

MINUTES of a meeting of THE LEICESTERSHIRE PARTNERSHIP REVENUES AND BENEFITS JOINT COMMITTEE held in The Symington Building, Adam and Eve Street, Market Harborough on THURSDAY, 24 JANUARY 2019

Present: Councillor R Hadkiss (Harborough) (Chair)

Councillors R D Bayliss (North West Leicestershire), J Hallam (Harborough) and C Ladkin (Hinckley and Bosworth)

Officers: Mrs C Hammond, Mrs J Kenny (HBBC), Mrs S O'Hanlon (Leicestershire Partnership - Revenues & Benefits), Mr N Proudfoot (HDC), Mr T Shardlow (NWLDC), Ms Z Thomas (Grant Thornton) and Mr A Wilson (HBBC)

20. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors R Allen and T J Pendleton.

21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no interests declared.

22. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on the 28 November 2018.

It was moved by Councillor R Hadkiss, seconded by Councillor R D Bayliss and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2018.

23. INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

The Chairman welcomed Ms Z Thomas from Grant Thornton to the meeting.

Ms Z Thomas presented the report to Members. She advised that the audit had looked at the debt recovery and business rates, and the outcome was significant assurance with some improvements required adding that it was a positive report. She explained that there were a number of recommendations made but they were low level and the report also highlighted a number of areas of good practice. She asked Members to have a think about any areas they wished the auditors to look at when they reviewed the Partnership.

Ms S O'Hanlon stated that it was a useful report and that everything that had been a formal recommendation a commitment had been given to look at or implement., though, this was not the case with the advisory matters

Members agreed that it was a positive report.

RESOLVED THAT:

The Internal Audit Report be noted

24. COUNCIL TAX PROTOCOL

Mrs S O'Hanlon presented the report to Members. She advised that the purpose of the report was to bring to Members attention the work that was being carried out. She

Chairman's initials

informed the Members that the protocol had been developed with the LGA and the aim was to prevent people from getting into debt in the first place however they had to be mindful that the authority still had a duty to recover Council Tax. She stated that senior officers had met with the CAB, which was a productive meeting as it had extended the relationship and provided some context of the process of Council Tax recovery. She advised that the document set out details of the protocol and was now with and the document was now with the Chief Executive of CAB for review. She informed Members that at the time of reporting on 61 authorities had signed up and hopefully the partnership would be the trailblazers for Leicestershire.

In response to a question from Councillor C Ladkin, Mrs S O'Hanlon advised that it was hoped that residents that were struggling with Council Tax payments would present themselves to the relevant authority first however there were those that had more complex debts and therefore would go to CAB for support.

Mrs S O'Hanlon advised Members that there was only the one CAB for Leicestershire but there were support officers that worked out of each of the three authorities. She informed Members that there was other bodies but due to the locality, residents would be sign posted to the CAB

RESOLVED THAT:

The work carried out by the Partnership be noted.

25. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE TO NOVEMBER 2018

Mr A Wilson presented the report to Members. He advised that the table at 3.3 of the report was showing an underspend of £86,837, which was due to an underspend of £51k from the FERIS budget and an underspend of £115k due to vacant staff posts. He stated that if the salary saving continued there would be a year-end saving of around £100,000, which was slightly lower than reported at the previous meeting due to increased agency costs incurred due to the vacant posts.

RESOLVED THAT:

The financial performance of the Partnership be noted

26. 2019/20 PROPOSED BUDGET

Mr A Wilson presented the report to Members. He highlighted the recommendations as set out in paragraph 2 including the recommendation to set aside some earmarked reserves. He drew Members attention to the table at 3.5 and the draft budget 2019/20 that approval was sought for, and the table at 3.6 was a breakdown of the contributions from the partners. He stated that the contributions had increased and the budget had been worked on the assumption of the earmarked reserves being agreed. Table 3.8.1 detailed the pressures for the forthcoming year including ICT, salaries and amendments to the structure. He advised that the proposed earmarked reserves were to cover pressures over the next year and some of the following year and as such it was hoped that it would help keep contribution requirements down. He reminded Members that they had set a reserve for the current year and it was expected that it would be used by the end of the 2019/20 year. He informed Members that there would still be a £50k general fund balance for contingencies.

It was explained that approval of the budget included the structure amendments noted in confidential section of the report.

Following a question from Councillor Hallam, Mr A Wilson advised that there was an increase for NNDR expenditure due to the valuation of the properties had going up and to cover the cost.

Mrs J Kenny asked Members to consider an additional recommendation

It was moved by Councillor R Hadkiss, seconded by Councillor R D Bayliss and

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The 2019/29 budget proposals for the Partnership be approved
2. The setting up of an earmarked reserve of £100,000 to meet the Revenue and Capital cost of ICT pressures noted in the report (Revenue £36,782, Capital £63,218) be approved.

27. PERFORMANCE SUMMARY REPORT NOVEMBER 2018

Mrs S O'Hanlon presented the report to Members. She advised Members that since November the Partnership had moved into the annual billing testing ready for Council Tax approval in February. She highlighted that all three authorities were meeting their targets for processing new claims and changes, and were in the tolerances for LA error. She informed the Committee that even though the report highlighted Universal Credit changes were constantly happening and therefore she proposed to bring an update report to a future meeting, and that LCC were no longer funding their element of the discretionary scheme.

In relation to revenues, Mrs S O'Hanlon advised that NWL were on target for Council Tax collection rates, and that HBBC and HDC were lightly down however there were no significant issues. In relation to Business Rates there was a significant reduction for HDC but it was due to one new assessment however work was being carried out to arrange repayment. She highlighted that other work relating to enforcement agent contracts, small business rates reviews and the timetable for annual billing had been carried out.

In response to a question from Councillor C Ladkin, Mrs S O'Hanlon advised the Committee that the review was carried out to ensure that all business receiving the rates had not made any changes to the size of their business and that there were no significant issues following the review.

RESOLVED THAT:

The Performance Summary Report November 2018 be noted.

28. SERVICE PLAN 2019/2020

Mrs S O'Hanlon presented the report to Members. She advised Members that the priorities for NWL were incorrect but would be changed following approval by the Council. She outlined the plan and that Universal Credit was number one for the Partnership, along with some of the other key projects including e-claims, telephone system and upgrades to ICT systems.

Mrs S O'Hanlon sought approval from the Committee to review the targets once the outturn of the year was available to see if targets need to be changed.

Members were happy that the targets were reviewed following the outturn and that the indicators would be brought back to the next meeting.

Chairman's initials

A discussion was held around the future/possible extension of the partnership. It was agreed that discussion paper be brought to the next meeting to gage an understanding of what elected members would like. For example having a new full partner or to sell services. Accepting that one LA had already made approaches re the possibility of becoming a partner. This work should continue with SOH speaking with AW around finance, subject to his commitments around budget setting

RESOLVED THAT:

The Service Plan 2019/2020 be noted.

29. FORWARD PLAN

Mrs S O'Hanlon presented the forward plan to Members.

It was discussed that Approval of Performance Targets, Internal Audit Report Update and a discussion paper on Future Plans for the Partnership would be added to the April agenda. Universal Credit Update would be added to the June agenda.

RESOLVED THAT:

The Forward Plan be noted and updated as detailed above.

30. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Members noted the date of the next meeting.

The meeting commenced at 4.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 5.20 pm