

MINUTES of a meeting of THE LEICESTERSHIRE PARTNERSHIP REVENUES AND BENEFITS JOINT COMMITTEE held in the Atkins Building, Lower Bond Street, Hinckley on THURSDAY, 28 JANUARY 2016

Present: Councillor J Hallam (Harborough) (Chairman)

Councillors R D Bayliss (NWLDC), M Hall (Hinckley and Bosworth), P King (HDC), T J Pendleton (NWLDC) and M Surtees (Hinckley and Bosworth)

Chief Executives: Mr S Atkinson (HBBC)

Officers: Mrs C Hammond, Ms B Jolly (HDC), Mrs J Kenny (HBBC), Mr M Murphy (NWLDC), Mrs S O'Hanlon (Leicestershire Partnership - Revenues & Benefits) and Mr A Wilson (Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council)

In attendance: Mr C Dickens (PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP)

18. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mr R Bowmer, Ms C E Fisher and Mr S Kohli.

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no interests declared.

20. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2015.

Mrs S O'Hanlon stated that she had given her apologies for the meeting and that Mr S Coop had attended in her place.

By affirmation of the meeting it was

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2015 be approved and signed as a correct record.

21. INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT 2015/16

Mr C Dickens presented the report to Members.

He advised Members that overall it was a positive report with two medium risk issues and one low risk issue identified with Council Tax and two low risk issues with the NNDR system along with two advisory findings in Housing Benefits. He informed Members that the issues were not specific to an individual Council and that actions had been agreed.

In response to a question from Councillor M Hall to the lack of detailed procedure notes and the agreed target date for completion, Mr C Dickens advised Members that a full review of procedures may take time, but action was being taken in the interim.

Mrs S O'Hanlon added that when staff returned to work following a lengthy absence they would familiarise themselves with the procedures again, this is in addition to accuracy checks being undertaken, and an officer available for training to new starters, areas of repeated error and new legislation

Chairman's initials

Councillor P King expressed concerns over the lack of evidence that was retained and felt that there should not be any gaps. He sought reassurance that measures were in place to address this.

Mrs S O'Hanlon reassured Members that plans were in place to address the issues identified and that in relation to the Council Tax element a review of empty properties was undertaken at the end of the year and that due to external agencies undertaking some of the work the evidence was not always recorded a bug in the system the evidence was not always logged.

In response to a question Councillor P King, Mr C Dickens reiterated that it was a good report and that it was not unusual to find a small number of issues and that an expectable rate was no issues however that was not practicable, adding that he was comfortable controls were in place and if there was anything out of sync it would have been raised as a more significant issue.

RESOLVED THAT:

The Partnership Internal Audit Report 2015/16 be noted.

22. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE TO NOVEMBER 2015

Mr A Wilson presented the report to Members.

He highlighted to Members that the budget was currently underspent and that the Partnership was forecasting an underspend with a yearend saving of £110,000 through salary savings and the procurement of a new virtual post room.

Councillor J Hallam stated that the budget was looking good.

RESOLVED THAT:

The financial performance of the Partnership be noted.

23. 2016/2017 PROPOSED BUDGET

Mr A Wilson presented the report to Members.

He advised Members having factored in a 1% pay increase, 1.1% for general inflation and an increase in pay and employer costs for NI and pension contributions there would be an increase in the Partnership budget of £58,820. He highlighted that the Partnership was still delivering savings and that the table at 3.9 outlined the partner contribution splits.

Councillor R D Bayliss stated that as the Partnership went on it was harder to compare, however he was happy that savings were being made.

Following a question from Councillor P King, Mrs S O'Hanlon advised that comparisons had been made from the previous budget post restructure not the commencement of the partnership.

Councillor P King expressed concerns that it appeared that the costs were still going up and that he would like to see them coming down adding that the Partnership could not sit back and should keep looking at ways to make further savings.

Mr S Atkinson stated that the Partnership had made significant savings following the restructure and as such costs were going up at lower rate.

Chairman's initials

It was moved by Councillor R D Bayliss, seconded by Councillor T J Pendleton and

RESOLVED THAT:

The 2016/2017 budget proposals for the Partnership be approved.

24. PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT AND CONSTITUTION

Mrs J Kenny presented the report to Members.

She advised Members that the Partnership was five years on and the original agreement was coming to an end. She stated that the legal teams of all three partner authorities had agreed the new agreement and that if the Committee were to agree the report the new agreement would be executed on the 1 April 2016 for a further five years.

In response to a question from Councillor M Surtees, Mrs J Kenny advised that each authority was still employing its own staff, but it could be a future change to be looked into.

In response to a question from Councillor M Hall, Mrs J Kenny stated that the Partnership would be offering its services, but not adding into the Partnership itself.

Mrs S O'Hanlon advised that the Partnership had been approached to deliver some Housing Benefit training and officers were currently looking at how to develop the request and expand on it.

It was moved by Councillor M Hall, seconded by Councillor T J Pendleton and

RESOLVED THAT:

That the draft deed of variation for the Partnership be approved.

25. NOVEMBER 2015 PERFORMANCE REPORT

Mrs S O'Hanlon presented the report to Members.

She advised Members that it is currently forecasted that all the targets would be met by the end of the year, however due to some significant write-offs for NNDR for NWLDC it is predicted this target will not be reached. Agreement hadn't been reached to amend its target for the year. It is also forecast the new claims indicator for NWLDC will not be achieved.

She highlighted to Members that each authority had one employee on long term sick and each authority was working with that employee to support returning to work, whilst ensuring action is taken to address any targets that are hit as they arrive.

Councillor R D Bayliss stated that he understood why the target had not been revised but felt that this was correct.

In response to a question from Councillor M Surtees, Mrs S O'Hanlon advised the Committee that a 'golden promise' was when officers tried to process a benefit application within 24 hours which in turn would lessen the impact of Customer Services and landlords would get a prompt payment.

RESOLVED THAT:

The November 2015 Performance Report be noted.

26. SERVICE PLAN 2016/17

Mrs S O'Hanlon presented the Service Plan to Members.

She advised Members that the plan detailed key projects and the performance targets for the year. She drew Members attention to the inclusion of performance indicators for previous years for Council Tax and Business Rates, and that there were no changes to the targets for HBBC and NWLDC and a slight increase to the targets for HDC both Council Tax and Business Rates.

RESOLVED THAT:

The Service Plan 2016/2017 be noted.

27. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED THAT:

In pursuance of Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting on the grounds that the business to be transacted involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act and that the public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

28. UNIVERSAL CREDIT - UPDATE

Mrs S O'Hanlon presented the report and updated Members on the current position.

RESOLVED THAT:

The report be noted.

29. FORWARD PLAN

Mrs S O'Hanlon presented the Forward Plan to Members.

RESOLVED THAT:

The Forward Plan be noted.

30. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Members noted the date of the next meeting Thursday, 14 April 2016 at 4.30pm.

The meeting commenced at 4.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 5.23 pm