers to questions asked by Members at the February meeting.

With no further comments raised, the item was noted by the Committee.

5 PROGRESS AND DELIVERY REPORT - PERIOD 4 2019/20

Members considered the Progress and Delivery report for period 4 2019/2020, including the months January to March 2020. This would be the last time the report would come to Corporate Policy and Resources Committee in this format.

The Senior Performance Officer introduced the report and in doing so highlighted that the quarter had been largely unaffected by Covid-19. 78.4% of the performance measures set were being met or exceeded, however it was expected that Covid-19 would impact on some of these areas in the near future. Examples of areas that would be affected included the West Lindsey Leisure Centre, car parking and the Trinity Arts Centre

Members were also asked to note that there had been a second recommendation added to the paper related to 'service updates' and how the Covid-19 pandemic was affecting Council operations.

Robust debate ensued with some Members expressing concern that the satisfaction levels, stated within the report, in respect of the Gainsborough Leisure Centre, did not match their own personal experience; nor that of residents who were making repeated complaints to Local Councillors. Despite this continuing to be raised, some Members felt this situation was not resolved and not enough action was being taken. Further disappointment was expressed that in light of the enforced closure, the opportunity had not been taken to drain and clean the pool, and thoroughly deep clean the facilities.

The decision to suspend the current cinema project within the Market Place, Gainsborough was considered sensible given the current climate and the unknown financial position going forward, however Opposition Councillors questioned why the same approach was not being applied to the 5-7 Market Place Project. It was suggested that the project was poor value for money, even more so given the financial impact of COVID-19 and should too be suspended.

In response, dealing with latter, the Leader outlined the difference between the two projects,

one being dependent on an outside body and partner arrangement, whilst the second was in total ownership of the Council and was being part funded by Heritage Lottery funding, which came with conditions. The Chief Executive echoed these comments, the Council needed to deal with the property and any ideas for the site were welcome. There were opposing views as to the wider benefits of Townscape Heritage Initiatives, with an Opposition Member calling for the project to re-considered by Council.

Regarding the Leisure Centre, Members were reminded that the Council were currently supporting the costs of critical staff only at the Leisure Centre, with the remaining staff furloughed. Therefore, only essential maintenance had been undertaken during the closure. A deep clean would be undertaken before re-opening.

The Senior Performance Officer also urged Members to forward any resident complaints they received directly onto the Council. Satisfaction levels were based on the number of complaints, received, if these were not being made directly to the Council and forwarded on by Local Members, they were not being captured within the statistics. It was acknowledged that cleanliness had been raised on several occasions, and the Authority through previous meetings had committed to undertake its own satisfaction surveys and spot checks. Unfortunately this work had been suspended due to the current lockdown, but would be resumed once the Centre re-opened.

In response to questions around the number of Freedom of Information requests received, Officers confirmed the figure stated was correct, and concurred that the level was rising and could be resource intensive. Trends were monitored through an internal officer board, this monitoring drove service improvement, primarily by looking at the type of information requested, and trying to ensure this was readily available on the website.

In response to comments regarding the need to monitor the impact of the new leisure facility at Market Rasen, not only from a usage point of view but its impact on mental and physical well-being. The Chairman proposed an additional recommendation for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, when discussing the Progress and Delivery report criteria, to consider a set of appropriate measures for the Leisure Centres in both Gainsborough and Market Rasen, ensuring the differences and similarities between the sites was taken into consideration. This was seconded.

The Senior Performance Officer also advised that wider targets around Health, Well Being and Sport were in place and were monitored through the Corporate Plan Measures, linked to the Corporate Plan objectives, as opposed to through Performance and Delivery. Such matters were also referenced in the State of the District report, which was due for publication in July.

Following much debate and on being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED to: -

- (a) Agree that the performance of the Council's services through agreed performance measures had been assessed. Areas where improvement could be made had been highlighted during the course of debate, whilst having regard to the remedial measures set out in the report;

- (b) Note the updates provided for each of the Council's service areas which detailed how the Covid-19 pandemic was affecting Council operations, and the likely effect on performance over the next 12 months;
- (c) Request the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, when discussing Progress and Delivery report criteria, to consider appropriate measures for the Leisure Centres in Gainsborough and Market Rasen ensuring the differences and similarities between the sites was taken into consideration.

