

## WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee held in the Council Chamber - The Guildhall on 14 April 2022 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 Michael Devine  
Councillor Ian Fleetwood  
Councillor John McNeill  
Councillor Mrs Mandy Snee  
Councillor Robert Waller  
Councillor Trevor Young  
Councillor Roger Patterson

**In Attendance:**

Tracey Bircumshaw	Assistant Director of Finance and Property Services and Section 151 Officer
Alison McCulloch	Revenues Manager
Natalie Kostiuk	Customer Experience Officer
Emma Redwood	Assistant Director People and Democratic Services
Cara Markham	Commercial Development Manager
Shayleen Towns	Senior Community Action Officer
Sally Grindrod-Smith	Director Planning, Regeneration & Communities
Ele Snow	Senior Democratic and Civic Officer

**Apologies:** Councillor Liz Clews  
Councillor Paul Howitt-Cowan  
Councillor Tom Regis

**Membership:** Councillor R. Patterson sat as substitute for Councillor T. Regis

### 77 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PERIOD

There was no public participation.

### 78 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING/S

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee held on 10 February 2022 were **APPROVED** and signed as a correct record.

## **79 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

## **80 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE**

With no comments or questions from Members, the Matters Arising Schedule was **DULY NOTED**.

## **81 COUNCIL TAX DISCRETIONARY FUND FOR REFUND OF MAGISTRATES COURT FEES**

The Committee heard from the Revenues Manager with a report seeking to consider and agree the proposal for the expenditure of the refund of Magistrates court fees. It was explained that prior to 2018 the Council was required to make payments of £3 for every liability order issued by the Lincoln Magistrates. These fees were paid by every local authority in accordance with council tax legislation, however, following a successful challenge in 2014, the regulations were amended in 2018, dated back to 2014, reducing the fees to 50p per liability order.

Members heard that this matter had been with the Ministry of Justice since 2018 waiting for them to confirm when and how they would pay each local authority. They had recently contacted the Council, detailing the refund they believed to be due and had stated the sum of £24,605.45 (which included interest paid at 1.73%). Evidence of further payments totalling £7,385.72 made during the four-year period had been submitted to the Ministry of Justice for an additional refund and this was currently under consideration.

The regulations did not stipulate how this refund should be distributed and consideration had been given to the various options available to the Council. If the Council chose not to award any payments the refund would be absorbed into the general fund and would not benefit any council taxpayers. If there was to be refund of £2.50 in respect of each liability order, this would require a manual exercise involving each account having to be checked. This would cost almost as much to administer as the refund itself and would take over 100 days to complete.

It was explained to Members that if the Council were to set up a council tax discretionary hardship fund for 2022/23, this would enable the Council to offer some financial assistance to some of the district's more vulnerable residents. It was highlighted that the benefits of having such a fund last year proved invaluable and enabled the Council to achieve a 98.02% collection rate which was 0.01% higher than the previous year. The Committee was therefore being asked to approve this proposal.

Members spoke in favour of the proposed discretionary hardship fund and expressed thanks to the Revenues Manager and her team for their hard work. Having been moved and seconded, the Chairman took the vote and it was unanimously

**RESOLVED** that

- a) option 1 of the report, that the refund of Magistrates court fees be set aside for a council tax discretionary hardship fund to be set up for 2022/23, be approved; and.
- b) any additional refund of Magistrates court fees be added into the discretionary hardship fund for 2022/23 as and when they be determined by the Ministry of Justice; and
- c) in the event of any discretionary fund being unpaid, any residual amount be made available for 2023/24 as a new discretionary fund.

## **82 CUSTOMER FEEDBACK POLICY (PREVIOUSLY CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE POLICY)**

Members gave consideration to a report presented by the Customer Experience Officer, seeking to inform Members updates made to the Customer Feedback Policy (previously Customer Experience Policy) and to gain their agreement prior to it being implemented and published online.

It was explained that the policy had been renamed the Customer Feedback Policy in order to avoid any confusion with the new 'in progress' Customer Experience Strategy. Background was provided to Members, detailing that in 2017 the West Lindsey District Council complaints process was reviewed and refreshed and the new Customer Experience Policy Complaints Process was implemented on 1 January 2018. Learning had taken place since the policy was implemented and feedback from various sources had been received, all of which had been taken into account when the new Customer Feedback Policy was written. The new policy had also been examined by a member of the Disability Network. Their comments were taken into account and necessary amendments were made.

