

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee held in the Council Chamber - The Guildhall on 10 November 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 Paul Howitt-Cowan
Councillor John McNeill
Councillor Mrs Lesley Rollings
Councillor Mrs Mandy Snee
Councillor Robert Waller
Councillor Trevor Young

In Attendance:

Ian Knowles	Chief Executive
Emma Foy	Director of Corporate Services and Section 151
Nova Roberts	Director of Change Management, ICT & Regulatory Services
Sally Grindrod-Smith	Director Planning, Regeneration & Communities
Peter Davy	Financial Services Manager (Deputy Section 151 Officer)
Sarah Elvin	Housing Communities Project Officer
Sue Leversedge	Business Support Team Leader
Alison McCulloch	Revenues Manager
Claire Bailey	Assistant Planning Services Team Manager
Katie Storr	Democratic Services & Elections Team Manager

Apologies: Councillor Liz Clews

Membership: Councillor Lesley Rollings was appointed substitute for Councillor Liz Clews

34 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PERIOD

There was no public participation.

35 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING/S

Members noted there were two sets of minutes, one being for approval and one for noting, with each set taken in turn, it was

RESOLVED that: -

- (a) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee held on 29 September, 2022 be confirmed and signed as a correct record; and
- (b) the Minutes of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee held on 8 September 2022, be noted.

36 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

37 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE

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

38 COUNCIL TAX ENERGY REBATE DISCRETIONARY SCHEME

Members gave consideration to a report which sought agreement to amend the Discretionary Council Tax Energy Rebate Scheme, previously agreed by delegated decision on 9 May 2022.

Earlier in the year, the Government had announced the Council Tax Energy Rebate Scheme to assist residents with the rising costs of energy by making a payment of £150 according to their council tax bands.

The scheme had been split into two areas of work; the core scheme being for residents in council tax bands A-D and which is fully funded and the discretionary scheme, intended for residents in bands E-H.

Government Funding had been allocated for this purpose with any underspend to be paid back to Government. It was also stressed any overspend would have to be met by the Local Authority. The scheme was due to close on 30 November 2022.

The delegated decision taken in May, in respect of the discretionary element was summarised to Committee and was available publicly and had enabled automatic payments of £150 to be made to anyone in Bands E to H in a vulnerable category, leaving the remaining balance to allocate to anyone else in Bands E to H to make an application with supporting evidence of financial hardship.

Members noted that since the Scheme launched 351 accounts in bands E-H had received a payment and of the original allocation £117,300 remained unspent.

Four options in respect of extending the discretionary scheme, to assist West Lindsey residents with their energy bills, had been considered, with each detailed within the report. The option being recommended to the Committee was option 1; a small payment to all Band E Council tax account holders who had not yet received a payment.

The rationale for this preferred Option was outlined to Members and contained in Section 6 of the report.

Debate ensued and Members remarked on the hard work undertaken by the team to administer such schemes since the onset of, first the pandemic, and now cost of living measures.

Whilst acknowledging the payment to each account was small, Members considered this to be a pragmatic approach and a preference to the funding being returned to Central Government. The approach was fully supported across the Chamber and although it was a very small amount, Members considered it would be welcomed by a large number of people, targeted those it had been demonstrated had not received assistance to date and that it would be foolhardy to return funding to Central Government.

Members sought indication as to the additional costs associated with administering such schemes and making such payments, and whether this had to be taken from the total funding allocation, met by the Authority or funded separately.

Whilst it was not feasible for Officers to provide a transaction cost for per applicant currently, Officers did confirm that only that week notification had been received from the Government, that administering organisations needed to complete an application for what were deemed “New Burdens”, which was the funding towards administering the Schemes.

To-date the local authority had received £56,000 towards administration costs, but that had nearly been fully utilised on IT costs, postage costs and an additional temporary Officer to help with the additional work. There were a lot of extra costs to the Authority, there was now opportunity to apply for further funding and Officers were currently undertaking that process.

In responding to questions Officers outlined how eligible recipients from bands D-H had been identified initially, how the remaining fund had been advertised and promoted and the hardship test which had been applied; evidence of energy bills in arrears. Council Tax accounts in arrears had also been approached as this was often a sign of hardship. Assurance was sought and received that if more residents eligible for the £150 were identified through any means, then the full £150 payment would be made. The smaller payments referenced in the report, would only be made right at the end of the Scheme post 30 November. Assurance was also offered that the team provided a service where they would complete the forms on behalf of residents who made contact, there was no reason for residents to struggle with online applications and paper forms.