6 BUDGET AND TREASURY MONITORING FINAL OUTTURN 2019/20

Members considered a report setting out the final budget outturn position for revenue and capital in 2019/20. The report also requested approval for a transfer to General Fund working balances, a request for approval to enter into a grant agreement, and a capital budget amendment for 2020/2021.

The Business Support Team Leader introduced the report and firstly advised of a typographical error with recommendation K, advising Committee it should read as follows: -

“Due to Covid-19 financial impacts, a revised budget for the year 20/21 and a mid-year review of the medium term financial plan will be presented to the November meeting of this committee.”

This was the final outturn report for 2019/20, following the closure of accounts. In relation to revenue, the final position is a surplus of £1.385m, with approval requested for a movement to general fund balances of £817,000. This brought the general fund working balance to £4.234m at year-end.

The final outturn position was an increase of £5,000 from that reported at period 4 – and details of the movements from period 4 to the final position were included in the report at section 2.2.

The final movement to general fund, after carry forwards, was £815,000 and a transfer to valuation volatility reserve of £568,000, which increased the balance of that reserve to 8% of our investment portfolio purchase price.

With regard to capital expenditure the outturn position remained unchanged from the quarter 4 position at £18.029m, after carry forwards of £4.654m.

Members were also asked to approve entering into a grant agreement with the Police and Crime Commissioner for Lincolnshire for the delivery of CCTV upgrades funded by the Safer Streets Fund, detailed at section 3.1. A further report for budget approval would be submitted to committee for budget approval once grant funds have been secured.

Members were also asked to approve a maximum capital budget of £428,000 as grant funding towards the Riverside Walk/Bowling Green land scheme funded from S106, detailed at section 3.2.

Finally Section 7 of the report provided Members with an update on the Council's response

to Covid-19 and the potential financial pressures that this was likely to have on our resources. The financials contained within the report were based on estimates and assumptions made at the end of April 2020.

Before opening the matter for the debate the Leader placed on record his thanks to the Finance Team. They had been 7th Authority in the whole country to submit their statement of accounts and the first in Lincolnshire.

Debate ensued and in response to Members' questions, it was confirmed that the Leisure Contract Staffing costs listed in Appendix 3, were a West Lindsey risk and were borne out of the authority covering the cost of two employees, referred to earlier in the meeting. It was further confirmed that the actual cost was £60k, the 78K having being an original estimate.

Explanation was also offered in respect of Covid capital impacts, with Officers explaining that some Officer time was specifically charged against capital projects. These Officers had been re-deployed but this had resulted in a capital impact against the projects.

These figures had been provided to the Government to assist them in predicting what would be the likely shortfall across Local Government, despite £3.2 billion having been distributed nationally.

In response to suggestions that the Administration must be concerned about the future, whilst acknowledging these were unprecedented times and one the most difficult times the country had faced in living memory, the 6% target against commercial investments was still being achieved. The volatility return was well placed. The Leader considered the Council was one of the best placed financially in Lincolnshire, and previously taken decisions had ensured the Council was in a robust position. The Chief Executive concurred, advising, overall, the commercial portfolio was holding up. The Authority continued to lobby for costs having secured circa £1m to date. The reserves were in a strong position. Spend would be reduced over the next 6 months with a Full review of the Medium Term Financial Plan, planned for November 2020. The figures provided were currently the best estimates. Costs were reviewed monthly and returns made to Central Government. There was confidence that the Authority would be able to manage itself through the difficult times ahead.

Noting a mid year financial review was planned in November, indication was sought as to whether Councillors would have the opportunity to input into the wider recovery plan, prior to that November report. Members were advised that Council would be meeting on 29 June to discuss the very subject, furthermore the report would propose Members hold a workshop, at which a much franker and broader debate could be held about what the future may look like. At county level, the Chief Executive was regularly preparing reports on the countywide position with authorities working collectively in respect of recovery.

