

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee held in the Council Chamber - The Guildhall, Marshall's Yard, Gainsborough, DN21 2NA on 19 December 2023 commencing at 6.30 pm.

Present: Councillor Trevor Young (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Lesley Rollings (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Owen Bierley
Councillor Matthew Boles
Councillor Stephen Bunney
Councillor Ian Fleetwood
Councillor Tom Smith
Councillor Mrs Mandy Snee
Councillor Paul Swift

Also Present: Councillor Karen Carless
Councillor Christopher Darcel

In Attendance:
Ian Knowles Chief Executive
Emma Foy Director of Corporate Services and Section 151
Lisa Langdon Monitoring Officer
Martha Rees Legal Advisor
Rachael Hughes Head of Policy and Strategy
Katie Storr Democratic Services & Elections Team Manager
Alison McCulloch Revenues Manager
Ady Selby Director - Operational & Commercial Services
Darren Mellors Performance & Programme Manager
Daniel Reason Senior Enabling Technology Officer
Ele Snow Senior Democratic and Civic Officer

Apologies: Councillor Frazer Brown
Councillor Roger Patterson
Councillor Adam Duguid

Membership: Councillor Adam Duguid was appointed to sit as substitute for Councillor Frazer Brown

67 WELCOME AND STATEMENT FROM CHAIRMAN

The Chairman welcomed all present, and those watching online, and confirmed the usual housekeeping arrangements.

Before moving onto the first item of business, Chairman proposed a variation to the agenda in order for agenda item 8 iii, Scampton Legal Position Update, to be heard prior to the other

reports. This would then be followed by the remaining exempt reports, agenda items 8 i and 8ii.

He highlighted that this would mean the agenda order would be as follows:

Items one to four inclusive, followed by the exclusion of the public and press to consider the reports on the Scampton Legal Position Update, Council Tax Write Offs and Contact Centre Technology. On opening to the public and press, the Committee would then consider items five and six as detailed on the published agenda.

Having been seconded and on taking the vote it was

RESOLVED that the agenda be varied as detailed.

68 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PERIOD

There was no public participation.

69 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING/S

The Chairman explained there were two sets of minutes, one for approving and one for noting.

Having been moved and seconded it was

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee held on 9 November 2023 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative committee, held on 23 November 2023, were **NOTED**.

70 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor T. Smith declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to agenda items 6a and 6b, relating to Council Tax arrangements, as a sitting Member of Lincolnshire County Council, as the County Council would financially benefit from the arrangements.

Councillors S. Bunney, M. Boles, I. Fleetwood and T. Young made the same declaration as County Councillors.

71 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 involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined

in paragraphs 1,3 and 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

Note: The meeting entered closed session at 6.36pm

72 SCAMPTON: LEGAL POSITION UPDATE

The Committee gave consideration to a report regarding the Scampton Legal Position Update. Members heard from the Chief Executive, Section 151 Officer, Monitoring Officer and Head of Policy and Strategy regarding planning matters. Details of how the approach had been developed were provided, alongside a summary of the work to date, costs to date, estimates for the way forward as well as the clear legal advice received by the Council.

Members of the Committee thanked Officers for their work and the clarity of the report being presented. A Member of the Committee who had been significantly involved in previous work regarding the site provided further background information for those Committee Members who had not been in office at that time. The recommendations, as written in the report, were proposed.

Members of the Committee discussed at length the history of decision making, from national and local perspectives. Officers present clarified information regarding access to information and actions undertaken in relation to the site. The recommendations, having been proposed, were duly seconded, with an additional proposal for a recorded vote.

A Member of the Committee echoed thanks to Officers involved, and for the clarification of decisions taken previously. It was proposed that the wording within the first recommendation be changed from 'Endorse the decisions...' to 'Note the decisions...'. Advice was sought from the Monitoring Officer in relation to this proposal. Following further discussion regarding the history of decision making, the proposal to amend the wording from 'endorse' to 'note' was seconded, as was the proposal for a recorded vote on the final decision.

There was considerable discussion regarding the wider implications of the report. At the conclusion of the debate, the Chairman confirmed the proposal on the table regarding the amendment to the first written recommendation, and took the vote. With a majority vote it was

RESOLVED that the wording of the first recommendation be amended to read:

NOTE the decision and actions of the Chief Executive and officers in undertaking legal proceedings to challenge the anticipated decision by the Home Office to deliver an Asylum Accommodation Centre at RAF Scampton;

Note: Councillor T. Smith requested for his vote AGAINST the above amendment to be recorded.

With the amendment having been carried, the Chairman enquired of the proposer and seconder of the written recommendations whether they remained content. This was confirmed, as was the requirement for a recorded vote.

