

MINUTES of a meeting of THE LEICESTERSHIRE PARTNERSHIP REVENUES AND BENEFITS JOINT COMMITTEE held in the Room 313, The Symington Building, Adam and Eve Street, Market Harborough on THURSDAY, 5 SEPTEMBER 2019

Present: Councillor R D Bayliss (North West Leicestershire) (Chairman)

Councillors P Dann (Harborough), J Hallam (Harborough) and K Lynch (Hinckley & Bosworth)

Officers: Mrs C Hammond, Ms B Jolly (HDC), Mrs J Kenny (HBBC), Mrs S O'Hanlon (Leicestershire Partnership - Revenues & Benefits), Mr T Shardlow (NWLDC) and Mr A Wilson (HBBC)

11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors R Ashman and D Bill MBE.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no interests declared.

13. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2019.

It was moved by Councillor R D Bayliss, seconded by Councillor P Dann and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2019 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

14. UNIVERSAL CREDIT - UPDATE

Mrs S O'Hanlon presented the report to Members.

She advised that since the report was put onto the agenda there was nothing new to update Members on so the report before them was to provide information to the new committee Members on Universal Credit.

She stated that it was no longer the responsibility of Local Authorities to provide Housing Benefit as it now fell under one of the six legacy benefits wrapped up in the one Universal Credit payment, however they will still receive a large number of enquires about it. She informed Members that the authorities had been advised that the rollout was to be completed in 2018 for new claimants and by now those already in receipt of benefits should have been migrated however it was far from happening. A pilot was being carried out to see how full migration would look, however it had come under significant criticism. She highlighted to Members that very little lead in time was given from the DWP along with very little collective working. A significant impact had been seen on the Partnership and officers had actively been encouraging those eligible to claim for council tax support along with a significant amount of real time changes coming through. It was proposed to look at how the administration of Council Tax Support to support claimants long with Discretionary Housing Payment She also noted the level of fraud that had been come apparent.

In response to a question from Councillor J Hallam, Mrs S O'Hanlon advised Members that capital in excess of £16,000 was liquid assets, such as stocks and shares rather than houses or cars, however it would depend on the nature of the claim.

Chairman's initials

In response to a question from Councillor P Dann, Mrs S O'Hanlon stated that she was unable to comment on a programme to seek to get back payments made through fraud as it was a sole responsibility of the DWP, unless it included Council Tax Support, which would become a joint case.

By affirmation of the meeting it was

RESOLVED THAT:

The content of the report be noted.

15. INTERNAL AUDIT PLANNING BRIEF

Mr A Wilson presented the report to Members.

He passed on the apologies of the Internal Audit Manager and advised Members that the audit plan was to review the memorandum of understanding between the Partnership & DWP. He highlighted that the plan was to ensure suitable controls were in place for the sharing of information between the two. This would include reviewing key documents and policies, speaking to key staff and sample testing. He stated that officers agreed that this was a good area to cover and welcomed the comments of Members. It was noted that some of the dates had passed however, these would be revised and it was hoped that the outcome would be reported to the next Joint Committee Meeting.

Mrs J Kenny advised Members that Internal Audit requested that the Committee signed off the actions before work was started.

By affirmation of the meeting it was

RESOLVED THAT :

The content of the report be noted.

16. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE TO JUNE 2019

Mr A Wilson presented the report to Members.

He advised Members that the budget had been adjusted following the agreement to reduce the partnership contributions with carry forwards. He drew Members attention to paragraph 3.3 that highlighted an underspend of £45k which was due to vacant posts and that should the post remain vacant there would be a significant underspend by the year-end.

Mrs S O'Hanlon advised that the all the posts were now either recruited to or had been advertised. She informed Members that due to ongoing matters on role had been covered by agency but it had now been recruited too. The advertising of all the other posts had now closed and interviews were being held.

Mr A Wilson advised that following the recruitment there may still be a small underspend which may be required for some other pressures including IT support, but an update would be brought to the next meeting.

By affirmation of the meeting it was

RESOLVED THAT :

The financial performance of the Partnership be noted.

17. PERFORMANCE SUMMARY REPORT JUNE 2019

Mrs S O'Hanlon presented the report to Members.

She advised Members that in relation to Benefits all three authorities were meeting their targets for new claims and change event processing, and that they were all below the threshold for LA error. She informed the committee that following a Supreme Court ruling, a report about Discretionary Housing Payment would be taken to the next Management Board meeting, as should officers wish to review payments when taking benefits into account. It was clear that the partnership would require a very robust policy to be in place. She also highlighted a pilot scheme that was being carried out to allow unpaid Council Tax to be recovered through earnings.

In relation to Revenues, Mrs S O'Hanlon the targets were slightly under for Q1 however officers were not concerned as they were confident that it would get back on track following some IT issues with the award of the new enforcement contract, however the targets for NNDR were either above or being met. She advised that the single person discount review was being carried out, that officers were working with the S151 officers to look at forecasting business rates for the year and officers were preparing to carry out a review of all the empty properties.

In relation to sickness officers were managing and in a position where the authorities were either slightly on or below target. Management would be keeping eye on sickness as the winter, along with seasonal illnesses approached.

In response to a comment from Councillor P Dann, Mrs S O'Hanlon advised that there were different challenges to collecting business rates, such as large units being claimed as empty to avoid payments and if one unit went bankrupt it would scupper targets. She advised that it was the same for all three authorities, however the team was beyond dedicated and would do all they could to get the money in. She stated that due to national issues, situations could change but officers were keeping close eye on that.

By affirmation of the meeting it was

RESOLVED THAT :

The Performance Summary Report June 2019 be noted.

18. FORWARD PLAN

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

RESOLVED THAT :

The Forward Plan be noted.

19. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Members noted the dates and venues of future meetings.

The meeting commenced at 4.30 pm
The Chairman closed the meeting at 4.57 pm

Chairman's initials