On that basis it was **RESOLVED** that

- (a) the existing Council Tax Energy Rebate Discretionary Scheme be

amended and option 1 approved, namely: -

- a small payment, estimated at approximately £33, be made to all eligible households in Council Tax band E, who have not already received a Council Tax Energy Payment, noting the resulting small surplus which may arise and would be refunded back to Central Government and that payments would be made direct to Council Tax accounts thus reducing the instalments due; and
- (b) Delegated authority be granted to the Section 151 Officer to make any minor amendments to the estimated £33 payment, in respect of the Scheme.

Note: Having sought advice during the discussion, Councillor John McNeill declared a non-registrable interest as a Band E property owner, and given he may be entitled to such a payment, remained in the meeting but did not take part in the discussions or vote.

39 PROGRESS AND DELIVERY QUARTER TWO (22/23) - INCLUDING PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT PLANS

Members gave consideration to the Progress and Delivery report for quarter two 2022/2023, which covered the period of 1 July to 30 September 2022.

Before considering the details of the performance, Members' attention was drawn to page 7 of the report, with quarter two seeing the introduction of a Performance Improvement Plan. The Performance Improvement Plan intended to provide further context and the extra level of assurance Members' had been seeking, when measures within services were reporting as underperforming. The Improvement Plan detailed those measures where performance had remained below target for two consecutive quarters or more, reasoning as to why the measure was reporting below target, the impact this was having, the actions in place to improve performance and when improvement was expected to be seen as a result of the actions being taken.

Officers outlined how the Plan had been developed, and how it would be managed and monitored, noting Improvement Plans would include clear linkages to the objectives of both teams and individuals.

Turning to the performance data Members were advised over 78% of all measures were either exceeding or within agreed tolerance of their targets, up compared with quarter one at 68.4%. Similarly, measures exceeding target for two consecutive quarters or more, had increased from 76% in quarter one to 83% in quarter two.

The measures that had performed above or below target for two consecutive periods, in each portfolio area, were then highlighted to the Committee, as follows: -

Corporate Health

Two measures were reporting below target during the quarter and had been included in the Performance Improvement Plan, earlier referred to, namely, the average time taken to pay invoices and overall customer satisfaction. Members noted the reasoning for this and the

actions to be taken. Overall performance in the portfolio continued to remain positive and Members indicated they had no questions in respect of this area.

Change Management, ICT and Regulatory Services

10 measures were performing above their targets for two consecutive periods with only 2 measures reporting below target for quarter two. Continued high performance was reported in all areas, but those areas brought to the Committee's attention within the portfolio were: -

In-year council tax collection. Having recently received outturn figures for 21/22, the average national collection rate was 95.8% for Council Tax with the Council Tax team having achieved 98% and therefore performing in the top quartile across the country.

Completed Food Safety inspections. The percentage of completed inspections continued to remain on track for the year, evidencing the recovery from the pandemic.

Housing Enforcement Cases - The percentage of cases closed within 6 months was reporting as below target. A number of long-standing cases which had been affecting the performance figures, had been closed over the Summer and such performance was projected to return to expected levels during quarter three.

Land Charges. Following a successful T24 review, searches were consistently being turned around within the agreed timeframes. The Market share for the service was reporting below target, with this being monitored but the focus remained on maintaining the high standards.

Members indicated they had no questions in respect of the Portfolio.

Finance and Property

Rental portfolio voids were reporting above target with voids, at 3.3%.

No measures were reporting below target within the Portfolio and Members indicated they had no questions in respect of this area.

Homes and Communities – Homes Health and Wellbeing TM

Noting the 22/23 measures review, approved by Members in February 2022 three measures with targets were set within the Portfolio. This year's performance would be used to baseline and inform the targets set for the 23/24 cycle.

The reasoning for new measures having been set were summarised to the Committee noting how individual cases could impact overall performance in the case of households in bed and breakfast accommodation.

One performance measure continued to report above target, this being long term empty properties as a % of all housing stock and the measure reporting below target which has been included in the Performance Improvement Plan related to the average number of calendar days from receipt of a completed DFG application to completion of work.

In respect of DFGs Members noted performance was already on an upward trajectory. April's figures had reported 302 days whereas September was 170, averaging 171 for the quarter. The improvements in the process resulted from the T24 review undertaken at the

end of 2021.

In responding to Members' comments about possible improvements to the application process, and indicating how daunting these could be for customers, whilst accepting they were often set by Central Government, Officers outlined how the T24 review, referred to, had identified this too. As a result, additional capacity had been added to the front end of the application process. Now when a referral was received, Council Officers would phone the customer and complete the form on their behalf, posting it out for the customer to sign and return. This had been one of the main contributors to reducing the times and Members welcomed the approach.

Operational and Commercial Services

Five measures had performed in excess of the agreed targets for at least two consecutive quarters within the Portfolio.

