

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of Council held Via MS Teams at <https://west-lindsey-public-i.tv/core/portal/home> on 1 March 2021 at 7.00 pm.

Present: Councillor Steve England (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Angela Lawrence (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Owen Bierley	Councillor Matthew Boles
Councillor Mrs Jackie Brockway	Councillor Stephen Bunney
Councillor Liz Clews	Councillor David Cotton
Councillor Mrs Tracey Coulson	Councillor Christopher Darcel
Councillor Timothy Davies	Councillor Michael Devine
Councillor David Dobbie	Councillor Jane Ellis
Councillor Ian Fleetwood	Councillor Mrs Caralyne Grimble
Councillor Mrs Cordelia McCartney	Councillor Giles McNeill
Councillor John McNeill	Councillor Mrs Jessie Milne
Councillor Keith Panter	Councillor Roger Patterson
Councillor Mrs Judy Rainsforth	Councillor Mrs Diana Rodgers
Councillor Mrs Lesley Rollings	Councillor Jim Snee
Councillor Mrs Mandy Snee	Councillor Jeff Summers
Councillor Robert Waller	Councillor Mrs Anne Welburn
Councillor Mrs Angela White	Councillor Trevor Young

In Attendance:

Ian Knowles	Chief Executive
Alan Robinson	Director of Corporate Services and Monitoring Officer
Tracey Bircumshaw	Assistant Director of Finance and Property Services and Section 151 Officer
Angela Matthews	Benefits Manager
Katie Storr	Senior Democratic & Civic Officer
Ele Snow	Democratic and Civic Officer

Apologies

Councillor Cherie Hill
Councillor Paul Howitt-Cowan
Councillor Tom Regis

53 REGISTER OF ATTENDANCE

The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed all present.

Prior to requesting the Monitoring Officer to undertake the formal roll-call to confirm all Members were in attendance, having offered Prayers for Councillor John Matthews, Mayor of Market Rasen, prior to the start of the meeting, the Chairman paid tribute to his colleague

.and friend, following his untimely passing. Members joined the Chairman in a minute's silence, as mark of respect, following which, numerous, tributes were paid across the "Chamber".

Members spoke of Councillor Matthew's passion and enthusiasm, his friendship, his dedication and commitment, and of his pride in having been the Mayor for a number of years. Councillor Bunney, Ward Member for Market Rasen and fellow Market Rasen Town Councillor gave a moving and lengthy heartfelt tribute and spoke of his pride at having served alongside such a wonderful man for a number of years, and of the great loss both he personally and the town of Market Rasen were feeling.

The roll-call for both Members and Officers was undertaken, during which apologies were noted from Councillors C Hill, T Regis and P Howitt-Cowan.

54 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

a) Minutes of the Meeting of Full Council held on 25 January 2021

Having being moved and seconded, and with no questions raised, it was: -

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting of Full Council held on 25 January 2021 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

55 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made at this point of the meeting.

For the avoidance of doubt, the Chairman advised the meeting that Members did not need to make a declaration in respect of the Council Tax Setting, as this was an area in which all Councillors were granted an exemption by the relevant legislation.

56 TO ELECT A DEPUTY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

On resignation of Councillor Paul Howitt-Cowan, it was proposed and seconded that Councillor Anne Welburn be appointed as the Deputy Leader of the Council.

There were no further nominations but there were political statements by the Opposition in reference to a further change in the Administration's leadership. On being put to the vote it was: -

RESOLVED that Councillor Anne Welburn be elected Deputy Leader of the Council for the remainder of 2020/21 civic year.

57 MATTERS ARISING

The Chairman introduced the report advising Members that the report would be taken "as

read” unless Members had any questions.

In response to questions, the Monitoring Officer advised that the Anti-Semitism action remained green as only those elements of the Constitution review, which had directly affected the Scheme of Officer Delegation, had progressed through to Council, in the absence of there having been an Annual Council in 2020. All outstanding matters from the 19/20 review, including that referenced in the outstanding matters arising, would be brought to Council alongside any additional matters to be considered as part of 20/21 review.

