

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Challenge and Improve Committee held in the Council Chamber - The Guildhall, Marshall's Yard, Gainsborough, DN21 2NA on 10 October 2017 commencing at 6.30 pm.

Present: Councillor Paul Howitt-Cowan (Chairman)
Councillor Lewis Strange (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Angela White (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor David Bond
Councillor Ian Fleetwood
Councillor Mrs Jessie Milne
Councillor Malcolm Parish
Councillor Mrs Diana Rodgers
Councillor Mrs Lesley Rollings
Councillor Thomas Smith
Councillor Giles McNeill

In Attendance:
Alan Robinson
Ele Durrant
Rachael Hughes
Grant White
Monitoring Officer
Democratic and Civic Officer
Developer Contributions Officer
Lead Officer Enterprising Communities

Apologies: Councillor Roger Patterson
Councillor Mrs Anne Welburn

Membership: Councillor Giles McNeill substituted for Councillor Mrs Anne Welburn

36 CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME AND MINUTE'S SILENCE

The Chairman commenced the meeting by welcoming all in the room. He acknowledged the sad news received the previous day in relation to the passing of former District Councillor Stuart Curtis and asked all Members and Officers to join him in a minute's silence in honour of Councillor Curtis.

The Committee came together for a minute's silence.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, extended his sympathies to Councillor Curtis' family and loved ones.

37 MEETING OF THE CHALLENGE AND IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 5 SEPTEMBER 2017

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting held on 5 September 2017 be approved as a correct record.

38 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

39 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE

The Committee gave consideration to the Matters Arising Schedule, setting out the current position of previously agreed actions, as at 2 October 2017.

With regard to the green action entitled "audit re scope of cycle path network", Members were advised that the item had been shared with the Chairman of the Prosperous Communities Committee. In relation to the proposal to lobby LGA regarding renewable energies in newly built homes, the Planning and Development Manager had been tasked with completing the matter.

The Democratic and Civic Officer also advised Members that the Committee work plan had been updated with additional items as per previous discussions.

Councillor G. McNeill commented that he had received a copy of the recent report by the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) regarding Accountability and Scrutiny within local government. He suggested meeting with the Chairman to discuss the contents of the report and implications for WLDC. The Chairman agreed with this suggestion.

RESOLVED that the Matters Arising Schedule as at 2 October 2017 be received and noted.

40 PRESENTATION ITEM

The Committee welcomed Jenny Barnett, CEO of Citizens Advice West Lindsey, who addressed Members in relation to the work of the Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB) across West Lindsey and nationally.

Members were told that Citizens Advice West Lindsey had 21 members of staff, over 20 volunteers and were one of over 300 independent local charities that made up the Citizens Advice network. In 2016/17 they advised over 4,500 clients on over 10,000 issues.

The most common issues brought to the CAB concerned receipt of benefits, accounting for 34% of queries, and problems with debt, accounting for 25% of queries. Ms Barnett explained that clients of CAB were almost five times more likely to live on a low income than an average member of the population. The organisation also saw a higher than average proportion of clients who were disabled or had long-term health conditions, accounting for almost 45% of all clients.

It was explained to the Committee that in situations relating to debt, the CAB played a vital role in ensuring people paid their priority bills first (such as rent, council tax and fuel payments),

which helped to stop escalation of debt and stabilise people's finances at that time and for the future. In 2016/17 they dealt with just over £870,600 priority and non-priority debts, helping clients to restructure their finances.

Ms Barnett explained that the other key issue faced by clients related to claims for, and receipt of, benefits and tax credits as it wasn't always clear to clients how to manage a claim, particularly as the system was changing under welfare reform. Through seeking support with the CAB, two out of every three clients had their benefit or tax credit problem solved.

Ms Barnett spoke to Members about the Rural Advice Service which offered generalist drop-in sessions and specialist benefits and debt appointments to clients in outlying areas of the district. The advantage of this was not only to assist those who might not otherwise have access to such advice, but also acted as a way of highlighting the difficulties faced by rural communities with wider organisations.

Further benefits of the services provided by CAB were highlighted, including the skills and confidence gained by volunteer workers and also the financial gains experienced, not just by CAB clients but also in terms of the wider economic and social benefits generated such as savings to government, a reduction in demand for health and local authority homelessness services, as well as the public value of improvements in participation and productivity for clients and volunteers.

At the conclusion of the presentation, a short period of questioning and answering followed, with Members raising further questions about debt management and advice given to those facing homelessness. These were responded to accordingly and Ms Barnett agreed to provide Members with statistics and details as discussed at the CAB AGM.

Members thanked Ms Barnett for her attendance and asked for her to convey thanks to her staff and volunteers.

41 PRE-SCRUTINY ITEM: ADOPTION OF THE CIL FOR WEST LINDSEY

Members gave consideration to a report regarding proposals for West Lindsey District Council (WLDC) to formally adopt the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The Committee was asked to pre-scrutinise the proposed report in advance of submission to the Prosperous Communities Committee.

The Developer Contributions Officer explained the concept of the CIL and Members were provided with a list of frequently asked questions and corresponding answers to assist with their understanding of the scheme. Discussion ensued about the level of charges and how they had been capped. The Developer Contributions Officer explained that the charges and capping had been set by the Inspector and could not be changed by the Council. It was requested that Members be provided with guidance notes to assist them in dealing with queries from constituents and that those who sit on the Planning Committee be given additional information for consideration of planning applications. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that, should the CIL be formally adopted, guidance notes and training sessions would be provided, to include parish councils, once the scheme was implemented.

Councillor T. Smith wished to put on record his disappointment with the decision of the CIL Inspector to reduce the charges that had been proposed by West Lindsey District Council. It was felt the decision demonstrated a lack of understanding of the district.

A Member of Committee enquired about the Regulation 123 list and it was explained that this was to demonstrate where the funds generated by CIL would be spent. The Developer Contributions Officer noted that the list had been agreed through Committee and allocated areas were considered to be of significant strategic importance. Discussion centred around whether the allocated areas had been chosen by WLDC or Lincoln County Council and it was confirmed that although WLDC were working in partnership with other areas, the Regulation 123 list had been chosen and supported by WLDC through Committee. There was further discussion about the fees and charges incorporated in CIL and how funds would be distributed. It was also confirmed that Officers had undertaken fact checking on receipt of the Inspector's draft report.

Committee voted to endorse the recommendations as laid out in the report to be presented to the Prosperous Communities Committee.

RESOLVED that the recommendations as set out in the report to the Prosperous Communities Committee be supported.

Note: Councillor L Rollings requested that her abstention from the above vote be recorded.

42 FORWARD PLAN

The Democratic and Civic Officer presented a report setting out the items of business due to be considered through the committee system and asked Members to identify any reports that they wished to be brought before the Challenge and Improvement Committee for pre-scrutiny. Items previously requested by Members were noted on the report.

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan be noted.

43 COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

The Work Plan for the business of the Challenge and Improvement Committee was presented. Members were advised that the work plan had been updated with the outstanding items about housing, homelessness and proposed visits from Lincolnshire Police.

RESOLVED that the Work Plan be noted.

The meeting concluded at 7.43 pm.

Chairman