Three measures were reporting below target and all featured within the Performance Improvement Plan. Those areas brought to the Committee's attention within the Portfolio were: -

Average stalls on a Tuesday and Saturday – These measures were covered by the three-year action plan approved by the Prosperous Communities Committee in January 2022 consisting of a three-phased approach to regenerating the Markets was approved – Transition, Development and Delivery. The Council was currently in the transition phase, with actions underway.

Recycling rates – the Summer had been exceptionally dry and as a result there was reduced garden waste sent for recycling, in addition the introduction of the purple lidded bin and the initial bin rejections had had a short-term reduction on the recycling rate. This was expected to improve through the targeted communication plans in place, to assist customers, as well as Officers on the ground.

Leisure centre, as with Home Choices, there had been a shift in measure as it had been felt that the 2021/22 performance measures set had not provided meaningful data – new targets around membership and membership activity had now been included for 2022/23. This year's performance would be used as a baseline and to inform the targets set for the 2023/24 cycle.

In response to Members' questions around the number of stalls, it was stressed this was an average over the period, accepting that the number of stalls could vary from week to week.

Planning and Regeneration

Development Management performance remained high with 3 measures maintaining performance above target. There were no measures under target in the Portfolio and Members indicated they had no specific questions on this area.

A period of general questioning ensued and Members commended the usage figures of the Market Rasen Leisure Centre. Enquiries were made as to whether data could be provided specifically in relation to the 3G facilities, their occupancy and usage across the week. Officers undertook to ascertain the information and supply it to Members.

In relation to the Trinity Arts Centre, again the performance was commended but Members

noted that most of the attendance was due to cinema screenings. Members sought indication as to what future proofing if any was being done, given the new ventures to open soon in the same local area, or work to ensure the offer at the Centre was different, in order to complement not compete with new offerings. Members were advised that a new Trinity Arts Centre Business Plan was being developed to reflect those matters referenced by Members and would be submitted to the relevant Committee in due course.

Referring to the reduced recycling rates, dual-hatted Members advised they were aware that this was a County wide reduction. A break down of the rates for each District was requested, again with Officers undertaking to provide this outside of the meeting.

Finally referring to fly-tipping, Members indicated it would be useful to understand the nature of the fly tips, acknowledging that rubble and such items, often tipped rurally, were considerably more difficult and costlier to remove, as opposed to maybe sofas, and the like, in the urban areas. The total cost of the service over the last few years was also requested. Again, Officers indicated they would ascertain the information, and circulate to Members. Going forward greater narrative around the nature of the "tips" would be included in the report where possible.

With no further questions, it was **RESOLVED** that: -

- (a) the Progress and Delivery Quarter Two (July – September) 2022/23 report be approved; and
- (b) the Progress and Delivery Performance Improvement Plan for Quarter Two (July-September) 2022/23 be approved.

40 MID-YEAR TREASURY MANAGEMENT REPORT 2022-23

Members considered a report which provided the Mid-Year update for Treasury Management Indicators in accordance with the Local Government Act 2003.

The report sought to update the Committee on progress against the Treasury Management Strategy which was approved by Council in March 2022 for 2022/23 financial year, and was compliant with the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management.

It was acknowledged that the report had been written during a time of much change in the national political situation, and during a period of economic turbulence, with there having been an increase to the base interest rate since the report had been published.

The report identified that interest rates had been rising and were forecast to rise further resulting in the Council receiving additional investment income, demonstrated in the quarter two budget monitoring report, to be considered later in the evening, and was due to budgets having been set when rates were at historically low levels. Members also noted that increased rates did also mean that the Council would find borrowing costlier if it was required to source funds.

Section four of the report highlighted the movements in the Council's prudential indicators. Changes had arisen as a result of the Council closing its accounts for 2021/22 after the original strategy had been written and due to a revised capital programme for 2022/23, again

outlined in the quarter two budget monitoring report referred to earlier.

The report concluded with an economics update which had been supplied by the Council's Treasury Advisors, Link Asset Services, and which was useful in understanding the national and international context the Council was operating within when undertaking its treasury activities.

Members referenced the usefulness of economic forecast information, particularly during current economic turbulence. Understanding the UK, and indeed the global economic outlook was important for everyone, not just for setting Council budgets, but also to residents in making personal decisions about their finances. Its public nature was therefore much welcomed.

It was suggested that in future the recommendations be more specific in identifying what the changes to prudential indicators were and indicating the relevant sections of the report, as had been the case historically, as this would aid with both Elected Members and the public's understanding.

RESOLVED that the report and treasury activity be noted and it be **RECOMMENDED** to Council that the changes to the Prudential Indicators (Section 4.3 of the report) be approved.

41 DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS - TOP UP FROM CAPITAL RECEIPTS RESERVE

Members considered a report which presented the forecast overspend from the Disabled Facilities Grant and requested additional top up funding from the Capital Receipts Reserve.

