

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee held virtually via Virtual - MS Teams on 17 September 2020 commencing at 6.30 pm.

Present:

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 Jeff Summers
Councillor Robert Waller
Councillor Trevor Young

In Attendance:

Ian Knowles	Chief Executive
Alan Robinson	Director of Corporate Services and Monitoring Officer
Ady Selby	Assistant Director of Commercial and Operational Services
Alison McCulloch	Revenues Manager

Apologies:

Councillor Giles McNeill

25 REGISTER OF ATTENDANCE

The Register of Attendance for Members and Officers was undertaken by the Democratic Services Officer and apologies were noted.

26 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PERIOD

There was no public participation.

27 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor D. Cotton declared a personal interest in relation to agenda item 6a (Debt

Management Policy) and clarified that in his role in the Courts he was not able to sit on any case related to the Council. He also highlighted that, in relation to mention of religion in the Budget Consultation paper (agenda item 6c), he was a priest in the diocese of Lincoln.

28 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING/S

For Approval:

- a) Meeting of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee – 23 July 2020

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee held on 23 July 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

- b) Meeting of the Concurrent Meeting of Prosperous Communities and Corporate Policy and Resources Committees – 16 July 2020

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Concurrent Meeting held on 16 July 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

29 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE

The Democratic Services Officer introduce the current Matters Arising Schedule and highlighted that all matters had been completed. With no comments or questions, the Matters Arising Schedule was **NOTED**.

30 DEBT MANAGEMENT POLICY

The Chairman invited the Revenues Manager to introduce the first of the public reports for the evening. The Revenues Manager explained the purpose of the report was to seek to clarify the Council's policy relating to debt management of all the Council's debts. The existing policies had been collated into this one policy for ease of use and consistency across the board.

Members enquired as to what actions had been taken regarding debt recovery during the pandemic as it was felt it was important to be somewhat lenient given the circumstances. It was confirmed that all recovery action had been postponed until the end of May 2020, at which point reminder letters had resumed. However, these had been reminder letters rather than statutory action letters. The Revenues Manager explained that in some cases, particularly for those who had been long-term furloughed or made redundant, payment terms had been extended or payments had been reduced. It was also possible for those really struggling to apply for hardship relief.

A Member of Committee enquired as to whether it would be possible to see a snapshot of the figures coming through the performance management indicators, not as a target figure but to give Members an overview of recovery action taken. The Revenues Manager confirmed this could be undertaken. There was discussion as to action to be taken should there be any concerns about Council Members not paying, for example, Council Tax. The

Monitoring Officer confirmed there were options available should the situation arise.

With no further discussion it was

RESOLVED that:

- a) the Debt Management Policy be approved; and
- b) minor policy changes be authorised by the Section 151 Officer under delegated powers.

31 THE COUNCIL TAX DISCRETIONARY HARDSHIP POLICY (SECTION 13A)

The Revenues Manager introduced her second report in relation to the Council Tax Discretionary Hardship Policy (Section 13A). She explained that the new policy included all elements of the hardship relief and combined all various awards into one policy rather than separate policies.

With regards to the recommendations, a Member proposed an amendment to recommendation two in line with the usual practice of consulting with the Chairman of the Committee with regards to any housekeeping changes. On being seconded and voted upon it was

RESOLVED that recommendation two be amended to read:

That minor housekeeping amendments to the policy be undertaken by the Section 151 Officer under delegated powers in consultation with the Chairman of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee.

A Member of the Committee noted that the same amendment would have been suitable for the previous item. The Chief Executive confirmed that even without the specific wording, Officers would be sure to follow the agreed process for such amendments. Members thanked him for this clarification.

Members of the Committee continued to discuss the policy and noted the inclusion of the risk of fire damage to a property as a positive. The Revenues Manager explained that this had been included as there had been a couple of occasions where this had happened but there had been no discount the team could have awarded. She stated that although it was a rare occurrence, it was a positive to be able to assist residents in such situations. It was also clarified that, as with residents affected by flooding, there had to be proof provided that the council tax liability was not covered by their insurance. If the insurance would cover it, they would not be eligible for the discount.