Confirmation was provided that by accepting recommendation (d) , Members were merely accepting to enter into a grant agreement. Approving any bid would be subject to a more detailed report, and as requested by Members would include details of any and all additional financial risks, such an arrangement may have to the Council.

At the request of a Member all recommendations with the exception of (d) were voted on together; a separate vote was taken for that recommendation.

Following which it was **RESOLVED** to:

- (a) Accept the out-turn position of £1,385k;
- (b) Note the contribution to the Valuation Volatility Reserve of £568k, as approved under urgent delegated authority by the Head of Paid Service in consultation with the Leader, the Deputy Leader and the Leader of the Opposition on 23 April 2020;
- (c) Approve the remaining £817k be transferred to the General Fund working balance;
- (d) Approve entering into a grant agreement with the office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Lincolnshire for the delivery of CCTV upgrades funded by the Safer Streets Fund;
- (e) Approve a maximum capital budget of £428k as grant funding towards the Riverside Walk/Bowling Green Lane scheme funded from Section 106 monies;
- (f) Note:
 - (i) the Section 137 expenditure statement for 2019/20, showing contributions made to certain charitable funds and not for profit bodies providing a public service in the UK;
 - (ii) the Building Control Account for 2019/20, showing the deficit for the chargeable and non-chargeable work for the year;
- (g) accept the use of Earmarked Reserves approved by the Chief Finance Officer using delegated powers;
- (h) accept the final capital outturn position of £18,029k;
- (i) note the information in the report related to the Revenue Outturn Subjective Analysis;
- (j) note the content of the Regulation 62 of the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 report for 2019/20;
- (k) due to Covid-19 financial impacts, a Revised Budget 2020/21 and a Mid-Year Review of the Medium Term Financial Plan be presented to the November meeting of this Committee.

7 BUDGET CONSULTATION 2020

Members considered a report outlining the 2020 budget consultation process. West Lindsey District Council (WLDC) were members of the Consultation Institute and in accordance with best practice it was ensured that all consultations were legal and that appropriate processes were in place to lower the risk of a judicial review.

Members questioned what would happen if they did not accept recommendation 1, particularly as the consultation had already opened despite the report advising this would not happen until July. Members expressed deep dissatisfaction that they had learnt of the consultation prior to being asked to comment on it, and did not consider this an appropriate way to engage elected Members.

The Finance and Business Support Manager apologised for the error in the timetable, which should have read June. The Chief Executive also expressed his personal apologies, accepting that he would have preferred Members had greater involvement and given greater consideration, however unfortunately on this occasion this had not been the case. With pressures across the team from elsewhere, it was an unfortunate situation and was not a common practice of the authority.

In light of the comments made throughout the debate, the Chairman of the Governance and Audit Committee undertook to look at how the Council undertook consultations going forward, in a bid to improve practise, where possible, and would discuss this at his next briefing.

In light of the comments made throughout the debate, it was suggested that the wording of recommendation 1 be amended to remove the word 'accept' and replace with 'ratify'. This was moved and seconded.

Following the vote, it was **RESOLVED** to:

- (a) Ratify the Budget Consultation process; and
- (b) Send a copy of the consultation video to all Members of the Committee.

8 REVIEW PARKING PERMIT OPTIONS

Members considered a report on the re-introduction of car parking and permit charges.

It had been decided, under delegated authority on 16 March to suspend parking charges for a period of three months, due to the lockdown by the Government. The report detailed different options for bringing parking and permit charges back, and the Officer recommendation was to bring these charges back from 1 July 2020.

The Strategic Finance and Business Support Manager informed Members that it was likely that the take-up of 5 and 6 days passes would decrease in the future due to the changing nature of working patterns; in particular, Officers at West Lindsey District Council were increasingly working from home during the lockdown period.

