

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee held in the Virtual - MS Teams on 10 December 2020 commencing at 6.30 pm.

Present: Councillor Mrs Anne Welburn (Chairman)

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

In Attendance:

Ian Knowles	Chief Executive
Tracey Bircumshaw	Assistant Director of Finance and Property Services and Section 151 Officer
Sue Leversedge	Business Support Team Leader
Alison McCulloch	Revenues Manager
James Welbourn	Democratic and Civic Officer
Katie Storr	Senior Democratic & Civic Officer

Apologies: Councillor Paul Howitt-Cowan
Councillor Jeff Summers

50 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PERIOD

There was no public participation.

51 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2020 were approved as a correct record.

52 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

53 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE

Members were given updates on matters arising from previous meetings.

Further information was requested on the customer base, or catchment for Market Rasen Leisure Centre.

There was an update on the Caistor Southdale project. Negotiations had started with the NHS Property Team and the Clinical Commissioning Group; officers at West Lindsey District Council (WLDC) were looking at how the project could be financed, although there was a funding gap with the appraisal as it stood.

54 REVIEW OF RESERVES

Members considered the annual review of reserves.

Each reserve was assessed for its appropriateness. The report detailed the statutory requirement for the Section 151 Officer to comment on the robustness of estimates and adequacy of reserves.

Currently the Authority made annual contributions of around £600,000 to reserves for replacement of assets; some of the biggest contributors to reserves were IT, the Vehicle Replacement Programme, and the future costs of investment property maintenance.

The General Fund Working Balance was estimated at £4.623 million at year end subject to the proposals within the report. This gave the opportunity to consider at the Budget setting in March options on earmarking the excess funding in the balance.

Earmarked reserves were estimated to be £17.141 million.

Members were then given the opportunity to ask questions of officers, and make comments on the report. Further information was provided:

- The Monitoring Officer had a reserve of £20,000. This was to be used for external advice, such as legal support;
- The opening balance of the Trinity Arts Centre reserve was £11,900;
- The Environment and Sustainability Strategy was being developed and was part of the workplan for the Authority. Any work on issues such as decarbonisation of vehicles would not be carried out until this plan was available to work to;
- The Connectivity Fund was forecast to be expended during 2021/2022. This fund didn't just provide funds for internet connectivity, there had also been scope to use it for transport matters;
- There was a preclusion on using capital funds for revenue purposes. The Wheeled Bin Replacement reserve had been created from revenue resources and was therefore a revenue fund. Occasionally, wheeled bins may fall under capital funds if for example there were a large batch of bins to procure; if bins were purchased individually they were effectively 'de-minimis', or of little value; the balance of this

reserve would be closed and budget provision made within the next Medium Term Financial Plan;

- The Authority was aware of dangerous structures within the District; the Dangerous Structure and Building Control Grant was there as a reserve in case money was needed to be spent on a third party's asset. It was proposed to bring that grant back under revenue to change the way in which the work was financed; the reserve was to be closed.

The recommendations were then moved and seconded, and following a vote it was unanimously **RESOLVED** to:

- (1) approve the proposals for returning £172,545 of Earmarked Reserves to the General Fund Balance;
- (2) approve the transfer of £400,000 from the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Reserve to the Project Investment Reserve for the purpose of funding the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) project;
- (3) include within the revenue budget and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2021/22 an £11,000 net reduction in the contribution to reserves.

All recommendations above were detailed at 11.7 of the report.

55 LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2021/22

Members considered a report recommending the adoption of a Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2021/22. The Revenues Manager recommended Option 1 in the report, which would mean no changes to the current scheme, with the exception of annual Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) upratings.

The Revenues Manager outlined the following points in response to a question from a Member:

- The Council Tax Support Scheme was replacing the benefits scheme. It was payments for those residents who were experiencing financial hardship. It would be difficult to include a discount through the council tax support scheme for environmentally friendly properties as it was for residents on low income. It was possibly something to look at in the future;
- Any changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme would have to go out to consultation, and would be discussed with the Chairman of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee;
- Every effort was made to make the scheme cost neutral; however with the ongoing pandemic this may not be possible. There were still new claimants coming through the system.

The report had earlier been moved and seconded, and following a vote, it was unanimously **RESOLVED** to:

- (1) Note the content of the report;
- (2) **Recommend to Full Council** the adoption of option 1 of the report for the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for West Lindsey District Council for 2021/2022.

56 STAFF RECOGNITION - EXTRA DISCRETIONARY DAYS' HOLIDAY

Members considered a report on a proposed extra days' holiday for all staff.

The report was introduced by Councillor David Cotton in his role as Chairman of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee, who acknowledged the work of all staff in maintaining services and meetings. He also highlighted 'hidden' staff such as wardens and crematorium workers.

It was also made clear that although this paper had not been considered by a meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee, it had been distributed to its Members, who were happy with the content to go forward to the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee.

Note: Councillor Mandy Snee declared a personal interest as a family members was an officer at the Authority. She took no part in the debate and did not vote.