In presenting the report Members noted that West Lindsey's allocation had not been uplifted for inflation and didn't necessarily reflect the demographic of the District with many residents, not holding sufficient capital funds to pay for adaptations or owning their own homes, which allowed charges to be raised against properties.

The delivery of Disabled Facilities grants was a statutory requirement and the relevant Central Government Department had been quite clear that running out of grant funding, did not mean the Authority could cease delivery.

To ensure delivery of the grants could continue and the current service demand be met, a request from capital receipt reserves of £300,000 was being sought with an additional £234,000 having already been allocated from Section 106 monies.

In previous years', top-up grants had been received in January, however this payment had not been confirmed.

The spend to-date was detailed at paragraph 1.8 of the report and the reasoning for budget pressures set out in 1.9.

Members also noted the additional work which would be undertaken alongside allocating funding, to raise with the Government, and the County Council, the inadequacy of funding and the flawed formula used to calculate funding levels, particularly given the demographic

of the District.

Debate ensued and Members sought and received assurance that the lobbying and letters referenced in the recommendations would be undertaken.

Members also questioned the process for determining how S106 funding was allocated, suggesting that there should be greater Member involvement and engagement in committing such Funds. The use of trusted assessors, appointed directly by the District Council, as an alternative way to reduce the delays resulting from a lack of Occupational Therapists was again raised.

In responding, Members were advised that as part of the detailed work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee, the use of trusted assessors had been considered. However, the need for a Disabled Facilities Grant was not ascertained until a referral had been made from the County Council. The Authority was not in a position to by-pass the County Council, as every person was entitled to an Adult Social Care Assessment. In comparison, a very small number of those assessments actually undertaken ended up in a Disabled Facilities Grant because there were so many other options that Occupational Therapists considered prior to relying on a DFG. The possibility had been discussed with County colleagues, but it had been made clear that given the right to a full assessment and the fact that many assessments did not result in a DFG but some other form of assistance which was the County Council's responsibility to deliver, it was not appropriate to miss out that step. Furthermore the District Council had no expertise, in-house, to supervise an Occupational Therapist or a trusted assessor because health, in those terms was not within the remit of West Lindsey, because it was not one of its functions under statute.

Regarding Section 106 monies, Officers outlined how approved Planning Policy dictated this and the wording of the Section 106 arrangements themselves. This was also detailed in the Infrastructure Funding Statement yearly.

Given this, applications for Section 106 monies were primarily dealt with internally and assessed against the options and priorities paper. If the situation arose where there was not enough S106 monies then Members would be asked to select their preferred projects. It was noted that much due diligence was undertaken to ensure any potential partners were adequate. Officers outlined the detail and the nature of the specific S106 which had enabled monies to be allocated to DFGs. It was emphasised that an overview and update of S106 spend would be included in the Infrastructure Funding Statement and offers to share more detail around the internal process was made.

In responding to further questions Officers confirmed the additional funding being sought would only cover the mandatory element of DFGs. Whilst the Council had a discretionary policy, this was only in place when there was funding to finance it and it had been suspended in April. It was also brought to Members' attention that discretionary grants were often in place for customers who had already had a mandatory grant and, as such, acted like a top up or a contribution towards something additional not available through the mandatory scheme. This had no bearing on speeding up the process or the number of applications being dealt with.

In response to Members' questions Officers confirmed they were not in a position to know how many applications were made to LCC but not referred to WLDC, only the number of

referrals that were made. This had been discussed with the County Council but they did not log this data at present. It was suggested dual hatted Members could raise this with the County Council .

RESOLVED that: -

- (a) the allocation of £300,000 from the Capital Receipts Reserve to address the shortfall in Disabled Facilities Grant funding for 2022/23 be approved;
- (b) further lobbying take place with Lincolnshire County Council to obtain both further funding from the Better Care Fund for the current year and a larger allocation in future years due to the demographic pressures West Lindsey faced; and
- (c) it be noted that the Chief Executive would be preparing a letter for the MP Sir Edward Leigh, setting out the challenges the District faced in meeting demand for disabled adaptations.

42 BUDGET AND TREASURY MONITORING QUARTER 2 2022/2023

Members considered a report which set out the revenue, capital and treasury management activity from 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022.

In presenting the report, and in relation to revenue budgets, Members were advised the forecast outturn position was a net contribution to reserves of £216,000, this represented a movement of £254,000 from the £38,000 deficit reported to the Committee in the Quarter 1 report presented July.

