

Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive Board held in The Hub, Mareham Road, Horncastle, Lincolnshire LN9 6PH on Wednesday, 20th September, 2023 at 6.00 pm.

PRESENT

Councillor Craig Leyland (Chairman)

Councillors Tom Ashton, Sarah Devereux, Martin Foster, Richard Fry, William Gray, Adam Grist and Steve Kirk.

Councillor Fiona M. Martin, M.B.E. attended the meeting as an observer.

Councillor Ros Jackson attended the meeting remotely as an observer.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Robert Barlow	- Joint Chief Executive
John Medler	- Assistant Director Governance & Monitoring Officer
Andy Fisher	- Assistant Director - General Fund Assets
James Gilbert	- Assistant Director - Corporate
Matthew Hogan	- Assistant Director, Strategic Growth and Development
Lydia Rusling	- Assistant Director - Economic Growth
Jonathan Burgess	- Economic Development Manager
Colleen Warren	- Head of Finance, Public Sector Partnership Services Ltd
Ann Good	- Democratic Services Manager
Elaine Speed	- Senior Democratic Services Officer and Civic Officer

18. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Marsh.

19. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS (IF ANY):

At this point in the meeting Members were invited to declare any interests, no such declarations were received.

20. MINUTES:

The Open and Exempt Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 5th July 2023 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

21. ACTION SHEETS:

The actions were confirmed as complete.

22. INVESTMENT IN ACCOMMODATION TO MEET HOUSING NEEDS ACROSS EAST LINDSEY:

A report was provided to enable consideration of a suite of recommendations on investment in accommodation to meet housing needs across East Lindsey over the short, medium and long term. The report was welcomed by the Portfolio Holder for Communities and Better Ageing as an opportunity to invest in accommodation to meet the housing needs of vulnerable people. The report sought agreement for the Council to take part in the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) Round 2 with a view to accepting £936,000 in national funding.

Additionally, the report recommended that the Council set aside a further commitment of £1.134m in order to match-fund the offer of LAHF from government, and to provide further funding of £1m to increase the council's temporary accommodation stock.

The Portfolio Holder summarised the background to the report and referenced the launch in 2022 of various schemes to support the safe resettlement of households impacted by the conflict in Afghanistan. It was noted that many of these families were currently residing in hostel-type accommodation. The scheme would support provision of more suitable and affordable accommodation to these Afghan families who had arrived in the UK legally and provide for them until expiration of their visas in approximately three to five years' time. Furthermore, it would support the local authority to meet its duty to accommodate such families, relieving pressure on the wider local housing challenges.

The Portfolio Holder highlighted that the scheme presented the opportunity to bring about investment in housing to support the long term need for temporary accommodation in the district. It was noted on expiry of visas the eight properties would be available as long term assets to meet its own housing need.

As with the LAHF properties, it was proposed when individual suitable properties were identified, a detailed business case and options appraisal would be brought back to Members for full consideration and decision.

In light of the proposal package of investment, it was therefore recommended that the authority registered with the regulator for social housing. Registration brought benefits detailed at paragraph 1.15 of the report.

The Assistant Director for Strategic Growth and Development added that the Council had through the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership the appropriate expertise required for delivery.

During discussion Members fully supported the recommendations.

Following which, it was

RESOLVED

1. That agreement be given by Executive Board to formally take part in the Local Authority Housing Fund Round 2 programme, with a view to bringing nine properties into the council's ownership to meet short, medium and long-term housing needs within the district;
2. That in order to further support the Council's ability to support those experiencing homelessness, Council be recommended to amend the 2023/24 capital programme to set aside a further £1m in funding to provide additional council-owned temporary accommodation within the district;
3. That Council be recommended to amend the 2023/24 capital programme, as set out in Appendix A, to reflect the LAHF project and the additional temporary accommodation funding;
4. That in light of the proposed housing investments, coupled with the direction of government policy, agreement be given by Executive Board to formally agree to the local authority registering as a 'Registered Provider' of housing with the Regulator of Social Housing;
5. That delegation be granted to the Assistant Director – Strategic Growth and Development, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Communities and Better Ageing, the authority to conclude contractual and grant agreement arrangements with Government in respect of the scheme.

Reasons:

To accept an offer of up to £936,000 in government funding to support in making nine properties available to meet short, medium and long term housing needs within the district. To recommend to Council the inclusion of match funds in the 2023/24 capital budget to deliver the Local Authority Housing Fund project, alongside a recommendation to set aside a further £1m in funds to support with wider temporary accommodation investment. To delegate authority to officers to conclude contractual agreements with government in respect of the LAHF scheme.

Other options:

Do nothing – Under this option, the Council will not accept the LAHF funds from government, nor to seek to create the financial capacity to invest in further temporary accommodation to meet the needs of those experiencing homelessness. Therefore, under the 'do nothing' option, the potential benefits referenced in this report will not be realised.

