

MINUTES of a meeting of THE LEICESTERSHIRE PARTNERSHIP REVENUES AND BENEFITS JOINT COMMITTEE held in the Atkins Building, Lower Bond Street, Hinckley on THURSDAY, 10 SEPTEMBER 2015

Present: Councillor J Hallam (Harborough) (Chairman)

Councillors R D Bayliss (NWLDC) and M Surtees (Hinckley and Bosworth)

Chief Executives: Mr S Atkinson (HBBC) and Ms C E Fisher (NWLDC)

Officers: Mr R Bowmer (Head of Finance, NWLDC), Ms B Jolly (HDC), Mrs J Kenny (HBBC) and Mrs M Meredith

In attendance:

9. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor P King.

10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no interests declared.

11. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2015.

By affirmation of the meeting it was

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2015 be approved and signed as a correct record.

12. JULY 2015 PERFORMANCE REPORT

Mr S Coop presented the report to members. He highlighted the slight reduction in Council Tax collection rates which, in the context of significant growth for all three authorities, was not a major concern at this point. He added that he was confident this would be brought back on target as the year progressed. He made reference to the concerns in respect of the non domestic rate collection for North West Leicestershire District Council and advised that there were two significant ratepayers who were in arrears. Discussions were ongoing with these ratepayers, one of which had since gone into liquidation. He highlighted that a number of businesses had received revised assessments resulting in an increase in their rates liability, which would have an impact upon the current collection rates. He highlighted the performance in respect of benefits and advised that an action plan was in place with the aim of achieving the targets set by the end of the month.

In response to questions from Councillor R D Bayliss, Mr S Coop advised that the administrative penalties in respect of fraud were usually paid by arrangement and that it was a legal requirement to ensure that these penalties were raised. He explained that these penalties were an asset in terms of a balance sheet entry and were classified as a debtor, in the same manner as court costs.

In response to a question from Councillor R D Bayliss in respect of commitments for DHP spend, Mr S Coop advised that the amount paid to date reflected the amount paid up to

Chairman's initials

the renewal date, which was October for the majority of cases. He added that it was difficult to quantify future demand at this time. Mr R Bowmer added that the management board received and monitored this information on a monthly basis.

13. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE TO JULY 2015

Mrs J Kenny presented the report to members, providing an update on the financial performance of the partnership for the last quarter. She highlighted the key headlines as set out in the report and advised that there was an underspend of £201,000 as at the end of July 2015, resulting in a net underspend of £80,482. She made reference to the variances outlined in the report, which were predominantly related to salary savings, delays in the virtual mailroom project, underspends on court costs and a transfer from reserves.

Councillor R D Bayliss requested an update on the virtual mailroom project. Mrs J Kenny advised that the contract was not awarded, and the previous framework agreement had now expired. She stated that the contract was close to being awarded. Mr S Coop added that a site visit had taken place and costings were currently being considered. He advised that DSA contract had been utilised in the interim. Mrs J Kenny explained that although there was an overspend in respect of the postage costs due to the delay, this was offset by underspends so there was no overall impact upon the budget.

Councillor J Hallam asked whether the project would be worthwhile, given that the cost would be £42,000 to achieve £38,000 savings. Mrs J Kenny advised that there were savings other than postage associated with the project, such as print room savings, which were not included in the report as there was no variance.

In response to a question from Mr S Atkinson, Mrs J Kenny advised that none of the costs shown were associated with procurement, and were recurring costs.

14. PROJECT UPDATE REPORT

Mr S Coop presented the report to members, highlighting the overall status of operational projects and the key projects as set out in the report.

In response to questions from Councillor J Hallam, Mr S Coop advised that the FERIS project aimed to incentivise a reduction in spend on housing benefit, by encouraging claimants to alert the council that their circumstances had changed. He explained that the recruitment of a temporary member of staff had been delayed, however other work was still taking place.

In response to a question from Ms C E Fisher in respect of the Single Fraud Investigation Service, Mr S Coop advised that a meeting between the DWP and HR representatives had taken place this week, and contact would be made with DWP to request an operational meeting.

Ms C E Fisher asked whether the position was any clearer in respect of how many staff would be transferred. Mr S Coop advised that anyone involved in the investigation of fraud would be in scope for a potential transfer, however there was a further piece of work to be completed in respect of the options for the creation of a corporate fraud team.

Ms C E Fisher sought clarification on the process and timescale for consideration of the staff transfers. Mr S Coop advised that there would be an initial report considered by the management board, followed by a decision by each local authority individually.

Ms C E Fisher felt that there was an issue about who was making the decision in respect of staff transfers as the impact would need to be considered by each local authority. She

sought clarification on where the discussions were being held to consider the options. Mr S Coop advised that discussions would take place at the management board prior to consideration by the joint committee. Mrs J Kenny added that each authority was being asked to consider who was in scope, and there was an individual right under TUPE to seek to transfer.

Ms C E Fisher commented that the forward plan for the partnership should be reinstated so that members could be aware of when key decisions were being made in each local authority.

RESOLVED THAT:

A forward plan for partnership activities/actions be included on agendas for future meetings of the Partnership.

15. CONSTITUTION AND PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

Mrs J Kenny presented the report to members, highlighting that the current partnership agreement would expire in March 2016, and therefore the agreement was being updated to reflect the current situation, and the percentage splits for each local authority had been revised accordingly. She explained that the agreement was out for consultation with partners at present, and it was hoped that a final agreement with all comments would be available at the next meeting.

16. GROWTH AND FUTURE DIRECTION OF THE PARTNERSHIP

Deferred until the next meeting.

17. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Thursday, 26 November 2015 at 4.30pm.

The meeting commenced at 4.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 5.02 pm

Chairman's signature