

## **WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL**

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Prosperous Communities Committee held in the Council Chamber - The Guildhall, Marshall's Yard, Gainsborough, DN21 2NA on 2 May 2017 commencing at 6.30 pm.

**Present:** Councillor Mrs Sheila Bibb (Chairman)  
Councillor Mrs Gillian Bardsley (Vice-Chairman) and  
Councillor Steve England (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Owen Bierley  
Councillor Michael Devine  
Councillor Paul Howitt-Cowan  
Councillor Mrs Jessie Milne  
Councillor Thomas Smith

**In Attendance:**  
Manjeet Gill Chief Executive  
Karen Whitfield Leisure and Cultural Services Team Manager  
Michelle Howard Home Choices Team Manager  
Katie Coughlan Governance and Civic Officer

**Apologies:** Councillor Malcolm Parish  
Councillor Mrs Diana Rodgers  
Councillor Mrs Lesley Rollings  
Councillor Trevor Young

**Membership:** No substitutes appointed.

### **99 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

### **100 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

(a) Meeting of the Prosperous Communities Committee – 21 March 2017

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Meeting of the Prosperous Communities Committee held on 21 March 2017 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

### **101 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE**

Members gave consideration to the Matters Arising Schedule which set out the current position of all previously agreed actions as at Monday 21 April 2017.

In the absence of the Chief Operating Officer, the Chief Executive sought to update Committee in respect of the green action entitled "Contact County Commissioner", which related to the extension to the Wolds AONB.

Members were advised that the Joint Committee of Greater Lincolnshire Leaders had met and discussed this matter early in the New Year. All authorities had been supportive of the extension proposal and thus the matter would now be going through the necessary formal processes.

Regarding the black action entitled "CIL training, parish council attendance" whilst Members welcomed the fact that a training session would now be held, some Members were of the view that this should be very much of a workshop style, and gave reasons. CIL offered a new potential source of income to local councils. Local council's finances continued to be pressured as tasks and services devolved. Members were of a view that CIL was a central element of the Localism agenda and Central Government had consistently expressed a view that the beneficiaries of monies generated through CIL should be those communities where development had taken place.

Members were of the view that the District Council had a proven record of adopting the spirit of localism, having offered communities invaluable help through Neighbourhood Planning Support and a raft of community grants scheme, and therefore the District Council's approach to CIL should reflect this. It was important local councils expectations were understood and taken into consideration so that the best outcome for all residents could be achieved, hence the suggestion of a workshop style session being the preference. There was concern that the suggested approach would not deliver such.

The Chief Executive requested that the CIL training item remain on the schedule, as amber status until such time as the training had a confirmed date. The Lead Officer would be made aware of Members' comments.

The Chief Executive also sought to update Members on the action entitled "Market Rasen Car Parking Consultation". The Chief Executive had been working with the Chairman regarding the methodology for engaging stakeholders. The Lead Officer for this work was now the Commercial and Economic Growth Director and she had been requested to ensure the Committee had sight of the project plans which related to Parking as a whole, for oversight and monitoring purposes. This would be the subject of a report in the future.

Councillor Smith, as Local Ward Member, indicated that he had been made aware that the parking meters in Market Rasen had been removed over the weekend and sought indication as to why and by whom. Officers undertook to feedback outside of the meeting.

**RESOLVED** that progress on the Matters Arising Schedule, as set out in the report, together with the verbal updates detailed above, be received and noted.

## **102 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

### **103 PROGRESS AND DELIVERY - PERIOD 4**

The report was introduced by the Chief Executive who noted that it reflected the performance of the Council over the 2016/17 municipal year (April 16 – March 17). In opening, the Chief Executive indicated that Council was now on the cusp of a major delivery phase in a number of complex areas and it was important that Committee had an oversight of these major projects and focussed on risk areas. The Chief Executive further advised that an area which closely needed to be monitored was that of capacity. Concerns were being raised by both Members and Officers yet on the other hand, through enthusiasm, new projects and initiatives were regularly being suggested. A broader conversation needed to be had following annual council to ensure that priorities were agreed and that these were the focus.

The report summary was structured to highlight those areas that were performing above expectations, those areas where there was a risk to either performance or delivery and those areas where further work was required for next year's report.

Areas described as performing well included: Economic Development with good progress made with the Gainsborough Growth Investment Plan, Hemswell Cliff, Business Growth and Employment and Skills; Development Management; the Benefits Services, despite extensive changes to legislation; Land Charges; and Contract management.

Those areas described as risks included: Enforcement; Homelessness and Corporate Governance.

Further information was given on each of the above.

Data relating to Complaints, Comments and Compliments was being reconsidered to present a more sophisticated way of monitoring and the Chief Executive drew Members' attention to the information contained in Section 4.3 of the report and indicated that she intended to make a presentation to the Committee that evening regarding this area.