23. 2023-2024 QUARTER ONE FINANCE UPDATE:

A report was presented that summarised the current financial position for the Council at the end of the first quarter of 2023/24 forecasting to the year end for consideration.

Quarter one data provided a 3 month view on which the full year forecast was based. It was noted that due to a volatile and inflationary financial environment, the figures were susceptible to further change. The full year outturn based on current projections and assumptions was a forecast net service surplus of £1.525m.

During his introduction the Portfolio Holder for Finance referred to:

- Certain assumptions had to be made around inflation pressures particularly pay, fuel, power and support for IDB costs. As a result of this approach when the budgets were not required for example, as budgets became more accurate, these were being offset against the savings target and this information was detailed in Appendix A – Table 2 of the report;
- The financial pressure generated by the Internal Drainage Boards had been supported by government for 2023/24 in the sum of £927,000 for which the Council was grateful. However, the issue and challenge of a longer-term solution to this problem had been raised again with government officials at DLUC and BEIS in order to seek to come to a resolution that enabled the Council to make use of the Council Tax that it raised for the purpose that it was set. In addition, the Council was now working with others affected in the setting up of a Special Interest Group on this topic to take it forward. Further updates would be provided as this progressed.

Following which it was

RESOLVED

1. That the current forecast unbudgeted surplus of £1.525m and the detail set out in Appendix A to the report be noted;
2. That Full Council be recommended to amend the Capital Programme to take into account the changes set out in this report at Appendix A – Table 4 which included slippage, additions and changes to the previously reported programme.

Reasons:

To ensure the Council's forecast financial position for 2023/24 is considered and related decisions approved. It is important that the Executive are aware of the financial position of the General Fund to ensure that they can make informed decisions that are affordable and financially sustainable for the Council.

Other Options:

To not approve the financial movements outlined.

24. PERFORMANCE AND GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK - QUARTER 1 MONITORING REPORT 2023/24:

A report was presented that brought together information relating to the Council's Performance and Governance Framework at the end of Quarter 1, 2023/24.

Following which, it was

RESOLVED

That the performance and risk information contained within the Quarter 1 Monitoring Report 2023/24 be noted.

Reasons:

To monitor delivery of performance and governance objectives and to support future planning and decision making within the Council.

Other options:

Alternative reporting arrangements.

25. LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME (CONSULTATION) 2024/25:

A report was presented to provide an update on the current Local Council Tax Support Scheme and sought Executive Board approval to consult on proposals for 2024/25.

Following which it was

RESOLVED

That consultation on continuation of the current Council Tax Support scheme, including uprating in line with DWP's annual update of allowances and premiums for 2024/25 be approved.

Reasons:

This will continue to align the CTS scheme and uprating for working age customers with DWP provisions for Housing Benefit and the CTS scheme for pensioners. This has been consistent each year since the introduction of the local scheme.

Additional analysis work as part of this year's review adds further emphasis to the need for a more fundamental scheme review, and work will begin in the next few months with any resulting new scheme being implemented 2025/26.

Other options:

The 'do nothing' option was considered, which would see the current scheme retained without uprating.

26. PARTNERSHIP COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY:

A report was presented to enable consideration of the South and East Lincolnshire Council's Partnership Communications Strategy. The background to the report was listed at paragraph 1.1 – 1.4. The report sought support for a Partnership Communications Strategy as set out at Appendix A to the report presented. During his introduction of the report the Leader of the Council stressed the need for a united communications strategy across the partnership.

During discussion the Portfolio Holder for the Coastal Economy referred to page 90 of the Strategy and stressed that communications must be an early part of any decision making process.

The Leader of the Council agreed this would be picked up. The Portfolio Holder for Communities and Better Ageing concurred.

RESOLVED

1. That the Partnership Communications Strategy at Appendix A be approved;
2. That the feedback from scrutiny committees at 2.6 be noted.

Reasons:

To provide an aligned and consistent approach to Partnership communications with internal and external audiences.

Other options:

Do nothing – this is possible, but it wouldn't support the aspirations of the Partnership to align functions or support the Partnership in delivering a consistent and co-ordinated approach to communications.

27. DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

The date of the next scheduled meeting was noted as Wednesday 1st November 2023.

28. EXEMPT INFORMATION:

RESOLVED

That under Section 100(a)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item on the grounds that, if they were present, there could be disclosed to them exempt information as defined in paragraph(s) 1, 2 & 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended).

29. SKEGNESS FORESHORE - TOWNS FUND PROJECT UPDATE:

An Exempt Report was presented in respect of the Skegness Foreshore – Towns Fund Project Update.

Following which it was

RESOLVED

That the recommendations within the Exempt Report be approved.

Reasons:

As per the Exempt report.

Other options:

As per the Exempt report.

The meeting closed at 6.45 pm.