On being put to the vote, votes were cast in the following manner:

For: Councillors Bierley, Boles, Bunney, Fleetwood, Rollings, Smith, M. Snee, Swift and Young (9)

Against: Nil (0)

Abstentions: Nil (0)

With a unanimous result of 9 in favour, it was

RESOLVED that the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee:

- a) NOTE the decision and actions of the Chief Executive and officers in undertaking legal proceedings to challenge the anticipated decision by the Home Office to deliver an Asylum Accommodation Centre at RAF Scampton;
- b) Note the decision of the High Court in respect of Clarke-Holland, West Lindsey District Council & Braintree District Council v Secretary of State for the Home Department, issued on 6 December 2023, including the leave given to appeal that decision; and
- c) Authorise the Monitoring Officer to undertake such further legal action as would, in their opinion and in consultation with the Leader [and the leader of the opposition group] of the Council, be in the interests of the Council to pursue.

Note: Councillor L. Rollings left the room at 7.17pm, for the remainder of the meeting.
Councillor P. Swift left the room at 7.17pm and returned at 7.19pm.

73 COUNCIL DEBT WRITE OFFS 2023/24

The Committee heard from the Revenues Manager, regarding irrecoverable debts and seeking permission from the Committee for those debts to be written off.

Members were appreciative of the detail within the report and sought clarification on whether debts could be re-written, for example should a person move back into the district. This was confirmed to be the case.

Members praised the Revenues Manager and her team for their efforts in minimising the level of write-offs as far as possible, and, having been moved, seconded and voted upon it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the following write-offs be approved:

- a) arrears of Council Tax to the value of £24,074.68;
- b) arrears of Housing Benefit Overpayments to the value of £31,832.07;

- c) arrears of National Non-Domestic rates to the value of £253,632.52.

74 CONTACT CENTRE TECHNOLOGY

The Committee gave consideration to a report presented by the Director of Commercial and Operational Services, recommending the procurement of Digital Contact Centre technology, in order for customers to choose how they connect with the Council, and for Officer time to be more efficiently used, along with other benefits.

Members of the Committee were supportive of the proposals, with widespread recognition of the need to improve customer contact options as well as improve the customer experience. In response to an enquiry regarding contingency planning, for example if the digital service failed for any reason, it was explained that existing business continuity planning recognised such risks, with mitigations in place already.

With further comments of support, the recommendations within the paper were duly moved, seconded and the Chairman took the vote. It was unanimously

RESOLVED that:

- a) the undertaking of procurement of appropriate technology to create a Digital Contact Centre in the council, within the financial envelope detailed within the report considered by the Corporate Policy & Resources Committee, be approved; and
- b) the £22.3k carry forward of 2023/24 savings into 2024/25 to offset future costs be approved; and
- c) the use of General Fund Balances in 2024/25 to the value of £26.5k to fund the capital element of the Contact Centre be approved.

Note: The Chairman called for a short 'comfort break' adjournment at 7.37pm. The meeting reconvened at 7.39pm

75 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE

Note: The meeting entered open session at 7.39pm

With no comments or questions, the Matters Arising Schedule, setting out the position of previously agreed actions as at 11 December 2023, was **NOTED**.

76 LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2024/25

The Committee heard from the Revenues Manager who explained that the Committee were being requested to make a recommendation to Full Council regarding the proposed Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2024/25. It was explained that Council Tax Benefit had

been a national scheme providing means-tested financial help for low-income households to pay their Council Tax liability. This was abolished on 31 March 2013 by the Local Government Finance Act 2012 which placed a legal requirement on every billing authority to adopt a Localised Council Tax Support (LCTS) scheme.

Since the inception of the LCTS scheme on 1 April 2013 relatively minor changes had been made which had enabled claimants to receive a similar level of support each year and enabled the council to maintain an annual council tax collection rate of around 98%.

In 2020, 2021 and 2022, following the Covid-19 pandemic, the Government awarded a grant to all local authorities for a payment to be paid to all working aged council tax support claimants. This was paid directly to council tax accounts and it also permitted the use of any surplus to support economically vulnerable people and households.

Following the allocation of these awards, it was also possible to introduce discretionary hardship funds for all council taxpayers to apply for if they continued to experience financial difficulties caused by the pandemic. It was highlighted that, to date, the Council had assisted 2,102 families, already in receipt of council tax support with an award of up to £50 off their council tax account. A further 74 council taxpayers had been assisted by the award of a council tax discretionary hardship payment in respect of their 2023/24 council tax liability.

Members heard that a significant change to the LCTS scheme for 2024/25 was likely to have a negative impact on the collection rate and reduce the yield over the year. Full Council must approve and adopt the finalised LCTS scheme by 31 January 2024 at the latest.

The Committee thanked the Revenues Manager for her report and clear options. A Member of the Committee commented on the cost of living crisis, but recognised the position as detailed in the report. In response to a question regarding the consultation responses, it was agreed for the Officer to provide this information where possible.