Members heard that these updates had been carried out because the Customer Experience Officer and Team Managers were keen to introduce a more stringent list of complaints that would be considered 'out of scope'. This stemmed from the Council having to accept complaints relating to issues that were at least 20 years old, leading to Officers having to spend hours/weeks of time investigating them in order to respond, when in reality, and in line with other authorities and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, it was not in the public interest to do so.

In addition to this, feedback received via legal services suggested that a review and updates were required in order to make it clear what action would be taken against difficult customers, including the fact that an injunction may be sought in some extreme cases and that the Council reserved the right to involve the police if appropriate. Work had also taken place to ensure that it was in line with the current difficult and complex customer policy. The Customer Feedback Policy would link to the new 'in progress' Customer Experience Strategy once it was finalised later in 2022.

The Chairman thanked the Officer and highlighted the positive changes that had been made since the Customer Experience Policy came into effect. There was widespread support for

the detail within the report, the layout and ease of reference to the amendments as well as all round thanks for the work undertaken in relation to the customer experience.

Following a question from a Member of the Committee regarding possible challenge to the policy, quoting an example of an individual complaining to an organisation about the complaints policy, it was confirmed that the intention was not to block complaints, rather to manage expectations of what would be dealt with.

Having been moved and seconded, it was, with majority vote,

**RESOLVED** that

- a) the amendments and additions made to the Customer Feedback Policy (previously Customer Experience Policy), be welcomed; and
- b) the amendments and additions be approved prior to it being implemented and published online.

### **83 REVIEW OF WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY**

The Committee heard from the Assistant Director for People & Democratic Services regarding the review of the Whistleblowing Policy. It was explained that the policy was last reviewed in 2019 and, following an annual report to the Governance and Audit Committee regarding whistleblowing activity, Members had recommended the policy be reviewed to take into account the feedback from that Committee. The amendments were summarised with reference to how the recommendations from the Governance and Audit Committee had been incorporated.

The Chairman thanked the Assistant Director for People and Democratic Services and formally congratulated on her new role. Members of the Committee commended the layout of the report and the detailed amendments. It was questioned whether there could be a standard approach to such policy reviews, with the Assistant Director for People and Democratic Services undertaking to seek feedback and incorporate suggestions into the report writing style.

It was highlighted that one of the concerns raised by the Governance and Audit Committee has been that people may be nervous to proceed with whistleblowing, due to perceived repercussions, and it was enquired as to whether any assurance had been sought for mitigating this concern. It was explained that the policy delivered a well-rounded and robust approach to whistleblowing, and also provided external avenues of support, all of which was standard across similar policies in other organisations and as supported by ACAS.

Having been moved and seconded it was unanimously

**RESOLVED** that

- a) the reviewed Whistleblowing Policy be approved and adopted by the council; and

- b) delegated authority be granted to the Chief Executive to make minor housekeeping amendments to the policy in future, in consultation with the Chairman of the Corporate Policy & Resources Committee and the Chairman of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee.

## **84 BUDGET AND TREASURY MONITORING - QTR 4 2021/2022**

The Committee heard from the Assistant Director, Finance, Business and Property Services with the 2021/2022 quarter four Budget and Treasury Monitoring report, setting out the revenue, capital and treasury management activity from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

With regard to Revenue, she highlighted that the draft revenue forecast out-turn position for 2021/2022 was currently reflecting a net contribution to reserves of £0.187m relating to business-as-usual activity as of 31 March 2022. When then considering the impact of Covid-19 it was currently forecast that the additional costs and loss of income forecast for the financial year, offset by savings, would total a net pressure of £1.13m. This would leave a balance of £0.399m remaining against the Covid Support funds held to support Covid recovery (total £1.529m). The summary of forecast Covid financial implications were detailed within the report. The forecast General Fund Balance as of 31 March 2022 was £3.981m (excluding carry forwards). This was £1.481m above the minimum working balance of £2.5m agreed by this Committee. The items with significant variances were detailed the report.

With regard to Capital, the Committee heard that the Capital Forecast Out-Turn for 2021/2022 was £7.228m, a variance of £2.603m against the approved budget of £9.831m. Both the revenue and capital figures were subject to change once the actual outturn position was finalised, and the final outturn would be reported to the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee in June 2022.

With regard to Treasury, it was explained that total external borrowing was currently £21.5m; however, no additional borrowing would be required this financial year. There had been no breaches of Treasury or Prudential Indicators within the period of this report. Average investments for the period (Jan-Mar) were £22.77m, which achieved an average rate of interest of 0.855% (Oct-Dec was 21.626m, 0.727%).

