

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Prosperous Communities Committee held in the Council Chamber - The Guildhall on 8 June 2021 commencing at 6.30 pm.

Present: Councillor Owen Bierley (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Tracey Coulson (Vice-Chairman) and
Councillor John McNeill (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Stephen Bunney
Councillor Michael Devine
Councillor Steve England
Councillor Mrs Jessie Milne
Councillor Mrs Judy Rainsforth
Councillor Jim Snee
Councillor Mrs Mandy Snee
Councillor Mrs Anne Welburn
Councillor Trevor Young

In Attendance:

Sally Grindrod-Smith Assistant Director of Planning and Regeneration
Ady Selby Assistant Director of Commercial and Operational Services
Katie Storr Democratic Services & Elections Team Manager (Interim)
Ele Snow Democratic and Civic Officer

1 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation for this meeting.

2 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Prosperous Communities Committee held on 16 March 2021 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

3 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE

The Chairman introduced the report advising Members that the report would be taken “as read” unless Members had any questions.

A Member of the Committee requested clarification as to what information had been shared with Parish Councils in relation to the Parish Charter and emphasised the importance of working with local communities. It was confirmed this information would be shared with Members.

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

4 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members at this point in the meeting.

5 PROGRESS AND DELIVERY REPORT QUARTER FOUR, 2020-21

Members gave consideration to the Progress and Delivery report for quarter four of the 2020-21 financial year. The Assistant Director, Commercial and Operational Services, summarised the highlights of the report per portfolio. Members heard that the report presented performance for quarter four (January to March 2021) and a summary of the year-end performance was attached as Appendix A for information. Of note, 59% of KPIs were on or above target for the quarter, 38% of KPIs were below target and the remaining 3% were within agreed tolerance levels.

In considering the report in relation to Corporate Health, it was explained that customer satisfaction had improved and was now back on target. The number of complaints had also reduced by 16%. Calls were being answered within 21 seconds, remaining below target. A combination of higher than usual demand, call handling staff being affected by closure of schools and the team temporarily taking on responsibility for administering Land Charges calls and payments had had an impact. The Customer Experience Strategy was being reviewed and would include call handling times to ensure performance improvements.

There were no performance concerns within the Finance and Property Services portfolio.

Members heard that, within the Homes and Communities portfolio, demand for homelessness support had continued to increase during the quarter. The Protect Plus and cold weather initiatives, designed to end rough sleeping had led to an increased use of B&B accommodation to ensure that nobody slept rough in the district. The Council's partners (P3), were releasing six new accommodation units in quarter one to support people with a history of street homelessness. This was in addition to the Council's Viable Housing Solution and should lead to a reduction in the need for B&B accommodation. As detailed in previous P&D reports, DFG completion times remained impacted by the initial lockdown in March 2020, which added 90 days to the average completion time. Larger and more complex cases had now been completed and a reduction in completion times was expected during the first half of 2021/22.

In relation to Operational and Commercial Services, it was explained that the Building Control market share was now back above target, having been below target in the previous quarter. Market share was also up 8% on the same period last year. Garden waste had had a strong start to its new year with a 4.7% increase in subscription take-up on last year. This was the largest increase since the service was introduced. The number of garden waste bins sold was expected to exceed the target during quarter two. Operations at the leisure centres, and the Trinity Arts Centre continued to be severely impacted by a third lockdown during the whole of quarter four. The leisure centres re-opened on 12 April 2021 for gym, swim and

squash. Dance classes resumed on 17 May, with virtual classes available as an option for members. No issues had been reported since re-opening and the Council maintained a stringent watch over the centres to ensure that Everyone Active was striving to return to business as usual as soon as possible. A total of 16,787 individual users visited the Leisure Centres during April and customer satisfaction remained high at 95%.

For the Trinity Arts Centre, all events that were due to take place during quarter four had been rescheduled for 2021/22. As was the case nationally, consumer confidence was low which was affecting advance ticket sales. The Council's application to the Arts Recovery Fund was unsuccessful, however the Arts Centre remained in a stable financial position and alternative funding options were being looked into. The Centre had successfully diversified to support local creatives who had used the centre as a rehearsal or filming space. The Centre would also feature in a 12 part television series later in the year which had opened up links with local historians who were keen to work with Centre management to bring to life the history and heritage of the Arts Centre.

The Markets were once again impacted by a third national lockdown which allowed only essential traders to operate during the whole of quarter four. Proposals were being developed for a grant scheme to support market traders up to April 2022.

A Member of the Committee enquired as to whether it would be possible to have a breakdown of the figures regarding the pre-recorded leisure classes, in order to be able to make comparisons in the future. It was agreed this information could be requested from the providers. It was also noted that the performance for the crematorium was likely to have been out of the ordinary during this year, which should be taken into consideration for future reporting.

There were no performance concerns within the portfolios of People and Democratic Services and Planning and Regeneration. A Member of the Committee enquired as to the total number of planning appeals and this point was clarified to be in relation to the appeal decisions.

In discussing Change Management and Regulatory Services, Members heard that Council Tax collection ended the year above target and with over £2 million more collected than last year. As expected, the NNDR collection rate remained below target as many businesses continued to experience extreme financial hardship during quarter four. All available business rate relief had been awarded. Demand on the enforcement service was up by 31% on last year, which had impacted on the time taken to provide an initial response to customers. Temporary resource had been brought in to help in this work area and response times should therefore reduce from quarter one. The high number of new planning enforcement cases continued to pose a challenge to the enforcement team and this would need to be reviewed in quarter one. Options included a change to the current policy position or a further review of resources. The team continued to focus on the highest priority cases, as per current policy. With regard to land charges turnaround times, the actions outlined in the P&D report had led to a significant improvement in performance, with the average time to process a search down to 9 days, which was better than target. The focus was to now maintain and improve on this level of performance. COVID-19 continued to place high demand on regulatory services, with demand up 147% compared to last year. The team continued to review resources to ensure that the ongoing demands of the pandemic could be met, alongside the statutory obligations of the service. As restrictions ease, the focus of

the service would remain on the COVID response and recovery for the foreseeable future.