The Home Options Team Manager was also present to further expand on the challenges currently facing the homelessness service and the work which needed to be undertaken over the coming months.

The Chief Executive then addressed the Committee, by way of presentation, regarding her vision for consistent quality customer services explaining why this should be a priority for the Council, the present situation and solutions.

Complaints had become a priority for the Chief Executive following escalation by Members, escalation was encouraged and was a positive action. Complaints were a way to learn for the future, and offered an opportunity to take actions to prevent similar issues in the future. The Chief Executive had spent time reviewing 3 months' worth of Planning and Planning Enforcement complaints analysing the issues in detail and any learning to be taken from them.

Fundamentally the best way to resolve complaints was by making use of good governance systems. Historically cases had been reviewed on a case by case basis rather than a holistic overview of the common issues and learning. There was an absence of an overall

strategy. This had been made more difficult by the often ad hoc approach to reporting and trying to resolve complaints, examples were given. It was important that Members made use of the formal complaints process, this would enable all information to be logged and treated in the same way, ensuring the “overall picture” was available. It was important the Council started to view complaints differently and should encourage more complaints. Complaints should be used to build positive relationships with communities and result in positive actions. Responses needed to be open and transparent, demonstrate that the Council had listened and where required, learned from complaints and made changes to the process. Where the Council could not take the action requested, again it was important that the response was open and transparent and offered reasoning as to why action could not be taken and managed expectations. Committee focus should not be on reducing complaints, this was viewed as an adverse target. The approach being suggested may see complaints increase but this was important for learning.

The Chief Executive also indicated that cultural issues may be present and thus escalation had been the correct action. Through her detailed analysis, issues with tone and empathy had been evident. Officers needed to “put themselves” in the customers shoes.

The Chief Executive outlined the work she had undertaken to date with Group Leaders and Committee Chairs and some of the immediate changes that needed to be made. The Customer Services and complaints management needed to be strengthened immediately. The current complaints process was under review, its staged approach built in significant delay during which time the customers often became frustrated, more parties got involved and the situation became more complex. Independent review did not happen until stage 3 and this needed to change. Options from streamlining this were being explored and Members would be provided with more detail at a future meeting. All complaints needed to be logged through the complaints system, Members were encouraged to make greater use of this as opposed to making direct approaches to relevant Service Leads or Directors. Every service was being encouraged to receive feedback on all transactions to improve learning.

The Chief Executive set out a number of actions she considered needed to be undertaken and sought Members endorsement to the suggestions including: -

- \* The need for all Councillors, businesses and parishes to be advised of the compliments and complaints procedure.
- \* All service requests and complaints received to be provided with a customer satisfaction and feedback request.
- \* Each Team Manager and the Chief Operating Officer would be requested to make a report on: -
  - All requests – customer feedback plus arising actions
  - All complaints – plus actions
  - All compliments and thanks – plus actions
  - Overall summary of SMART actions agreed in the period.
- \* Prosperous Communities Committee would receive a report at each meeting comprising an overall Chief Executive view, which each of the Services’ report on

complaints in their areas.

- \* The need to review the complaints process, a further report would be submitted to the next meeting, outlining the current process and the proposed revision for agreement by Members.
- \* A need to address empathy, tone and culture using the Dr Batra message of understanding causes, rather than treating the symptoms.
- \* A need for everyone receiving complaints to log them using the formal governance process, including Elected Members, as all information needed to be captured in one place. If the process didn't work Members needed to escalate this direct with the Chief Executive. Facts and Figures would be needed as evidence to address culture.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Executive for her presentation. A Member whilst accepting the approach the Chief Executive had outlined, did express concern that as an elected Member, when you receive a complaint from the public that has remained unresolved for a period of time, their wish and desire was to rectify this by whatever means possible as soon as possible. The Member outlined his experiences. Furthermore whilst accepting all the work that had been undertaken in planning to meet Government targets and realise the adoption of the Local Plan, this had been at the cost of customer service to residents. Councillors shared the Chief Executive's concerns regarding culture again citing examples and were of the view that this needed addressing urgently.

In response the Chief Executive reaffirmed the reasons why the governance process needed to be used. The Council needed to understand what elements of the process worked and which did not and this could only be achieved if all issues were documented through a single process. This, in turn, would generate evidence which would be used to enforce and inform changes. What was clear was that the current approach was not working and it was important this changed and Members and Officers did not take on adversarial roles.

Other Members cited examples where the Council could have taken steps to better inform the public and put them at the forefront. It was suggested that complaints should be issued with a trackable number. The Challenge and Improvement Committee were monitoring customer services closely. Staff training was considered vitally important. On the whole, Members welcomed the work being undertaken and were supportive of the approach

The Chief Executive responded again outlining the benefits recording all data on the system would achieve, the information which would be gained from this and how it could be used to drive service improvement, staff training and ultimately improved customer care.