Members thanked the Assistant Director for the report and for the work of the team in preparing it. A Member of the Committee enquired as to the green home grants and sought clarification regarding the details of the grants, such as how many applications had been received, process and how successful the scheme was overall. It was confirmed this information would be circulated to Members.

There was discussion regarding car parking income levels, which were higher than had been expected, and a question was asked whether there had been consideration given to using reserves to put aside financial assistance for those who may be in need of it through the pandemic recovery and cost of living increases. It was highlighted that earlier in the evening the council tax discretionary fund had been approved and there would be ongoing consideration as price increases such as energy and fuel were set to continue. In the same vein, a Member of the Committee enquired as to the interest rate forecast and whether consideration had been given to a potential rapid increase in rates. It was noted that the

annual report would be presented to the Committee in June which would have further updated information and finance Officers were monitoring the situation.

The Chairman reiterated her thanks for the report and also extended a personal thank you to the Assistant Director, who was due to leave the Council. Members joined with the Chairman in expressing their thanks and best wishes.

Having been moved and seconded, with a unanimous vote it was

**RESOLVED** that

**REVENUE**

- a) Members accept the forecast out-turn position of a £0.187m net contribution to reserves as of 31st March 2022 (see Section 2) relating to business-as-usual activity.
- b) Members approve the use of Earmarked Reserves (2.4.1).
- c) Members accept the use of Earmarked Reserves during the quarter approved by the Chief Finance Officer using delegated powers (2.4.2).
- d) Members approve the amendment to the fees and charges schedules (2.3.2), to be effective immediately.
- e) Members accept the Revenue budget carry forwards of £0.856m approved in year (Appendix 3).

**CAPITAL**

- f) Members accept the current projected Capital Outturn as detailed in 3.1.1.
- g) Members approve the capital budget carry forwards of £2.449m, and to bring forward budget of £0.051m from 2022/2023 into 2021/2022, as detailed at 3.1.2.

**TREASURY**

- h) Members accept the report, the treasury activity and the prudential indicators.

**85 COMMITTEE TIMETABLE 2022-2023**

The Senior Democratic and Civic Officer presented a report regarding the committee

timetable for 2022-23, explaining that any changes from previously noted versions of the timetable had been detailed within the report and Members were asked to approve the timetable as printed, as well as to note the provisional timetables for the years 2023-24, 2024-25 and 2025-26.

Members were satisfied with the timetable as printed and, on being proposed and seconded, it was unanimously

**RESOLVED** that

- a) the timetable for the 2022/2023 civic year be approved, and the indicative committee dates for the years 2023-24, 2024-25 and 2025-26 be noted; and
- b) the indicative committee dates be presented annually for approval, with each subsequent report noting any changes proposed from the previous version noted.

**86 COMMITTEE WORK PLAN**

With no comments or questions, the work plan was **DULY NOTED**.

**87 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 items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

**Note:** The meeting entered closed session at 7.14pm

**88 SURESTAFF BUSINESS PLAN 2022-23**

The Committee gave consideration to a report from the Commercial Development Manager, providing a summary of the performance of the Council's arms-length companies, Surestaff and West Lindsey Staffing Services, and seeking approval for the 2022-23 Business Plan.

Having provided the history of the two companies, as well as summarising the performance over the past two years, the Commercial Development Manager invited Members to review the details of the business plan.

Members were pleased with what was considered to be a positive report and felt confident with the information provided to them. They thanked the Commercial Development Manger for her time and a comprehensive report and, having been proposed and seconded, it was unanimously

**RESOLVED** that the 2022-23 Surestaff Business Plan be approved.

## **89 HEMSWELL CLIFF MANAGED ESTATES CONTRACT RENEWAL**

The Committee heard from the Senior Community Action Officer regarding the renewal of the Hemswell Cliff Managed Estates contract. She provided a history of the area and demonstrated how significant improvements had been made, as well as upcoming changes that would continue the work already undertaken. Members were thankful to the Officer and her team for the support provided to residents and the gains shown by their hard work.

A Member of the Committee highlighted that this was one of several estates that were managed in a variety of ways, with positive steps being taken to unify areas for the future. The Officer was again commended for her work in the area and, on being proposed and seconded, with a unanimous vote it was

### **RESOLVED** that

- a) the proposal to offer a five-year contract to Hemswell Residents Company in respect of Estate Management Services for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2028 be approved; and
- b) oversight of the contract renewal procedure, including any minor housekeeping changes, be delegated to the Assistant Director of Homes and Communities, in consultation with the Chairman of the Prosperous Communities Committee and the Chairman of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee.