The movement to a contribution to reserves position was primarily due to the following factors: -

- * The Planning fee income forecasting to be overachieved by £177,000 and was based on actual income to-date, which included several applications for major developments.
- * Net interest receivable was forecast to be £190,000 above budget. This was due to the budget being set when interest rates were historically low, combined with larger balances than expected in the early part of the year, which meant that the Council was forecast to exceed its interest receivable budget.
- * This was offset by a pressure on employee costs of £37,000. With the forecast outturn now including the confirmed pay award for 22/23, and also the reduced National Insurance rate to be applied from the 6 November, announced in the Government's September mini-budget.
- * Crematorium income had reduced by £36,000, to reflect the business plan reported to the Committee in July; and there was also a pressure within Property and Asset services relating to forecast electricity costs and repairs and maintenance expenditure.

In relation to Capital, Section 3.1 of the report detailed requested approvals to capital schemes, including £6.823m which it was proposed be moved to future financial years.

Members were also asked to approve the adjustments to the capital budgets as detailed at section 3.2 of the report and to approve the revised capital budget of £10.5m, which included the amended Disabled Facilities Grant capital scheme budget, considered and approved earlier in the meeting.

In responding to questions, Officers confirmed capital costs relating to the Market Square development would be funded from the Levelling Up Fund award.

RESOLVED that:

REVENUE

- (a) the forecast out-turn position of a £0.216m net contribution to reserves as of 30th September 2022 (see Section 2) relating to revenue activity be accepted;
- (b) the use of Earmarked Reserves during the quarter approved by the Chief Finance Officer using Delegated powers (2.4.1) be accepted;

CAPITAL

- (c) the current projected Capital Out-turn as detailed in 3.1.1 of the report be accepted;
- (d) the adjustments to the Capital Budget as detailed in 3.2 of the report be approved;
- (e) the revised Capital Budget of £10.5m be approved; and

TREASURY

- (f) the report, the treasury activity and the prudential indicators be accepted.

**43 RECOMMENDATION FROM PROSPEROUS COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE:
PROPOSED FEES AND CHARGES 2022/2023 - INCLUDING CHRISTMAS
PARKING AND DISTRICT PARKING CHARGES**

The Committee considered a report which detailed the proposed Fees and Charges to be implemented from the 1st of April 2023 for services within the remit of the Committee (Appendix A) as well as those recommended by Prosperous Communities Committee (Appendices B and C). Service specific detail relating to performance and demand were included within the report at Appendices 1 to 19.

Members noted that two additional recommendations had been made by the Prosperous Communities Committee when considering their fees and charges, namely for the free parking period in Gainsborough to be increased from one to two hours, in line with Market

Rasen to establish parity across the district; and that all charges relating to car parking fixed penalty notices be halved. Regarding the latter Members were advised that unfortunately the Council was not able to amend such fines as they were set by statute under the Road traffic Act 2007 and as such Members should reject the recommendation on legal grounds.

The net impact of the original fees and charges review was an increase in income of £6,700 in 2023/24, rising to £58,300 by 2027/28, however, the proposed increase in free parking in Gainsborough was forecasted to reduce this by £27,000 per year.

Members further noted inflation currently stood at 12.00% but it was being proposed that a lower rate of 6% be applied, to reflect the impact of the pay award on service provision, with employee costs and Officers, time being the main cost driver for many of the proposed fees. This reduced inflation rise would also ensure services remained accessible to all residents given the current cost of living crisis.

Furthermore, the proposal reflected the result of the budget consultation event, where the majority of respondents had felt that a cap less than inflation be used to increase fees and charges for 2023/24.

Two service areas had had income budgets reduced to reflect updated Business plans, presented to Committee earlier in the year, these related to the Crematorium and Markets. Members were also advised that car parking permit demand had also fallen and as such it was proposed to reduce the income budget to reflect this as part of the budget setting process for 23/24, the report before Members reflected an expected pressure on income in this area.

No new fees were being proposed, but the usual one-day free parking requests usually dealt with on Annual basis had been included with the report requesting not only approval for the current year but for each year up to 2025, covering the period of the current Parking Strategy, with a further review of this arrangement to be included in the next Parking Strategy, due in 2025.

Debate ensued and Members sought indication, given that Gainsborough's Christmas Event was held over three days, who had determined the date on which it should be held, and the process by which this would be determined each year up and until 2025.

Members were advised this had been determined with the event organisers and the free parking would be on the Saturday this year. Given the point raised regarding the process for future years, the Chief Executive indicated a process would be required. With Members debating whether there was a need for a formal process for future years and if so what that should look like. Agreement was reached a formal process would be required, and the Chief Executive made a suggestion for Members to consider.

As a result, a Member proposed the following additional recommendation be added, "Delegated Authority be granted to the Chief Executive to determine the date on which free parking is held each year, in consultation with Event Organisers and the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee"

During the course of further debate, it was identified that there was a discrepancy with the date stated with the report in relation to the Gainsborough Event in 2022, having earlier heard, free parking would be Saturday. In the absence of absolute clarity, it was suggested

the earlier proposal be further slightly amended to read as follows, “Delegated Authority be granted to the Chief Executive to determine and vary the date on which free parking is held each year, in consultation with Event Organisers and the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee.” This was duly seconded and on being put to the vote was carried.

