

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee held in the Council Chamber - The Guildhall on 17 June 2021 commencing at 6.30 pm.

Present:

Councillor Mrs Anne Welburn (Chairman)
Councillor Jeff Summers (Vice-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:

Tracey Bircumshaw	Assistant Director of Finance and Property Services and Section 151 Officer
Emma Redwood	Assistant Director People and Democratic Services
Jeannette Anderson	Corporate Systems Development
Sue Leversedge	Business Support Team Leader
Ele Snow	Democratic and Civic Officer

Apologies:

Councillor Paul Howitt-Cowan

1 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PERIOD

There was no public participation.

2 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING/S

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 April 2021 were approved and signed as a correct record.

The minutes of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee meeting held on 25 March 2021 were noted.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE

The schedule of matters arising setting out the position of previously agreed actions as at 9 June 2021 was **NOTED**.

5 REPLACEMENT DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The Committee gave consideration to a report presented by the Corporate Systems Development & ICT Manager, seeking to gain approval to spend up to £70,000 from reserves for the implementation costs of the Document Management System (DMS). She explained that the replacement DMS being considered was an extension of the functionality of the new OneCouncil Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system to include a document management system, which would meet all current and future requirements. The capital programme 2021/22 included for the replacement of the current Idox Document Management System and the report requested the drawdown of £70k from ICT Reserve to fund the implementation of the OneCouncil document management system (DMS). In addition, it was prudent to allow a further £5,000 for additional consultancy days, if required, to be funded from General Fund balances.

There would be a slight increase in annual maintenance costs, of £900 per annum, which would be met within existing budgets, and there would be efficiency savings of approximately £44k a year, as the new DMS would not incur in house support and maintenance cost from the IT team (of which a small amount was in staff resources and the remainder were savings from not having an on-premise server with licences). This saving would only be realised when the server portfolio was refreshed and this server was removed from the network and therefore future costs would not be incurred. It was highlighted that the specification for the new DMS system had been developed in consultation with all services currently using the Idox DMS, which would be replaced.

A Member of the Committee enquired as to what consultancy would be required, in order to need the £5000 from general funds. He also questioned how it was possible to state that the system would meet ‘all future requirements’ and whether there was any cause for concern in that the system had not been tried in the UK up to this point.

In response to these questions, the Corporate Systems Development & ICT Manager explained that the £5000 was a contingency plan should there be any further consultancy work required on the system, however it was not anticipated that this would be required. The contract had been made to the specific requirements of the council and had integrated the ‘best bits’ of other systems as well as planning in the specifications of what was already in the pipeline for future ICT developments. She confirmed that the system had not been used in the UK previously, however, this gave additional scope for building the system to the exact requirements of the council. West Lindsey had previously been the first Local Authority in the country to use a certain system, that had proved successful and long-lasting and there were no concerns regarding being the first to go live on this occasion.

In response to a question regarding the use of reserves and general funds, it was explained that the £70k from reserves had been set aside specifically for this project, however the additional £5000 from general funds was as a contingency fund and may not be required.

With no further comments, the Chairman thanked Officers for the report, and, having been proposed and seconded, it was

RESOLVED that a capital budget and expenditure of up to £75,000 for the implementation of a replacement Document Management System, funded from the IT reserves £70,000 and General Fund Balance £5,000, be approved.

6 BUDGET AND TREASURY MONITORING FINAL OUTTURN 2020/21

The Committee heard from the Business Support Team Leader regarding a report setting out the final budget outturn position for revenue and capital 2020/2021, and requesting approval for transfer to General Fund working balances. She explained that Council approved a revenue budget, including Council Tax charges, for 2020/2021 of £14.357m at its meeting in March 2020 (£14.783m 2019/2020). There was no requirement to utilise the General Fund Balance to provide a balanced budget. The budget was revised in November 2020 to £20.525m to reflect the significant impact Covid-19 was having on both income and expenditure. The actual outturn had realised a surplus of £2.783m, £1.414m of which related to one off budget provision for the delivery of projects which spanned financial years and would therefore be carried forward. This left a remaining surplus budget of £1.369m (7% of the Revised Revenue Budget) to be transferred to the General Fund Working Balance, which now stood at £7.338m. The total amount of the General Fund Reserves was £26.546m (£20.020m 2019/2020).

It was explained that the forecast outturn position for 2020/2021 was presented to this Committee on 15 April 2021 as part of the Budget and Treasury Management Monitoring report for Quarter 4 2020/2021. The forecast outturn position at that time, for Business as Usual activity, was a net contribution to reserves of £0.540m. It was reiterated that the purpose of this report was to present to Members the final outturn position for the year, following the closure of accounts. The final outturn position was a net contribution to reserves of £1.389m, an increase of £0.849m from the previous forecast.

With regard to Capital, it was explained that the capital outturn position for 2020/2021 had moved since the Quarter 4 reporting. The outturn was £9.034m variance against revised budget of £14.113m. Final net carry forwards totalled £4.955m (£5.442m Quarter 4). The main scheme variation related to the Depot, due to the pace of construction being faster than anticipated, therefore Work in Progress accruals were higher than forecast. £0.124m was the final net underspend position on scheme budgets.

The Chairman thanked the Business Support Team Leader for her summary and invited questions from the Committee. There was discussion regarding the reduction in the credit loss provision for Housing Benefit debt, which was explained to be in relation to the way in which calculations had been undertaken in previous years, as well as there being a 95% subsidy on housing benefit. With regards to the capital grants figures, it was explained that the grant funding agreement for the Sun Inn expired in August 2022 and the business case

had included expenditure of selling the property.