The Leader of Council, on being questioned, advised that unfortunately, to-date he had not received a response from the Chief Executive of the United Lincolnshire Hospitals Trust. He gave his assurance to Members that this matter would be further pursued and Members would receive notification of any response received.

With no further comments or questions and with no requirement for a vote, the Matters Arising were **DULY NOTED**.

58 ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chairman

The Chairman started his announcements advising that Civic commitments for obvious reasons had been limited. He was hopeful for more positive times ahead due to the successful vaccine rollout. Both the Chairman and his Lady had now received their vaccine and the Chairman spoke of the amazing organisation and efficiency he had witnessed at the vaccination centre and of his admiration for the volunteer Marshalls standing out in all weathers to ensure everything ran smoothly. He encouraged everyone to take up the offer of their vaccine.

The Chairman spoke of his delight at working with his fellow ward councillors to produce the first Ward Newsletter. He congratulated the Communications team for their excellent work. The publication had focussed on community spirit within the ward. It was appreciated that this was indicative of the marvellous ways in which communities across the district had come together over the last twelve difficult months. The Chairman expressed sincere thanks to all the District’s residents for their fantastic and continued response to these challenging times.

Leader

The Leader made the following address to Council: -

“I very much welcome the publication by the Cabinet Office last week of the ‘COVID-19 Response – Spring 2021’ guidance, setting out the roadmap out of the current lockdown for England. This is made possible by the notable success of the vaccination programme to date, with over 20m doses delivered nationally up to the end of February, mirrored here in Lincolnshire by more than 200,000 doses up to 14th February.

From a West Lindsey perspective this provides considerable clarity in helping form the delivery of our leading role in support of the recovery from the pandemic through the Council's core competencies, especially in our business, community and health and well-being service areas. It remains vitally important though that, individually and collectively, we continue to follow the rules set out in the interests of everyone.

In January we were pleased to welcome Graham Biggs, the Chief Executive of the Rural Services Network, as one of the guest speakers at our Member Strategy Event. Mr Biggs outlined the development of RSN's Revitalising Rural: Realising the Vision campaign and the rationale and thinking behind it, including a focus on why it is of such importance to rural areas in general and West Lindsey in particular. I can advise that the campaign was officially launched this morning.

Last week I was privileged to join the Big Conversation virtual conference, most ably organised and promoted by the Lincolnshire Youth Commission. Young people gave some really valuable insight into the five priority themes affecting their lives and their views on how improvement could be delivered through partnership working with organisations in all sectors of society. The Lincolnshire Youth Commission was instigated by our Police and Crime Commissioner and I very much look forward to continued engagement with them.

I have accepted an invitation to chair a workshop session at a national conference on Friday entitled 'Post Covid Recovery: Planning, Places and Building Back Better' and next month, alongside Mr Selby, to present at a national seminar on Cemeteries and Crematoria.

Finally Chairman, whilst we should never underestimate what we have achieved so far as a Council during a time of unprecedented challenge and change, much remains to be done and will be done on behalf of those we represent. My heartfelt thanks go to each and every one of you, to our colleagues in local government and to all of our partners in the community."

Chief Executive

The Chief Executive addressed Council, and started his announcements by formally thanking Alan Robinson, Director of Corporate Services and Monitoring Officer for all his support to him personally over the last seven years and to the Council over the last 17 years. He expressed his personal well wishes to him in his new role at South Kesteven.

The Chief Executive was pleased to advise members that the Council had been successful with its bid to the Salix fund having been awarded £68k to support Solar Panels and battery storage in the new depot. The Council had also been successful with a joint bid, alongside other district councils, to support the development of our Local Heritage List.

Thanks were expressed to those members who took part in the Strategy Event on the 29th January. Formal feedback was being sought, and those Members who had attended were encouraged to respond.

Members were advised that the Council had now paid out a total of £24.9m to businesses during the Covid period. The second payment for this current lockdown has already been paid within West Lindsey. In terms of the vaccination roll out, Lincolnshire had made really good progress and continued to do so.

59 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chairman advised the meeting that no public questions had been received.