**Note:** Councillor M Boles left the meeting at 7.27pm

## **90 RAF SCAMPTON**

The Assistant Director of Planning and Regeneration provided the Committee with a detailed report, seeking approval to submit an Expression of Interest to the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) for the potential acquisition of RAF Scampton.

**Note:** Councillor M. Boles returned to the meeting at 7.28pm

It was explained that there were two options available to Members, those being to either submit an expression of interest, or to not. On choosing to submit an expression of interest, this would allow for further work to take place and could culminate in the production of a full business case to determine the next steps. It was highlighted that there was no commitment to progress to formal acquisition. If it was decided to not enter an expression of interest for the site, work would continue to develop the Local Plan policy framework through the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan and officers would continue to engage with the DIO, investors and interested parties regarding the future of the site.

The Committee was fully supportive of the opportunity to submit an expression of interest

and recognised the importance of, not just the site itself, but the need to transition from Ministry of Defence (MoD) to local community. There were positive comments of thanks to all Officers involved as well as recognition for work already undertaken, such as communicating with the DIO and MoD once the announcement of the closure of RAF Scampton had been made.

With further positive comments, the recommendations within the Officer's report were duly moved, seconded and voted upon. With a unanimous vote it was

**RESOLVED** that

- a) the submission of the Priority Assessment Report at Appendix 1, to register the interest of West Lindsey District Council in the potential future acquisition of the land at RAF Scampton be approved, and any final amendments be delegated to the Head of Paid Service in consultation with the Chairman of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee; and
- b) Officers be instructed to develop an options appraisal and business case to be considered at a future meeting.

## **91 THRIVING GAINSBOROUGH 2024: CINEMA AND LEISURE SCHEME**

The Assistant Director of Planning and Regeneration presented to Members the last report of the evening, explaining that the purpose of the report was to update Members on progress with delivery of the Thriving Gainsborough 2024 Cinema and Leisure Scheme and to seek approval for the proposed delivery method and associated expenditure.

**Note:** Councillor R Patterson left the meeting at 7.46pm and returned at 7.49pm

Members heard that planning approval for the scheme was now in place, which included an historic façade that met the requirements of the Gainsborough Town Centre Conservation Area. Funding for the scheme was also now in place, with the success of the Levelling Up Fund bid increasing the total capital budget available. Despite very challenging times since 2020 as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic, Savoy Cinemas Ltd remained committed to the scheme and were in place ready to deliver.

It was explained that the chosen site, the Lindsey Centre, had a complex and restricted title and required intervention from the Council in order to deliver a viable development option. Under Section 203 of the Housing Act (2016) Councils were granted powers to deal with title matters for the benefit of approved development. The Assistant Director set out the steps required in order to progress the delivery of the town centre leisure scheme.

Committee Members were supportive of the proposals and recognised the opportunities available for building a strong future for the town. The need to consider climate related risks, such as carbon impact and also how to make new developments energy efficient, was highlighted with the Assistant Director agreeing that this was a consideration in the development of the plans and proposals.

There were discussions regarding the timescales of the development, with different dates having been stated. It was explained that the developer was keen to be on site and completed as soon as possible, with Officers working to facilitate that as far as it was feasible. Despite concerns raised regarding current instability in the hospitality industry, and having been reassured that there were sufficient options open for the use of the proposed units, Members were positive and supportive of the paper.

On being moved and seconded, the Chairman took the vote and it was unanimously

**RESOLVED** that

- a) the acquisition of the freehold property title number LL126969, known as the Lindsey Centre for £375,000 as per the Sale Agreement at Appendix 3 (subject to matters at 4.6 being completed) be approved; and
- b) the utilisation of section 203 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 to make an application to the Land Registry for the purposes of Land Appropriation of property title LL126969 be approved; and
- c) the sale of property title LL26969 to Savoy Cinemas Limited as per the draft Sale Agreement at Appendix 6 upon completion of the demolition scheme of works, be approved, with any changes required to this agreement to be delegated to the Assistant Director of Planning and Regeneration in liaison with the Monitoring Officer and S151 Officer; and
- d) the delivery model as set out at 7.2 to secure the construction and ongoing operation of a four screen cinema and leisure scheme in Gainsborough be approved; and
- e) an increased budget and expenditure of up to £6,105,366 reflecting the cost of the Lindsey Centre acquisition be approved, the increase being met from a capital receipt of £375,000 upon its sale to Savoy Cinemas Ltd.

The Chairman concluded the meeting with thank to all involved and particular thanks and best wishes again to Tracey Bircumshaw, Assistant Director, Finance, Business and Property Services.

The meeting concluded at 8.04 pm.

Chairman