Referencing the recommendation made by the Prosperous Communities Committee, which related to extending free parking in Gainsborough to two hours to establish parity across the District with Market Rasen, the Chairman of that Committee advised the meeting, that he would be unable to support the recommendation, outlining his reasoning. At the time of making the recommendation, there had been no evidence provided as to how it would support either businesses or car-park users in Gainsborough, nor was the financial impact of the proposal available to the Committee. Members were now aware extending free parking would result in a loss of income of £27,000 with additional costs for updating parking machines and infrastructure. The suggestion of achieving parity was questioned given the offer at the two towns was very different and in effect would have to be subsidised by residents across the entire district. The Council had also only just recently adopted its revised Car Parking Strategy.

Opposing Members outlined their reasoning as to why the Committee should support the recommendation acknowledging the financial impact, but also indicating this was not insurmountable in their view. Again, as it had been at the Prosperous Communities Committee it was suggested that there needed to be greater focus on the cost implications for the wider economic community, and recognition that the Cost of Living Crisis did not just impact households but was impacting the Council’s wider stakeholders. Consideration needed to be given to the impact of losing return visitors due to parking charges and how this reduced spend in the town impacted local businesses’ revenues regardless of their nature. There were concerns that the town centre was declining at an alarming rate and that the LUF investment would be too late if action was not taken. The suggestion that the offer between the two settlements was also disputed.

Returning to the cost of the proposal a Member indicated he had posed a number of questions to Officers outside of the meeting, to ascertain how this additional funding may be financed. Accepting there had been little time between the two Policy Committees for Officers to undertake work, but in light of this, proposed that recommendation four be deferred to allow Officers to give further consideration to financing options. Members were reminded they would need to raise the options and the Officers were charged with costing these.

The need for parity was supported by some Members however the timing was questioned, Members had already approved a Parking Strategy, which had been evidence based, had assessed various aspects such as short stay and long stay parking, geographical assessments and comparisons with similar locations and offers. It was even suggested if parity was being sought the free period should be one hour across both settlements.

Further debate ensued, Opposing Members suggested the schedule of charges did not reflect local people’s shopping habits, that additional hour allowed people to not only shop but to make those spontaneous spends a little more time allowed for, such as stopping for coffee. Human nature was not being reflected or recognised and this was impacting on local businesses. Local nearby towns were offering free parking and people would naturally migrate to those areas due to the ease of parking. It was suggested action needed to be

taken soon to save the town centre, as opposed to being rolled over into future reviews. This was the only charge across the District where people were charged differently dependent on where they lived. Some suggested there would be little value in the cinema opening if the town centre had closed down around it. It was disputed that business closures were as a result of car parking charges.

Having quoted a number of empty shops in the town centre, Members were challenged as to the accuracy of their statements, given the premise audit which had been undertaken in August 2022 and shared with Members.

The proposal to defer recommendation 4 was seconded, but a Member of the Committee, raised a Point of Order, seeking advice as to whether such an action was constitutionally acceptable.

Whilst advice was being sought, there was further lengthy debate on people's shopping habits and concerns again voiced by several Members that these were not being considered to a greater enough degree. The Chairman reminded the Committee, that whilst they were all valid points being raised, they were not charged with Policy setting, all these points were relevant to that matter, and not the recommendation under discussion.

During the course of the debate there had been concerns raised in reference to fixed penalty notices, the numbers issued and the Council's general approach to both on and off-street parking. Accepting the position in the report regarding charges, Members were still of the view there needed to be a wider debate and requested whether a report could be brought forward on this matter. A Member indicated that he had requested a break down of the type of infringements enforced, in assurance that a pragmatic approach was being adopted.

The Democratic Officer addressed the Point of Order, made earlier in the meeting and indicated she was content the request was constitutionally acceptable and should be treated like any other amendment. On request it was clarified if the amendment was carried at this stage, it would be voted on again at the conclusion of the debate, and if supported a further paper would be submitted to the next Committee in line with the amendment. If the amendment was lost, recommendation 4, as printed stood, and Members would need to vote on that at the end of the meeting either supporting or rejecting it.

Having proposed and seconded on being put to the vote the proposal to defer recommendation 4, for the reasons outlined in the debate, was not carried.

Having debated the matter at length, and in moving to the recommendations, a Member made a request for a recorded vote and this was duly seconded.

The Democratic Officer sought and received clarification that the Members required a recorded vote for all six recommendations, given they were to be taken individually.