60 QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO. 9

The Chairman advised the meeting that one question pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No.9 had been submitted to the meeting. This had been circulated separately to the agenda.

The Chairman invited Councillor Mick Devine, Gainsborough Independent and Ward Member for Gainsborough East to put his question to the meeting, as follows: -

“Leader

In recent years WLDC has had it’s Regional Support Grant reduced by Central Government, this resulted in a debate on how best to proceed to support services., It was agreed by Members to build an investment portfolio with strict criteria with the aim of providing an income to support services to our Communities.

In recent weeks and months there have been a number of Social Media posts regarding the property investments made by WLDC, the comments made are I believe misleading the residents of West Lindsey and Gainsborough in particular and I quote

“Current WLDC Tory Controlled Council recently spent over 20 million pounds of council tax payers money on projects outside the district”.

This I believe to be misleading the people of Gainsborough and they deserve to know the true facts.

Can you please put on Public Record the facts as they are

- 1 Where the investments have been made
- 2 The year when the investment was made
- 3 The total value of new investments by year
- 4 The total net income by year of the investments to support Services

Many thanks”

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Owen Bierley, responded as follows: -

“Thank you for your question Councillor Devine.

As part of the Commercial Strategy, agreed in 2015, Council approved the development of an investment portfolio, with strict criteria, that would deliver a minimum of 6% gross return (3% net) with a maximum expenditure of £20m. This amount was subsequently increased to £30m.

In accordance with the approved Commercial Property Investment Strategy the Council has now purchased six properties for £20.455m. (When including stamp duty, legal and professional fees the total costs have been £21.666m)

In terms of location, our strategy identified that if all of the properties were located in West Lindsey this would bring risks associated with investment in a single economic area. Similarly the strategy recognised that by investing in a variety of sectors we would avoid any single sector risk.

35% of the investment has been in West Lindsey.

The first purchase was made in 2017/18 at a total cost of £2.490m with the property located in Keighley.

Four properties were purchased in 2018/19 at a total cost £13.494m of which one is in West Lindsey whilst two are in Sheffield.

A further property was purchased in Doncaster in 2019/20 at a total cost of £5.682m.

The portfolio has achieved gross and net income in excess of the strategy targets, with net income contributing to and supporting the provision of our valued services being;

Year	Actual Rental Income	Annual Gross Yield %	Net Income	Net Yield %
2020/21	£1.305m	6% CVA /6.38%	£0.763m	3.52%
2019/20	£1.300m	6.53%	£0.718m	3.31%
2018/19	£0.721m p/y	6.72%	£0.446m	2.8%
2017/18	£0.079 p/y	6.4%	£0.052m	2%

The Council has been completely transparent in reporting these transactions through the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee.

Even through this difficult year for businesses the portfolio will achieve the returns expected and other than one tenant, the Travelodge (which is subject of a Company Voluntary Arrangement) all full year rentals have been met.

In addition the current valuation of the portfolio has increased to £20,727,200.

This compares to the purchase price of £20,455,000.

Thank you again for your question.”

With the discretion of the Chairman, the Leader of the Opposition responded and questioned the motives of the question and called into question Councillor Devine’s current political affiliation and membership within the Administration. Investments had been outside of the District to the benefit of residents outside of the District. He considered rentals had only been maintained due to Government furlough schemes and other benefits and time would tell, quoting loss made in a number of sectors. The continuing asset value was questioned, as was the saleability of the investments.

Councillor Brockway by way of point of information, sought to remind the Chamber a short question had been permitted, and considered the comments being made were misleading.

Another Member suggested that without the money generated through these investments the Council’s financial position would be very different.

By way of point of information, Councillor J McNeill outlined to the Chamber Which Committee scrutinised such investments and of planned reports to do just such.

Councillor Devine by way of right of reply strongly refuted the question was political motivated nor was his political persuasion relevant. Rather more, he had considered it appropriate and necessary to put on formal record the status of these investments, as in his view, social media posts had been misleading the people of Gainsborough regarding the true facts.

61 MOTIONS PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO. 10

The Chairman confirmed to the meeting that no motions had been submitted under Procedure Rule No.10.