In response to a final question regarding oversight of awards made under the policy, the Revenues Manager explained that applications were considered by two Senior Officers, all awards given were logged on the system and it was also reported through the Section 151 Officer via budget monitoring.

Having been moved and seconded, it was unanimously

RESOLVED that:

- a) the Council Tax Discretionary Hardship Policy (Section 13A) be approved; and
- b) minor housekeeping amendments to the policy be undertaken by the Section 151 Officer under delegated powers in consultation with the Chairman of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee; and
- c) individual applications for Section 13A Discretionary Relief be determined by the Section 151 Officer under delegated powers; and
- d) it be **RECOMMENDED** to the Governance and Audit Committee that the Constitution be amended in order to allow that, in the event of an appeal, they be considered by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council.

32 BUDGET CONSULTATION 2020

The Business Support Team Leader introduced the Budget Consultation 2020. She highlighted the key points of interest were included in the executive summary and explained this year had seen a new initiative to record online Question and Answer sessions which had proved worthwhile. There had been an increased response rate on previous years and where there had been a low response rate from local businesses, it was intended to do an online consultation with business rate customers.

A Member of Committee enquired as to the reason behind the increased rate of response, suggesting the pandemic may have had an impact as much as the amended methods of communication. He also asked whether anything was being done to engage with younger residents as the breakdown of responses showed a clear majority of older respondents. In addition, it was shown that only two District Councillors responded to the consultation and he enquired how that compared with previous years. It was noted that Councillors may have responded under other guises, such as a resident or a member of the Citizen Panel.

The Business Support Team Leader explained that the increase in responses was most likely a combination of factors, including the effect of the pandemic creating a somewhat captive audience as well as the alternative communications. She stated that it was important to build on the success this year and work to engage with under-represented groups for the next consultation. It was suggested that the categorisation of 'District Councillor' may not be required and this would be reviewed during the planning for the next consultation.

Having been proposed and seconded, it was

RESOLVED that the results of the Budget Consultation 2020 be accepted and the results and comments be considered during the budget setting process 2021/22.

33 COMMITTEE WORK PLAN

The Committee Work Plan was **NOTED**.

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

Note: The meeting adjourned at 7.29pm

35 FARMERS' MARKET RENTS DECISION

Note: The meeting reconvened at 7.31pm

The Assistant Director of Commercial and Operational Services introduced the report regarding the need to make a decision on charges for trading on the Farmers' Market from October 2020 to March 2021. He explained the background to the previous decision and the need to review that decision at this point. He emphasised the importance of ensuring the continued success of the markets as well as supporting the local High Street shops and businesses.

There was widespread support for the Officer recommendation to continue to offer free rents to Farmers' Market trader until the end of March 2021 however it was suggested that this be caveated with the assertion the market should remain in the Market Place for the duration of this arrangement. The Chief Executive highlighted that the purpose of the move had been to adhere to social distancing and as such, it was unlikely to move from the Market Place whilst those restrictions remained. The amendment to recommendation was moved, seconded and taken to the vote and it was

RESOLVED that recommendation one should read:

“Continue to offer free rents to Farmers' Market traders until the end of March 2021 provided the Farmers' Market remains in the Market Square.”

Through the course of discussions there was significant praise for the management of the markets and it was requested that the Officer responsible be sent a message of thanks on behalf of the Committee. This was agreed by the Assistant Director of Commercial and Operational Services and Chief Executive to be completed.

Members of the Committee discussed the current difficulties with continuing with wider publicised events and how the focus should be on maintaining the current market successfully with a view to building more events in next year. It was agreed there would be a paper brought to Committee in February 2021 to look further at future options. A Member of Committee enquired whether there would be any merit in running a Working Group to look at markets across the district. The Chairman confirmed comments and suggestions, where

possible, would be considered either through Chair's Briefing or by the Assistant Director.

RESOLVED that:

- a) the offer of free rents to Farmers' Market traders be continued until the end of March 2021 provided the Farmers' Market remains in the Market Square; and
- b) a further report regarding the re-introduction of charges for both the general and Farmers' Market be brought to the Committee in February 2021.

The meeting concluded at 8.16 pm.

Chairman