

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Regulatory Committee held in the Council Chamber - The Guildhall on 9 December 2021 commencing at 6.30 pm.

Present: Councillor Mrs Jessie Milne (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Angela Lawrence (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor David Cotton
Councillor Mrs Caralyne Grimble
Councillor Paul Howitt-Cowan
Councillor Mrs Cordelia McCartney
Councillor Peter Morris
Councillor Mrs Judy Rainsforth
Councillor Jim Snee

In Attendance:
Andy Gray Housing and Enforcement Manager
Katie Storr Democratic Services & Elections Team Manager

Apologies: None received

Membership: No substitutes appointed for the meeting.

16 CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME

The Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming all Members and Officers. The safety measures that were in place were highlighted. In the absence of a public gallery, due to capacity within the Chamber, the Chairman advised the Committee meeting would be live webcast and extended her welcome to those watching at home.

17 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

18 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

19 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Regulatory Committee – 16 September 2021

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Regulatory Committee held on Thursday, 16 September 2021 be confirmed and signed as an accurate record.

20 MATTERS ARISING

With regard to the green action entitled “Fly Posting - Wider Consideration as Part of Gainsborough PSPO Work”, a Member of the Committee sought an update as to when the wider work was scheduled to be considered by Committee, citing further concerns and a continued presence of fly-posting.

In responding, Members were advised of the pending recruitment of a Senior Officer within the Licensing and Enforcement Team. This work would fall within their remit and it was anticipated progress would be made during 2022. Officers undertook to schedule an anticipated consideration date within the work plan.

In the absence of any further questions, the report was taken “as read” and with no requirement for a vote, the Matters Arising were **DULY NOTED**.

21 FOOD, HEALTH AND SAFETY WORK PLAN - MID YEAR UPDATE

At its meeting in June 2021, Regulatory Committee resolved that an update on performance against the Food Standards Agency (FSA) Recovery Plan be submitted to the Committee by January 2022 in order that the Committee had assurance on what progress was being made, given the circumstances raised through the initial report. (The original report can be found at [Agenda for Regulatory Committee on Thursday, 10th June, 2021, 6.45 pm | West Lindsey District Council \(west-lindsey.gov.uk\)](#))

The requested update was therefore submitted to Committee for their consideration and in presenting the report, Officers were candid in the continued significant difficulties facing the Authority and which were impeding the delivery of the Recovery Plan in respect of food premise inspections.

The current position in respect of the number of inspections completed was set out at 3.1 of the report, (November’s inspections were not reflected) and the key points to note were highlighted: -

- * The number of premises requiring inspection had increased since June 2021. This was due to unrated premises being rated and then requiring further inspection alongside new premise registrations something not factored into the original plan and the number of new premises was considerable.
- * The overall number of inspections required had remained static, despite the number of inspections completed.

- * A large proportion of the inspections related to reactive work based on complaints from the public, from which an inspection occurs.
- * A number of inspections had been completed in line with the recovery plan requirements.
- * No sampling programme had been reintroduced as yet.
- * The likelihood of meeting the overall target within this FSA Recovery Plan was now reduced.
- * The number of staff available to complete the required inspections had reduced within the period due to vacancies and one officer not becoming fully competent until the end of September 2021.

Coupled alongside this was the current resourcing issue and difficulties with recruiting fully qualified staff as detailed in Section 4 of the report. Officers outlined the steps which were being taken to address this including recent Management Team decisions. The main risks arising from the current position were set out in Section 5 of the report and were again highlighted to the Committee.

The Authority was not the only authority experiencing similar issues in recruiting fully qualified staff and increased workloads. Officers would be meeting with the FSA to seek assurance that the steps they were taking to meet the plans requirements were acceptable and to be honest about the challenges the Plan in its current form brought to the sector.

A further emerging risk not referenced within the report was the Government's move to Plan B it was unclear yet as to whether there would be additional duties on Officers as had been the case throughout the Pandemic. It would be the same Team, responsible for food inspections, requested to undertake additional activity again impeding planned work.

Debate ensued and whilst Members welcomed the candidness and openness concern was expressed at the current situation. Members considered there was real reputation risk, given the front facing nature of this service. The lack of capacity to re-introduce sampling was of concern given its importance. Members questioned whether 3 FTEs would be sufficient and challenged whether resources were always focussed on the highest priority tasks. Noting November's inspections rates were not reflected in the report, Members requested they receive this information. Officers undertook to provide the revised data and it was also suggested the Chairman's January briefing, referenced in the recommendation could be shared with wider Committee Members.

In responding to Members' comments, Officers offered reassurance that they were able to respond to the most serious complaints and respond swiftly. The team had since June instigated two voluntary closures and were dealing with customer complaints which required an inspection. Further comfort could be taken in that food standards across West Lindsey were not generally low with most achieving a 3* rating. Close liaison would be held with the FSA in the New Year and it was hoped the impact of the temporary resource recently approved would start to show an impact.

Whilst acknowledging the situation raised by a Member, it had to also be recognised that not

all Officers within the Team had the relevant competency standard to complete Inspections of Food Premises. The staffing levels and caseload in the service were under constant monitoring, with this matter being at the forefront of Management Team's attention. Officers were satisfied the additional resource cited in the report would provide enough resource.

Bringing the debate to a close the Chairman and Committee Members thanked and offered appreciation to the team for all the work undertaken, acknowledging the considerable pressure and new demands the service had been under since the outset of the Pandemic.

RESOLVED that: -

- a) the update report, as requested by Members at their meeting on 10 June 2021, in regards to the Food Standards Agency Recovery Plan and the action plan, that is being developed, to address the issues be received; and
- b) a further update on the resources and inspection position be provided to the Chairman and Vice Chairman at the end of January 2022.

The meeting concluded at 6.58 pm.

Chairman