62 EXECUTIVE BUSINESS PLAN AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2021/22 - 2025/26 AND 2021/22 BUDGET

Members gave consideration to a report which presented the Executive Business Plan and the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2021/22 – 2025/26. These documents were central to the Council’s financial and strategic planning.

The Executive Business plan detailed the deliverables to supporting achievement of the Corporate Plan Objectives and provided a national and local context to the environment the Council was working within.

The Medium Term Financial plan included the financial strategies, principles and assumptions which had been applied in developing the medium term financial analysis which forecast the revenue budgets over a 5 year period.

The report proposed a balanced budget for 2021/22 with a budget requirement of

£13,279,100. The one year Local Government financial settlement was detailed within the report and had provided additional resources, to those previously forecast for 2021/22.

The General Fund working balance, which was forecast in excess of the £2.5m minimum balance, both provided the opportunity to create new Earmarked Reserves, and increase reserves for future investment.

The budget assumed approval of a Council Tax increase of £5, the maximum allowable within referendum limits, and in terms of future year's, an assumption of a 3% increase in the Council Tax had been applied.

In accordance with the Spending Review announcement, no pay award had been included for the 2021/22 budget, although 2% had been assumed with future year's budgets.

Members' attention was drawn to the statement on the robustness of estimates and adequacy of reserves in setting the budget presented. The Statement also provided the context in which the Capital Programme had been set, mitigating future financial risks and its affordability . (Page 82 of the reports pack related).

The fees and charges, had been recommended by both Policy Committees and were included at appendix 3 for approval.

In respect of our Capital Investment Programme the current year budget was £9.4m rising to a total £20.7m over the Medium Term, this level of investment was deemed to be both affordable and sustainable in the long term.

The Treasury Management Strategy, policies and prudential indicators had been scrutinised by the Governance and Audit Committee and were presented for Council approval.

Also included for approval was the Statutory Pay Policy Statement along with the Human Resource numbers on which the employee budget had been based.

In conclusion, the S151 Officer was please to confirm that the MTFP met the requirements of the regulations;

- * the requirement for the local Authority to agree a balanced budget for each financial year, prior to the start of that year;
- * the requirement for the local Authority to establish the level of Council Tax for the coming year on the basis of that budget; and,

Furthermore, met best practice (supported by CIPFA) by setting out the coming year's budget in addition to a 5 year MTFP

The Leader of the Council made the following speech in response: -

“The Executive Business Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2021-22 to 2025-26 are the documents that form the Council's Budget.

Firstly I would like to place on record my thanks and those of the Administration, to the officers involved in preparing these plans and strategies. This will have

been a difficult year in terms of the demands on the Finance Team as a result of the Covid response and we therefore thank you accordingly.

These Plans, Strategies, budgets and fees and charges have been presented to our Policy Committees and the Treasury Management Strategy has received scrutiny from the Governance and Audit Committee and they are now presented here to Full Council this evening.

The Budget for 2021-22 will be £13,279,100 and is aligned to the Administration's Corporate Plan priorities and recognises the good financial position the Council is in.

The Government's one year financial settlement has provided us with the opportunity to set aside £1m to support the delivery of future strategies for Environment and Climate Change, Culture and Health and Wellbeing, in addition to earmarking £0.500m for investment in Growth and Regeneration, all of which will deliver long term outcomes for our residents and support of the Council's vision for West Lindsey to be a great place to be where people, businesses and communities can thrive and reach their potential by continuing to deliver award winning services.

Whilst there remains considerable uncertainty around future funding for local government, we are well placed to mitigate the impact through the earmarking of £1m, which will provide resources over the medium term in balancing the budget, should it be required.

We will continue to support our communities, businesses and residents through the recovery from Covid-19 and we have therefore set aside £0.500m of our own resources to support additional costs and to help mitigate our own income losses.

We are committed to investing throughout the District and indeed, our Capital Investment Programme totals some £21m. It will see investment in Caistor, Gainsborough, Market Rasen, Hemswell and Nettleham as well as in the new Central Depot at Glenthams, which will open during the summer giving our Operational Services teams much needed facilities that are both environmentally sustainable and future proofed as our communities grow. With these funds we can also invest in Council services and continue to deliver award-winning services, improving the experience of our residents and through investment in new technology continue to deliver efficiencies. We will invest in growth and regeneration projects to support the creation of jobs, skills and housing whilst improving our infrastructure and the built environment.