Having been moved, seconded and voted upon, it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the Corporate Policy & Resources Committee **RECOMMEND** to Full Council, the adoption of Option 1 of the report for the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for West Lindsey District Council for 2024/25. That being:

“to make no changes to the current council tax support scheme apart from to apply any new legislative requirements and the uprating of the non-dependent charges, applicable amounts, and household allowances and deductions, used in the calculation of the reduction in accordance with the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) annual ‘up-ratings’.

To also apply any additional changes to government welfare benefit regulations during the year which are intended to increase the income of benefit recipients to avoid unintended consequences to customers.”

77 COUNCIL TAX EMPTY HOMES PREMIUMS 2024/25

The Committee gave consideration to a report presented by the Revenues Manager,

regarding options to maximise the increased premiums payable for long term empty properties. It was explained that the report outlined the current arrangements for the charging of Council Tax on unoccupied and substantially unfurnished property, together with new powers to increase this charge under the Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018. Members heard details of the reasoning behind a possible change to the current charges and it was highlighted that approval was being sought to allow an increase to the premium charges of properties that have been empty for over five years. The current arrangements for the charging of Council Tax on furnished second homes were also outlined, and approval was sought to allow for a reduction of the 10% discount (ie a 90% council tax charge on furnished second homes) to no discount being awarded (ie a 100% charge).

Members were supportive of the proposals. In response to a question regarding the timescales, it was appreciated that 12 months would be reasonable for a house to be brought back into use. There was discussion regarding different approaches to rental properties where the landlord may have a break between tenants, or the definition of a second home as opposed to an empty property. It was explained that specific examples could be looked into outside of the meeting. Additionally, the majority of rental properties were let as unfurnished.

Having been moved, seconded and voted upon, it was unanimously

RESOLVED that:

- a) the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee **RECOMMEND** to Full Council the adoption of Option 1 of the report to increase both the second home charges from 90% to 100% and long term unoccupied and substantially unfurnished property charges from 100% premium for those empty between 5 and 10 years to 200% premium i.e. charge 300% council tax and for those empty over 10 years to 300% premium i.e. charge 400% council tax; and
- b) the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee **RECOMMEND** to Full Council an additional local exception and discount for any new owners of properties subject to a council tax premium providing evidence is provided of a firm commitment to bring the properties back into use within 12 months. This reduction would mean they would not be liable to pay council tax on the empty property for a maximum period of 12 months but, should the property become occupied within 12 months the new resident would become liable in accordance with council tax legislation. In the event that it is not brought back into use within this time period the appropriate premium charge will be restored and become due and payable.

These changes to be effective from 1 April 2024.

78 STREET NAMING AND NUMBERING POLICY

The Committee gave consideration to a report presented by the Corporate Systems Development Manager regarding the Street Naming and Numbering Procedure, detailing

proposed changes to the procedure and seeking agreement for a further policy review. It was explained that all District Councils had a statutory responsibility for the naming of streets and postal addressing of properties within their authority boundaries. The legislation relating to street naming and numbering was contained within The Towns Improvement Clauses Act 1847, Public Health Act 1907, The Local Government Act 1985 and subsequent amendments. As part of the Levelling up and Regeneration Act, there was an intention by the Government to update the national policy for street naming and numbering to ensure a standard approach across England. This law had not yet been enacted; however, it was thought this will happen sometime in 2024.

The proposed procedure amendments were highlighted for the Committee. Members enquired as to why there was a stipulation of waiting 20 years prior to naming a street after a named individual. This did not exist previously and Members questioned whether it was relevant. The reasoning behind the stipulation was provided, being that it was a national guideline, however it was noted that it could be managed at a local level. It was subsequently proposed that the 20 year stipulation be removed from the procedure. This proposal was duly seconded.

There was discussion regarding specific scenarios in different parishes, with Officers agreeing to seek further details and respond to Councillors after the meeting.

With discussions drawing to a conclusion, the Chairman called the vote regarding the amendment on the table. It was

RESOLVED that the stipulation to wait 20 years prior to naming a street after a deceased individual be removed.

With the recommendations as written in the report having been proposed and seconded, the Chairman called the vote and it was

RESOLVED that:

- a) the changes to the procedure guide for Street Naming and Numbering be noted; and
- b) a further update to the procedure guide be undertaken in Quarter 4 2023/2024 as part of a Street Naming and Numbering Policy review to ensure that West Lindsey processes align to proposed changes in the Levelling up and Regeneration Act which when enacted will standardise the process for Street Naming and Numbering across England; and
- c) the review in Quarter 4 2023/2024 be in consultation with relevant key stakeholders and include a review of all the content, and improvements to accessibility of the information.

79 COMMITTEE WORK PLAN

With no comments or questions, the Committee Work Plan was **DULY NOTED**.

Corporate Policy and Resources Committee- 19 December 2023
Subject to Call-in. Call-in will expire at 5pm on

The Chairman expressed his thanks to all involved in the meeting, and wished all present a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

The meeting concluded at 8.12 pm.

Chairman