Members commented on the usefulness of the recently launched complaints reporting form for Members, their experience to-date had been positive. Members were accepting of the need to use the system and gain the evidence. Some were of the view that in the event of continued failings Members should be able to hold Services Managers to account through the Committee process.

The Chairman welcomed the report and the work being undertaken and acknowledged the

need to address cultural habits of both Members and Officers.

The Home Options Team Manager was then invited to address the Committee regarding significant changes within the Homelessness service and potential risks to the service this posed.

The Homeless Reduction Bill which received Royal Assent earlier in the week, would come into force between January and April 2018 and would see a major overhaul to legislation and the way in which the service needed to be delivered. This would affect all policies and operating procedures and, with a change in emphasis, and shift in focus, a need for resources to be restructured.

The Act fundamentally changed the focus to Homelessness prevention, as opposed to its current legal duties to quite a limited number of cohorts. It would place a legal duty for the Council to help and prevent anybody from becoming homeless. This was the current culture within the Team at West Lindsey and was feasible given the case numbers, and was often not the case for some of the larger city councils due to capacity. However, the current legal duty to intervene was for those cases where a person would become homeless in 28 days, the Act extended this to 56 days and this would have an impact on the number of cases the authority would likely need to handle. Priority need groups would be removed by the Act and the Council would have to act in all cases to prevent homelessness. Greater engagement would need to take place with the private sector housing landlords. The Act was based on changes to homelessness legislation made in Wales, whilst the number of prevention cases had risen, the number of people reaching crisis point had also significantly reduced. The predicted rise was therefore based on this experience. However, concerns had been raised that this could be a conservative estimate, as the Act in Wales had not included a public duty to refer, something which was included in English legislation. The "duty to refer" was explained to Members and the additional impact this could have on case numbers. There was, however, no "duty to co-operate" placed upon those agencies who had a duty to refer. The Council would be required to provide written advice on all cases referred, create and monitor an action plan. The Council would have the ability to refuse cases where people were not engaging but as yet the details of this were still being understood.

Processes and systems would need to be reviewed as they were simply not sophisticated enough to store information at the required level of detail regarding prevention activity. This again would be a focus for Officers over the coming months. Grant funding for the homelessness service would be entirely based on prevention performance from 19/20. Monitoring and analysing capacity would need to be increased to meet the funding requirements. A small amount of Government funding had been available to local authorities to help with the transition, West Lindsey's allocation being £43k.

The Transitional period would pose an area of risk for the Council as during that time, the team would need to handle cases both post and pre legislation change, in effect running dual systems.

There was a considerable amount of work to undertake and Officers would be working on ensuring all activities and measures used across all Council services were pooled together to demonstrate the actions the Council had taken to prevent homelessness. Consideration needed to be given as to how the value of these could be demonstrated and captured and this would become a requirement of future funding allocations.

Members would continue to receive detailed briefings as Officers worked through the changes required as a result of the impending legislation.

In response to questions, Officers confirmed that partnership arrangements would be explored where suitable in order to make the maximum use of the limited resources available.

**RESOLVED** that having reviewed the performance information contained in the Progress and Delivery Report, the report be accepted and the verbal updates given in respect of ongoing work around the Homelessness Services and Customer Services be noted.

#### **104 WORK PLAN**

Members gave consideration to the Committee Work Plan.

**RESOLVED** that the Work Plan as set out in the report, be received and noted.

#### **105 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 item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

#### **106 LEISURE CONTRACT**

Consideration was given to a report which sought to update Members with progress made in respect of the leisure contract procurement.

Section 2 of the report outlined to Members a number of potential factors within the contract opportunity that had the ability to affect the market interest in it.

Section 3 of the report outlined a number of recommended actions the Council could take to mitigate against these by way of amending the contract opportunity.

Debate ensued and in response to Members' questions, Officers confirmed that all contracts had a "get out clause" and the Council had considerably upped its resource in terms of contract monitoring, regular inspections and financial penalties for poor performance, this would continue. Profit generation would always be sought.

A recent condition survey had highlighted no concerns.

Members were supportive of the proposed amendments and on that basis it was

**RESOLVED** that:

- (a) the contents of the report be noted; and
- (b) in order to achieve the best financial result for the Council, the length of the new contract be amended to be a minimum of 15 years with an opportunity to extend to a further five should this be beneficial to the Council.

**Note:** Councillor Tom Smith declared a personal interest as the Ward Member for Market Rasen, a potential area for investment.

## **107 CLOSING REMARKS**

This being the last meeting of the Civic Year, the Chairman thanked all Members and Officers for their contribution to the Committee's work over the past year. The Committee in turn paid tribute to the Chairman for the fair, reasonable and professional approach she had applied when chairing committee.

The meeting concluded at 7.45 pm.

Chairman