In respect of Council tax a £5 increase (equivalent to 2.99% or 10p per week) is proposed. With future uncertainty and the expected longer term recovery of our income streams it is appropriate that we take the opportunity this year to maximise our Council Tax increase to the governments referendum limit.

West Lindsey is a district that has made significant progress in delivering on the commitments that we made to local residents. The Administration's record is one

that has not been about short-term opportunism, or quick fix solutions to the challenges we face; but the dedicated, deliberate and steady long-term approach to policies designed to make the Council's financial position more resilient at a time when central government continues to reduce grant funding and consider limiting our ability to find innovative solutions to fund the frontline services that local people expect and rely on from this Council.

Chairman, this budget clearly sets out how we, as a Council, will maximise the leadership and support provided to businesses, communities and individuals in West Lindsey in recovering from the negative impacts of the coronavirus pandemic. As such I commend it to Council and move the recommendations set out in the report.

Thank you Chairman."

The Leader of the Opposition in responding, whilst accepting the Council had done well in setting its budget questioned whether the budget was as ambitious and aspirational as it needed to be, given the difficult years ahead and the recovery. He questioned wider Member's involvement in budget setting and other Members' ability to effect its content in its preparation and considered this view had been accepted at the most recent Corporate Policy and Resources Committee. He was of the view that both the consultation and engagement process around budget setting needed to be extended.

The Leader in responding was satisfied the budget was both ambitious and aspirational but more importantly achievable. Comments around greater engagement had been taken on board, and the Leader was of the strong belief the Council was at its strongest when it worked collaboratively.

Debate ensued and the budget was welcomed but some questioned whether the monies put aside for climate and sustainability work were enough. In response to questions relating to new 5 bids detailed at 4.5, only 4 appeared to be listed, the fifth being food waste collection, £531k had been allocated and it was expected LCC would fund the bulk of costs related to any change in waste collections. The Leader acknowledged that more monies would be needed in respect of climate and sustainability work. The allocation set out a clear intent to deliver against this programme, for it be a priority, and as the action plan developed, with costed schemes, further allocations would be made as appropriate and funding bids made where feasible.

Given the difficult unprecedented year, and the challenges Covid had brought, the budget should be seen as a good news story. Members questioned how news of the budget was shared with residents, citing the importance of ensuring residents were clear about the percentage increases and which authorities were applying them. It was suggested an Executive summary aimed at residents should be produced ensuring the information was clear to residents. Clarity was sought as to whether the increase was 2.99% or 2%.

In responding, the Chief Executive confirmed a press release would be issued as soon as the budget was agreed and would be very clear about the impact to residents. It

was also confirmed that a “leaflet” was issued alongside the Council Tax Bill, including the revised Council Tax and level increase, but this was predominately in recent years an e-leaflet. There was some concern that there was a presumption that all residents had access to on-line services.

Members welcomed the good spread of investments and the income this was generating for the Council to be used to fund its services. Continued returns were even more welcome given the difficult year. It was questioned how or if negative interest rates would affect the Council

This being the last year of new homes bonuses , some Members called for monies gained through the scheme to be re-invested back to those villages where the homes had been built.

In responding Officers advised the Council had received confirmation from its bank that they would not be charged a negative interest rate. It was possible for money markets to go into negative equity which would mean the Council in effect would be charged for holding monies. The Council was managing and moving its money as necessary to avoid any such charges where possible and had planned accordingly for reduced income from investments.

£13million had been generated from New Homes Bonuses and had been re-invested in regeneration schemes. It was anticipated an alternative scheme would be introduced and the Government was looking at ways to incentivise Councils to deliver affordable housing and these were outlined to the Chamber. Consultations through central Government were ongoing and the Council was fully engaging.