Having been proposed and seconded recommendation one was put to the vote, with votes cast in the following manner: -

For:- Councillors Bierley, Devine, Fleetwood, McNeill, Summers, Waller and Welburn (7)

Against:- Councillors Boles, Bunney, Howitt-Cowan, Rollings Snee and Young (6)

With a total of 7 votes in favour and 6 votes against recommendation one was carried

Having been proposed and seconded recommendation two was put to the vote, with votes cast in the following manner: -

For:- Councillors Bierley, Boles, Bunney, Devine, Howitt-Cowan, Fleetwood, McNeill, Rollings, Snee, Summers, Waller, Welburn and Young (13)

Against:- None (0)

With a total of 13 votes in favour and 0 votes against recommendation two was carried.

Having been proposed and seconded recommendation three was put to the vote, with votes cast in the following manner: -

For:- Councillors Bierley, Boles, Bunney, Devine, Howitt-Cowan, Fleetwood, McNeill, Rollings, Snee, Summers, Waller, Welburn and Young (13)

Against:- None (0)

With a total of 13 votes in favour and 0 votes against recommendation three was carried.

Having been proposed and seconded recommendation four was put to the vote, with votes cast in the following manner: -

For:- Councillors Boles, Bunney, Howitt-Cowan, Rollings Snee and Young (6)

Against:- Councillors Bierley, Devine, Fleetwood, McNeill, Summers, Waller and Welburn (7)

With a total of 6 votes in favour and 7 votes against recommendation four was **NOT** carried

Having been proposed and seconded recommendation five was put to the vote, with votes cast in the following manner: -

For:- Councillors Bierley, Boles, Bunney, Devine, Howitt-Cowan, Fleetwood, McNeill, Rollings, Snee, Summers, Waller, Welburn and Young (13)

Against:- None (0)

With a total of 13 votes in favour and 0 votes against recommendation five was carried.

Having been proposed and seconded recommendation six, added earlier in the debate, was put to the vote, with votes cast in the following manner: -

For:- Councillors Bierley, Boles, Bunney, Devine, Howitt-Cowan, Fleetwood, McNeill, Rollings, Snee, Summers, Waller, Welburn and Young (13)

Against:- None (0)

With a total of 13 votes in favour and 0 votes against recommendation six was carried.

In light of the above votes it was **RESOLVED** that:-

- (a) the proposed Fees and Charges at Appendix A, as well as those recommended by Prosperous Communities Committee detailed at Appendices B and C* (commercially sensitive*) be **RECOMMENDED** to Council for approval;
- (b) the recommendation from the Prosperous Communities Committee be **ACCEPTED** and as such, free car parking on 18/11/2022 (Gainsborough) and 10/12/2022 (Market Rasen) when Christmas Events are to be held (Section 5.1) be approved;
- (c) the recommendation from the Prosperous Communities Committee be **ACCEPTED** and as such, the request for one day of free parking in Gainsborough and Market Rasen when Christmas Events are to be held, for the years 2023, 2024 and 2025 (Section 5.1) be approved, with a further review to be included in the next Parking Strategy, due in 2025.
- (d) having reviewed the additional financial and legal implications, the recommendation from the Prosperous Communities Committee that the current free parking period in Gainsborough be extended to 2 hours in line with Market Rasen to establish parity across the District be **REJECTED**
- (e) having reviewed the additional legal implications, the recommendation from the Prosperous Communities Committee that car parking fixed penalty notices (FPNs) be reduced by 50% across all current charges, be **REJECTED**, as all such charges were set by Central Government through statute, and were therefore not within the legal powers of West Lindsey District Council to alter; and
- (f) Delegated Authority be granted to the Chief Executive to determine and vary the date on which free parking is held each year up until 2025, in consultation with Event Organisers and the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee

44 OUTCOME OF THE SEPTEMBER 2022 COST OF LIVING SUMMIT

Members gave consideration to a report which presented the findings from the multi-agency Cost of Living Summit which had been hosted by West Lindsey District Council on 26 September 2022.

In presenting the report the Chairman indicated she was aware some Members would feel disappointed at the lack of financial commitment within the report, but set out her reasoning as to why she considered this the best approach, given the significant unknowns the Council was facing and an ever-changing situation. The Authority's current sound financial position was as a result of prudent management over the last 12 years. Reserves once spent could not be replaced easily and as such it was important that any actions taken were sustainable and addressed real need. The impact of numerous financial support packages offered by Central Government, many of which were administered locally, was unknown as yet and would have impact on livelihoods. Gas and petrol prices had started to fall and there was a concern, given the risks identified in the report any commitments now would prevent the Council from assisting further if the situation continued to persist. There was also concern that other Council priorities which had been supported in the Chamber, would not be delivered if resources were diverted without due consideration.