Members asked questions of, and provided comment on the report. Further information was provided:

- There were around 18 temporary workers within the Operations Team; they were temporary because they supported the green bin collection and were with the Authority for around 8-9 months. There was no mechanism for them to become permanent members of staff without applying for a full-time role.

Legislation required any benefits afforded to full-time staff to be dealt with through their agency;

- One Member pointed out that people in other organisations and businesses were losing their jobs so it may not be appropriate to reward West Lindsey District Council (WLDC) staff with an extra day of leave in 2021;
- The original intention of the report was to request of committee that staff received an additional day of annual leave on their birthday, as the offer is due to run for a calendar, rather than fiscal year. The Chief Executive would ensure that everybody was treated fairly;
- It would not be possible to withhold this extra day of annual leave for any staff involved in disciplinary proceedings. Any actions taken under disciplinary processes would be taken separately to this issue and applied accordingly;
- This offer would be a one-off gesture to recognise the commitment of WLDC staff over the preceding 10 months.

The recommendations were moved, seconded, and it was **RESOLVED** to approve the 1 extra day of discretionary leave for all employees of the council to recognise their efforts during an exceptional period in 2020.

Delegated authority be granted to the Chief Executive to ensure this is rolled out in 2021.

57 PROPOSED FEES AND CHARGES 2021/22 - CORPORATE POLICY AND RESOURCES

Members considered proposed fees and charges to take effect from 1 April 2021.

The Business Support Team Leader introduced the report, and highlighted the following points:

- Prosperous Communities Committee had recommended their schedules to this committee for approval at their meeting earlier in December;
- 41% of the fees were statutory, leaving the remaining 59% as non-statutory. This 59% of fees had been reviewed, and where reasonable an inflationary rate of 3% had been applied. Some fees had been increased at a rate above inflation; this was because total cost recovery wasn't being achieved, and they may appear lower when being compared with benchmarking data;
- Where inflation had been applied for 2021/2022, a 2% inflationary rise had been assumed but future years' budgets;
- One charge, for the Trinity Arts Centre Sunday theatre hire and performance was proposed to be removed and the Friday to Saturday charge expanded to include Sunday at the same rate;
- As a result of this exercise, the base income budget had been increased by £24,600 for 2021/2022, rising to £42,900 in 2025/2026.

Note: Councillor David Cotton declared a personal interest in fees and charges related to the Crematorium due to the amount of time he spent there as part of his ministerial duties.

Members then provided comment on the report, as well as asking questions of officers. Further information was provided:

- Overall the report was much clearer than the version considered by Prosperous Communities Committee; the Business Support Team Leader was to be commended for this;
- Any carbon reduction and sustainability targets would be considered as part of the Investment Strategy;
- One of the fees related to Electoral Services was letters confirming electors' registers;

these letters were not charged for in 2019/2020 or 2020/2021 as they had ceased in 2018/2019;

- The public sector pay award for 2020/2021 was 2.75%; therefore this was why the inflationary index of 3% had been used.

It was subsequently moved, seconded, and following a vote, it was unanimously **RESOLVED** to:

- (1) **Recommend to Full Council** for approval the proposed fees and charges as detailed in Appendices A and B;
- (2) **Recommend to Full Council** for approval the proposed fees and charges at Appendices 1-3, as well as those recommended by Prosperous Communities Committee as detailed at Appendices 4-18;
- (3) Ask officers to keep fees and charges under review throughout the year. If necessary changes were identified during the financial year, these would be reported directly to the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee for approval as appropriate.

58 COMMITTEE WORK PLAN

The Democratic and Civic Officer highlighted that the Caistor Southdale report had been provisionally scheduled for the April meeting. Officers confirmed that whilst negotiations were ongoing, the report would be removed from the workplan and re-submitted once a decision was required.

Following this update, the workplan was noted.

59 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 1,2 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

60 NATIONAL NON DOMESTIC, SUNDRY DEBTORS, COUNCIL TAX AND HOUSING BENEFIT OVERPAYMENTS

Members considered a report on debts which were irrecoverable.

The Revenues Manager explained to Members how a member of staff had been employed since January to look at all old accounts, in particular housing benefit overpayments and sundry debtors.

The report related to debt write offs, which could be contentious with the possible effect of raising public concern.

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A new system designed for this area of work was due in 2021; the work carried out this year on debts would enable officers to start using it with a clear caseload.

The report was moved, seconded and it was **RESOLVED** to:

- (1) Write off arrears of National Non-Domestic rates to the value of £23,867.07;
- (2) Write off arrears of Housing Benefit Overpayments to the value of £12,135.33;
- (3) Write off arrears of Council Tax to the value of £2,956.52;
- (4) Write off arrears of Sundry Debts to the value of £2,590.00.

61 PROPOSED FEES AND CHARGES - EXEMPT APPENDICES

The Proposed Fees and Charges had previously been approved.

The meeting concluded at 7.47 pm.

Chairman