Referring to early comments regarding wider member involvement in budget setting, the newly appointed Deputy Leader, re-iterated her commitment to drive wider inclusivity across the Chamber and her hopes to re-establish the Member Forum, where Members could come together informally. She spoke of previous successful initiatives which had been developed this way in years gone by.

Given the interest being offered by banks and alike some Members questioned why the Council’s investment Strategy and approach continued to be discredited, citing the building of the crem, the leisure centre contract, investment of property , all of which were contributing to sustaining services and plugging gaps in government funding.

By way of point of order Councillor Young questioned the accuracy of the previous speaker believing the leisure contract to not be cost neutral but at the cost of three quarters of a million pound. The S151 Officer advised that Covid support monies had been applied and £180k funding bid had been applied for to offset such costs.

Responding to further criticism of the commercial approach, Members across the chamber again re-iterated the context in which the Council was operating, diminishing government grants, rising costs and the need to fill the gap. Alternative funding proposals were welcomed but had not been forthcoming from opposition Members. The planned investments were welcome, as was the return of the Members Forum which it was hoped would give all Members a forum in which they could share views. Working remotely had resulted in some dis-jointedness. The Strategic Away Day it

was considered had the potential to allow members to engage on these wider strategic matters , and organisers were urged to consider the setting of the budget to be a future topic at such an event.

In responding to comments regarding changes to procurement potentially in the future the Chief Executive confirmed the Council already had procurement rules which sourced local first where appropriate. For major contracts, to ensure value for money, framework arrangements were used. Procurement rules were being revised in light of Brexit however it was noted that many of the EU rules were in fact set by the UK , so increased flexibility was not necessarily going to be gained.

Returning to comments about greater and wider engagement in budget setting, whilst the forums, away days and workshops were to be welcomed, and would be referenced briefly in the annual review of the constitution, it was argued that budget setting was not a surprise. Opposition Members were at liberty to propose their own alternative spending plan to be considered, something they had chosen not to do.

The lack of social return considerations and the treatment of some decisions as pure spreadsheet exercises was where Opposition concerns lay, citing examples including the leisure centre contract. Out of District investments did not provide the knock on social return that local investments would, and only looking at income and expenditure failed to address social issues and investment opportunities.

Following a lengthy political exchange and having had the recommendations, as set out in the report, moved and seconded, they were put to the vote. In accordance with required legislation for voting on the Council's budget, a recorded vote was taken.

Votes were cast as set out below:

For: - Councillors Bierley, Boles, Bunney, Brockway, Clews Coulson, Davies, Devine, Ellis, England, Fleetwood, Grimble, Lawrence, McCartney, McNeill G, McNeill J, Milne, Panter, Patterson, Rodgers, Snee J, Summers, Waller, Welburn, White (25)

Against: - Councillors Cotton, Darcel, Rollings, Young (4)

Abstain: - Councillors Dobbie, Rainsforth, Snee M (3)

With the majority of Councillors voting for the proposals, the motion was declared **CARRIED** and on that basis it was:-

RESOLVED that: -

- (a) the external environment and the severity of the financial challenges being faced as detailed in the Financial Strategy be recognised;
- (b) the Statement of the Chief Finance Officer on the Robustness of Estimates and Adequacy of Reserves be accepted;
- (c) the Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 to 2025/26 (Appendix 1) be approved with an awareness of the associated risks included in Appendix 2.

- (d) a Mid Year Review of the Medium Term Financial Plan be received during 2021/2022;
- (e) the Revenue Budget 2021/22 (Appendix 2) be set;
- (f) the movement in reserves be approved;
- (g) the Fees and Charges 2021/2022(Appendix 3) be set;
- (h) the Capital Investment Strategy (Appendix 4) be adopted;
- (i) the Capital Programme 2021/2022 to 2025/2026 and the Financing and Expenditure on Business as Usual Schemes (Appendix 5 and 6) be approved;
- (j) the Treasury Management Strategy 2021/2022 be approved and the Treasury Investment Strategy, the Borrowing Strategy and Treasury and Borrowing Prudential Indicators (Appendix 7) be adopted;
- (k) the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy as contained in the Treasury Management Strategy (Appendix 7) be approved;
- l) a £5 increase in the Council Tax to £222.74 be approved (Appendix 8 – 12); and
- m) the 2021/2022 Pay Policy Statement (Appendix 13) and the Human Resources Statement 2021/2022 (Appendix 14) be approved.