Reference was made to the already existing funding gap and the unknowns the revised Government settlement presented, as such the Chairman was of the view that it would be more prudent to wait for the outcome of this settlement. The Council's core business needed to be secure in the first instance. It was not being suggested that the Council should not do anything, with the Chairman outlining numerous examples, but that there was a need to ensure the interventions had a longer lasting impact. It was also highlighted how the Council currently supported Voluntary and Community Groups and how offering greater support to such organisations could have the potential to provide community led support which matched need identified locally.

The Leader of the Council showed his support for the Chairman's position echoing her comments around increased partnership working and support, ensuring interventions had a real impact and the unprecedented levels and sources of uncertainties the Council and the Country faced at the current time, in respect of its finances, moving the recommendations in the report.

Debate ensued and Members from across the Chamber commented on the success of the Summit. Engagement from partners had been excellent and the knowledge gained invaluable. Members also spoke of the amount of information they had learned and the evening had made them more informed in terms of the support that currently existed across the District.

That being said, some Members, including Opposition Members, expressed disappointment, given the success of the Summit and the ideas generated, that the report lacked indication of any direct actions to be undertaken, and as such considered the need for urgent delivery had been overlooked. It was not accepted that all potential actions would incur a cost, and as such a more detailed action plan had been anticipated. The cost of consultants to-date was requested.

It was suggested by Opposition Members, that the Authority's offer was lacking, in comparison to other East Midland authorities, the pace of delivery was also challenged, with people already facing extremely difficult circumstances and wanting to see things put in place. It was accepted that any support needed to be appropriate and proportionate but moreover it needed to be quickly, not in a year's time.

This stance was shared by some Members, and whilst it was accepted that partnership

working was the way forward, that financial handouts were not the best solution and that a small amount of funding could have a huge impact to “grass roots” organisations, it was the pace of delivery that caused concern, with Members seeking to understand when such proposals would come forward given the word “future meeting” in the recommendation.

Responding to previous comments, it was disputed all Councils were taking immediate action but the Chairman indicated that Members should share any learning they have from what other Authorities were implementing so all options could be considered. Committee Members spoke of local organisations in the District creating warm spaces but already experiencing financial difficulty and of an initiative being run by a Town Council creating a fuel bank, suggesting supporting local parishes who may be more aware of residents’ direct needs at a local level, may be more appropriate and for consideration in any future action plan.

Referring to the proposal to promote the ‘Connect to Support Lincolnshire’ concern was raised that such websites were not often kept as up-to-date as they could be and this led to frustration. The Chief Executive, by way of reassurance, outlined how the Authority was working closely with Districts from across the county to co-ordinate the information of the website. Areas had been allocated to specific working groups; one looking at food banks; one looking at spaces; one at financial help and another at communications. It was a collaborative approach between the third sector and Districts and was supported by the Integrated Care Board, established as part of a new structure.

The Chief Executive took the opportunity to raise the risks detailed within the report and asked Members to consider these in any decision they made.

Many Members were supportive of the rationale outlined at the outset, supported the ethos to support partners, and community organisations, as opposed to direct financial support to residents but continued to share concerns around timescales. Members saw no reasoning as to why a plan could not be in place, regardless of the finances, and were of the view this could be revisited once the true settlement was known.

It was suggested it should be feasible for Officers to bring back a plan that set out measures, which wouldn’t necessarily have additional resource implications or only marginal resource implications, alongside additional measures which may have spending implications, which could be authorised subsequently by a further report when the spending position was known better.

Given the comments made by Members, the Chairman requested assistance with re-wording recommendation 2 to reflect the sentiment of the Committee, with the following suggested and subsequently proposed, seconded and accepted: -

In response to the Motion resolved by Council on 4 July 2022; Officers be requested to scope additional financial support measures for “socially vulnerable households”. Initial proposals to be brought to the December meeting, with future costings to be determined at a later date, by report to Committee.

On that basis it was **RESOLVED** unanimously that: -

- (a) the findings and emerging themes arising from the Cost of Living Crisis Summit be noted;
- (b) in response to the motion resolved by Council on 4 July 2022; Officers scope additional financial support measures for “socially vulnerable households” and initial proposals be brought forward to the December meeting, with future costings to be determined at a later date, by report to Committee.
- (c) the promotion and use of the ‘Connect to Support Lincolnshire’ website (<https://lincolnshire.connecttosupport.org/>) on the Council’s own website, as a central source of online help and advice; and as a community directory relating to the cost of living for all Lincolnshire residents, be approved.

45 COMMITTEE WORK PLAN

The Chairman took the opportunity to remind Members that suggestions for inclusion could be made and would be considered, referencing the suggestion made in earlier discussions and encouraging that Member to contact Officers.

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

The meeting concluded at 8.51 pm.

Chairman