Lengthy and robust debate ensued with several Members indicating the original decision taken back in March had been very much appreciated. There were calls for the current suspension of charges to remain in place and whilst Members appreciated and acknowledged the additional costs, it was considered the continued suspension demonstrated a continued intention to support local communities, and business in their

recovery.

Members considered there was data to support that free parking was working. The recovery was very much still in its early stages and supporting local businesses where possible was paramount.

In response to questions, Officers confirmed that it would take in the region of 2-3 months to establish alternative arrangements for permits, once these had been determined and this was due to the legal notices required when making changes to parking charges.

An alternative to the printed recommendations was moved and seconded namely: -

“To reconsider the report in September 2020 with a view to considering whether it would be appropriate to reintroduce parking charges on October 1 2010.”

Several Members spoke in support of the alternative recommendation, whilst others, whilst they wished to support continued free car parking, were conscious of the mounting costs to the Council. Some felt these costs were relatively small given the overall cost.

Following further debate an addition to the written recommendations was moved and seconded, namely: -

- (1) Recommendation 1 as written be supported,**
- (2) Recommendation 2 as written, be curtailed so it finished with the words from 1 July 2020; and a further recommendation be added;**
- (3) To allow Officers to investigate further more flexible options to support workers in our community, and report back to the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee. These options to be determined by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chairman of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee.**

On being put to the vote, this first alternative recommendation **was not** carried and the committee continued to debate.

Reference was made to the difference between the free parking periods within Gainsborough and Market Rasen, and in the event that charges were to be re-introduce from 1 July, it was suggested the free parking period should be re-aligned across the two towns granting both a free period of parking for 2hrs. Officers advised of the legal mandatory lead in times for making any such changes. The Monitoring Officer also expressed caution that no such decision of that nature could be made at this evening's meeting as Members did not have all the information available to them.

Following much debate the following further recommendation was proposed and seconded:

“To delegate to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chairman of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee, a review of the introduction of 2

hours free parking in Gainsborough from 1 October 2020. This was with a view to bringing a report to the 17 September 2020 meeting of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee.”

On being put to the vote this additional recommendation **was not** carried.

There was general consensus however that the Parking Strategy as a whole would need to be reviewed to account for the “new normal” patterns. Whilst it was regrettable that charges could not remain suspended indefinitely due to the other financial pressures the Council faced. There was also view that it was fairer that those who used the car parks paid for them as opposed to all council tax payers.

In response to questions, Officers confirmed that 62.2% of users were taking advantage of the free parking hour.

With all other proposals falling, the Committee considered the amended set of recommendations proposed at the outset of the meeting namely:

- (1) To approve the re-introduction of car park charges from 1 July 2020;
- (2) To approve the re-introduction of permit charges from 1 July 2020;
- (3) To allow Officers to investigate further more flexible options to support workers in our community, and report back to the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee. These options were to be determined by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chairman of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee.

Following a vote, the recommendations listed above were **APPROVED**

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

- (a) the re-introduction of car park charges from 1 July 2020 be approved;
- (b) the re-introduction of permit charges from 1 July 2020 be approved;
- (c) Officers investigate further more flexible options to support workers in our community, and report back to the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee. These options to be determined by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chairman of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee.

9 COMMITTEE WORK PLAN

The Committee workplan was noted. Officers undertook to update any items which were still allocated to Officers who had left the Authority.

10 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 item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

Note: There was a short adjournment, prior to the next item of business, with the Committee reconvening at 20.49.

A roll call was undertaken to ensure all Members had returned to the meeting.

11 SURESTAFF UPDATE

Members considered a report on the current position of, a Council-owned local recruitment agency.

Members had previously made a decision to close this company, however since making that decision there had been a number of changes. These were outlined to Members. Officers advised the decision was not being changed, rather delayed, for the reasons outlined.

Hearing the changing situation, Members requested a further report on the position of the company be submitted to the Committee in March.

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

- (a) note the delay in closing the company in order that it can play a role in the District's recovery; and
- (b) submit a further report on the position of the company in March 2021

The meeting concluded at 8.56 pm.

Chairman