A Member of the Committee expressed dissatisfaction that close to 40% of the KPIs were showing as below target. He explained to Members and Officers that, whilst there had been improvements to the report layout, he felt there should be more detailed commentary specifically in relation to what measures were in place to improve performance in those areas that were below target. He highlighted specific services, such as Disabled Facilities Grants, fly tipping and land searches. He requested further information to be included in future reports in order for Members to be able to fully assess the improvement plans and to be able to assure themselves of demonstrable improvements.

In response to his comments, it was noted that several of the areas that had underperformed had been severely impacted by the pandemic. It was highlighted that the problems with land charges had been turned around and data at the time of the committee meeting showed that they were now working within target. There had been additional resources allocated to the team and future reports would demonstrate those improvements.

There was a concern raised regarding the sharing of information with Councillors, with a specific case being detailed as unsatisfactory. Officers acknowledged the difficulty experienced in that case and assured Members that the issue was being investigated and the affected Member would be contacted separately.

There was further discussion regarding the layout and content of the report in addition to the measures used within performance monitoring. It was acknowledged that there was more detail in current reports than previous versions and performance measures could be looked at as a part of the annual Progress and Delivery review, however measures could not be changed part way through a year.

A Member of the Committee highlighted the impact of the pandemic and recognised the efforts of Officers in maintaining service provision as well as working in other areas as needed. He enquired whether there were any provisional measures in place for teams to counteract any reduction in performance as a result of pandemic efforts being unsustainable. It was explained that it was difficult to predict what impact there may be in the coming months however, services were involved in business planning and identifying potential concerns.

With no further questions, the Chairman noted that the Committee had assessed the performance of the Council's services through agreed performance measures and had indicated areas where improvements should be made, having regard to the remedial measures set out in the report.

The Chairman also requested for it to be recorded that the Committee thanked Members and Officers alike for their efforts throughout the pandemic.

6 GAINSBOROUGH CYCLING AND WALKING NETWORK PLAN

Members gave consideration to the Gainsborough Cycling and Walking Network Plan. The Assistant Director of Planning and Regeneration explained that Lincolnshire County Council had commissioned the production of the plan and the report was finalised in March 2021.

The plan had been produced to take advantage of future and additional funding streams; maximise the best opportunities for improving cycling and walking rates; make cycling and walking a priority and to make Gainsborough one of the best towns in the UK for cycling and walking. The objectives of the plan were to produce an evidence-based infrastructure network plan; identify early network investment priorities and potential interventions; secure stakeholder “buy-in” for the network and potential interventions and to provide high-level feasibility for investment in the highest priority cycling and walking infrastructure. Members were being asked to adopt the Gainsborough Cycling and Walking Network Plan 2021 for use by Officers on related projects and future decision making.

There was considerable disquiet amongst Committee Members regarding many of the proposals within the plan, including the pedestrianisation of the town centre, the removal of on-street parking in several areas of the town and the removal of several trees along those same routes. The Committee was not satisfied that the details of the plan correlated with the aims and aspirations of West Lindsey District Council. Questions were raised as to how Lincolnshire County Council had come to the final document and there was significant discussion as to the need for local Members and communities to have a much greater input to any changes to their local area. There was little support amongst Committee Members to agree to the adoption of the plan.

The Assistant Director of Planning and Regeneration recognised the concerns raised and assured Members that the proposals would have to proceed through considerable consultation processes before any final decisions were made. It was emphasised that the adoption of the plan would enable Officers to work closely with communities and the County Council in order to achieve the best possible outcome for the town.

With further discussion amongst Members as to their concerns regarding the plan and the lack of support for the proposals, it was suggested that the recommendation for adoption be amended to better reflect the discussions of the Committee. It was acknowledged that Members were concerned the voice of the District Council would be lost and it was considered of great importance to ensure the council, Members and the local community were strongly represented during any future discussions with the County Council.

With several suggested wording options being discussed, the Vice Chairman sought advice from the Democratic Services and Elections Team Manager (Interim). Members of the Committee clarified their position towards the plan and, on being proposed and seconded, the Chairman took a vote on the proposed amended and additional recommendations. With the vote on the amended recommendations **CARRIED**, the Chairman asked Committee Members to indicate their support or otherwise with a second vote.

With 10 for, 1 against and 1 abstention, it was

RESOLVED that Members:

- a) Support, in principal, the Gainsborough Cycling and Walking Network Plan 2021 for use, as an evidence base, by Officers on related projects and future decision making; and
- b) Support cycling and walking in Gainsborough and the wider District of West Lindsey; and

- c) Require Officers and Members on the Gainsborough Transport Board to robustly challenge the proposals put forward in this paper, and ensure appropriate and suitable alternatives are developed.

7 WORKPLAN

Members gave consideration to the Committee Workplan. A Member of the Committee enquired as to the purpose of the paper for the future options for Selective Licensing. It was clarified that the intention of the paper was to consider consultation and engagement options for all stakeholders, and to assure Members that there would be comprehensive consultation for any future plans.

With no further comments or questions, and with no requirement for a vote, the Work Plan was **DULY NOTED**.

The meeting concluded at 8.40 pm.

Chairman