63 DISCRETIONARY DISREGARD OF WAR PENSION INCOME - HOUSING BENEFIT POLICY

Councillor Anne Welburn as Chairman of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee, was pleased to present the report to Council which provided Members with details of the current arrangements for the treatment of War Pension, War Widows Pension and Armed Forces Compensation income in the calculation of Housing Benefit entitlement.

Historically West Lindsey District Council had agreed a policy to apply a 100% disregard of all War Pension incomes when assessing Housing Benefit entitlement. The Department for Work and Pensions subsidised the first £10 of War Pension disregard in full and 75% of any additional discretionary disregard leaving the remaining 25% to be funded by the Local Authority.

The current policy aimed to ensure that a payment received in respect of a loss incurred during service in the armed forces did not negatively affect the person's entitlement to housing benefit.

Nationally all bar four Local Authorities applied a discretionary disregard of such income and the cost to West Lindsey of the current policy was £6,492 in 2018/19 and £5,479 in 2019/20.

The current year cost to West Lindsey up to Quarter 3 was £3,690.

This report was being presented direct to Full Council as a result of new audit requirements of the Department for Work and Pensions, which required the Disregard Policy to be acknowledged and agreed by Members.

Councillor Welburn concluded her introduction by moving the recommendation, which was duly seconded.

In response to questions it was confirmed that no amendments from the previously approved scheme were being recommended, but given that it had been many years since the last policy had been viewed by Members, bringing it to Members' attention again, was considered appropriate. There were no governance reasons to review the policy on an annual basis.

On being put to the vote it was:-

RESOLVED that the content of the report be accepted and the continued application of the Discretionary Disregard War Pension Income – Housing Benefit Policy, in line with national opinion, be approved.

64 RE-ALIGNMENT OF COMMITTEE VICE-CHAIRMANSHIPS

The Chairman presented the report to Council which sought to amend a number of previously made appointments to Committee Vice Chairmanships, arising from the change in Deputy Leadership and at the request of the Administration.

Having been moved and seconded it was: -

RESOLVED that Councillor Jeff Summers be appointed Vice Chairman of Corporate Policy and Resources Committee and Councillor Tracey Coulson be appointed Vice Chairman of the Prosperous Communities Committee.

Note: Due to the recommendation contained within the following item of business, the Chief Executive left the meeting, prior to its consideration.

65 APPOINTMENT OF AN ELECTORAL REGISTRATION OFFICER AND RETURNING OFFICER

The Chairman of Council presented a report which sought to appoint the Chief Executive, Mr Knowles, as the Council's Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer. The responsibilities were currently assigned to Mr Robinson who would be departing the Council imminently.

The Chairman moved the recommendation, which was duly seconded, and on being put to the vote it was: -

RESOLVED that: -

- (a) In accordance with the requirements of Sections 8 and 35 of the Representation of the Peoples Act 1983, Mr Ian Knowles, Chief Executive, be appointed as the Council's Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer with immediate effect.
- (b) The Constitution be amended, as necessary, to reflect this revised appointment.

This being the Monitoring Officer's last full Council Meeting the Chairman led tributes to Mr Robinson, for his services to the Council over the last 17 years and for his personal support both as a Councillor, but also that given to him in his role of Chairman.

A number of Members in turn paid moving tributes to Mr Robinson, speaking highly of his personal attributes, his integrity, his commitment, his desire and willingness to support and assist Members whatever the hour. Several spoke of the personal support he had offered them during their years of service and of the difference, his work had made within their local communities and with regard to their personal learning and development. His diplomatic nature together with his sense of humour would be missed in the organisation.

With the permission of the Chairman, Members joined in a round of applause as a sign of gratitude and well wishes for Mr Robinson.

Mr Robinson in turn thanked Members for their kind words, well wishes and of his fondness for West Lindsey.

The meeting concluded at 9.50 pm.

Chairman