Members enquired as to the impact of fuel prices, which was explained to be reflected in the quarter one report for the current financial year, as well as the details around the planning fee income. It was stated that it had been anticipated for this to have reduced, as a result of the pandemic, however that had not been the case and applications had picked up towards the year end. Again this would be reflected in the quarter one report.

In relation to staffing, with a lower than expected outturn, it was enquired whether this was as a result of limited overtime rather than holding vacancies. It was noted that this was due to delayed recruitment because of the pandemic.

There was discussion regarding the cost of replacing lost bins for residents and it was requested for the Democratic and Civic Officer to identify further information regarding this.

Following further discussion amongst Members regarding the impact of the pandemic on all areas of the council and how this reflected in the financial reports, the Chairman read aloud the recommendations within the report. Having been proposed and seconded, it was

RESOLVED that:

- a) Members accept the out-turn position of £2.783m gross contribution to reserves against the revised budget for 2020/2021 (£3.240m against the original budget); and
- b) Members approve £1.369m be transferred to the General Fund Working Balance; and
- c) Members accept the use of Earmarked Reserves approved by the Chief Finance Officer using Delegated powers (Section 5); and
- d) Members' accept the final capital outturn position of £9.034m (Section 3); and
- e) Members' accept the final treasury management indicators (Section 6).

7 PROGRESS AND DELIVERY REPORT QUARTER FOUR, 2020-21

Members gave consideration to the final quarterly report for Progress and Delivery for 2020/21. The Assistant Director for Finance, Business Support & Property Services provided a summary of each section, with Members invited to ask questions per portfolio.

Members heard the following summary.

Executive Summary

- Report presented performance for quarter 4 (Jan-Mar)

- Summary of year-end performance was attached as Appendix A for information
- 59% of KPIs were on or above target for quarter 4
- 38% of KPIs were below target
- The remaining 3% were within agreed tolerance levels

Corporate Health

- Customer satisfaction had improved and was now back on target. The number of complaints had also reduced by 16%.
- Calls answered within 21 seconds remained below target. This was 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. The Customer Experience Strategy was currently being reviewed and this would include call handling times to ensure performance improvements.

Finance and Property Services

- No performance concerns within this portfolio

Homes and Communities

- Demand for homelessness support continued to increase during quarter 4. The Protect Plus and cold weather initiatives, designed to end rough sleeping 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 6 new accommodation units in quarter one to support people with a history of street homelessness as part of the Next Steps Accommodation Programme. This was in addition to the Council's Viable Housing Solution and should lead to a reduction in the need for B&B accommodation. Following queries raised at Prosperous Communities Committee, the Change and Performance Officer would circulate additional information to members following the conclusion of this committee meeting.
- 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. This was due to a combination of not being able to access customers' homes to complete the work in the first lockdown, plus a national shortage of building materials. Larger and more complex cases had now been completed and, as of the meeting date, there were 115 DFGs ongoing which was comparable to pre-COVID levels. The service therefore had high confidence that completion times would improve significantly by the end of quarter two. In future, P&D reports would include data on the average number of days from receipt of a completed DFG application until completion of works, which was the period of time that West Lindsey had full control over performance. This would be provided in addition to existing KPIs.

Operational and Commercial Services

- 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 April 12th 2021 for gym, swim and squash. Dance classes resumed on May 17th, 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 TAC, 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 is 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. TAC 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.

People and Democratic Services

- No performance concerns within this portfolio

Planning and Regeneration

- No performance concerns within this portfolio

Change Management and Regulatory Services

- 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.

Members felt that, overall, the report reflected an acceptable level of performance given the circumstances. Improvements within Land Charges were noted and the importance of this service performing well was emphasised. It was noted that reputationally, there continued to be a need for improvement. It was confirmed that the improvement had come about as a result of changes in process, not because the performance measures had been changed.

Members commended the work of the team at the Trinity Arts Centre and it was noted that the Centre had been noticed at a national level, thanks were noted for the Manager and the team involved.

Queries were raised regarding the numbers of community litter picks that had taken place, it was recognised that if organised litter picks were not reported to the council, they could not be included in the figures. In relation to an enquiry regarding CCTV in Gainsborough, it was explained that the report was ‘by exception’ and therefore did not include the CCTV data, however this could be provided separately.

Members discussed the importance of the two leisure centres focusing on recovery in the post-covid period and Members sought assurance that this was taking precedence. Officers undertook to assure Members and seek additional information where required.

The Committee suggested that Officers had worked well in difficult circumstances to maintain services, however in some cases they had been working at a level that was not sustainable. It was noted that Team Managers were expected to be aware of this and make provision for continuity of service.

With no further comments, and with a proposer and seconder, the Chairman took the vote and it was

RESOLVED that the Committee had assessed the performance of the Council’s services through agreed performance measures and indicated areas where improvements should be made, having regard to the remedial measures set out in the report.

8 COMMITTEE WORK PLAN

The Committee gave consideration to the work plan for upcoming meetings. Councillor J. McNeill informed the Committee that, following a meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee, it had been recommended that the CP&R and JSC Committees receive a report regarding whistleblowing, this would be on the work plan for the Committee before the end of the Civic Year.

With no further comments the workplan was duly **NOTED**.

Corporate Policy and Resources Committee – 17 June 2021
Subject to Call-in. Call-in will expire at 5pm on 21 July 2021

The meeting concluded at 7.34 pm.

Chairman