

MEETING OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 13 SEPTEMBER 2016

10.00 AM



GROUP MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Lynda Coutts
Councillor Phil Dilks
Councillor David Mapp
Councillor Bob Russell
Councillor Bob Sampson (Chairman)

Councillor Jacky Smith (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Judy Smith
Councillor Mrs Sarah Stokes
Councillor Mrs Brenda Sumner
Councillor Frank Turner

EXECUTIVE MEMBER

Councillor Nick Craft (Executive Member, Environment)
Councillor Frances Cartwright (Executive Member, Governance)

OFFICERS

Strategic Lead – Programme Delivery (Lee Sirdifield)
Executive Manager – Commercial (Judith Davids)
Performance and Projects Team Leader (Sam Pearson)
Executive Manager – Property (Neil Cucksey)
Community Engagement & Policy Development Officer (Carol Drury)
Admin Assistant, Democratic Services (Anita Eckersley)

10. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Mrs Rosemary Kaberry-Brown.

11. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Councillor Jacky Smith declared an interest in agenda item 8 in so far as she was a Board Member of the Welland & Deeping Internal Drainage Board she noted that she was also an "Outside Representative" on the Upper Witham Internal Drainage Board but not as a representative for South Kesteven District Council.

Councillor Phil Dilks declared an interest in agenda item 8 in so far as he was a Board Member of the Welland & Deeping Internal Drainage Board.

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Councillor Bob Russell declared an interest in agenda item 8 in so far as he was a Board Member of the Black Sluice Internal Drainage Board.

Councillor Nick Craft declared an interest in agenda item 8 in so far as he was a Board Member of the Upper Witham Internal Drainage Board.

12. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 12 JULY 2016

The action notes of the meeting held on 12 July 2016 were noted.

13. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chairman referred to the Action notes of 12 July 2016 regarding the Disabled Facilities Grant and noted that on behalf of the Scrutiny Committee, he had approved a detailed letter to Lincolnshire County Council that senior officers had drafted requesting the full amount of the Disabled Facilities Grant to be paid to this Authority. This letter had now been sent to Lincolnshire County Council.

In response to a Member's query about why the process had taken two months, the Chairman explained that Senior Officers had spent time checking the interpretation of the Department of Local Government & Communities instructions against the interpretations of Lincolnshire County Council.

The Executive Member – Environment, commented that the Executive was fully behind the Scrutiny Committee's decision to send a letter to Lincolnshire County Council requesting the full amount of the Disabled Facilities Grant.

The Chairman assured Scrutiny Committee Members they would be kept informed of progress.

14. SKDC REPRESENTATIVES ON INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARDS

This item had been referred to Scrutiny Committee by Resources PDG. Members were informed that excerpts from action notes taken at meetings of Resources PDG had been provided for information. The Chairman explained that the Committee had been asked to look at whether SKDC was getting value for money from the Internal Drainage Boards; whether the SKDC Members on the Board were able to contribute to Board efficiencies and how representatives could most effectively represent the Council.

A Member referred to an extract from the minutes that noted there might be opportunities to work more closely with Internal Drainage Boards and queried how this would be progressed.

The Executive Member – Environment advised that Internal Drainage Boards were run strictly in line with Government policy. Any changes in the use of land, or the different types of land Internal Drainage Boards covered, were governed by this policy with the Boards having limited control over how they worked or with whom they worked. He also explained that Members on the Board, appointed by Council, were present to act as Board Members and not to represent the Council. Both he and the Vice Chairman of Scrutiny Committee were members of the Internal Drainage Board Finance Committee. The Executive Member – Environment assured the Committee that the systems used by the Boards were controlled and efficiency aware.

Further discussion took place around the extensive knowledge of the Internal Drainage Board operatives for their particular areas; that land across the area was either just above or below sea level; potential flood risks in the area compared to other parts of the country that may not have Internal Drainage Boards, that levies were normally increased in line with inflation but the potential was there for an increase slightly higher than inflation should larger equipment, such as pumps, need to be replaced. The Committee was also provided with an insight into the decision making process of the Black Sluice Internal Drainage Board.

The Chairman thanked Internal Drainage Board Members for clarifying their roles on the Internal Drainage Boards, for outlining their input into the Internal Drainage Board Finance Committee and answering questions from the Scrutiny Committee.

In summing up, the Chairman outlined that due to Internal Drainage Board Members being solely Board Members and not attending as SKDC representatives, any opportunity to initiate negotiations on levies or discussions about working more closely with Councils in the running of the Boards was limited. The Committee unanimously agreed therefore, that the referral be noted and the Resources PDG be reminded of the limitations, scope and remit of the Internal Drainage Board Members from SKDC.

15. GREEN WASTE RENEWALS 2016

The Chairman referred to the excerpt from the Governance and Audit Committee minutes of its meeting of Thursday 24 March 2016. He noted that the Governance and Audit Committee had asked the Scrutiny Committee to consider the decision to offer reductions to customers paying via direct debit for green bin renewals together with the way systems had operated during the renewal period.

The Strategic Lead – Programme Delivery was in attendance to provide the Committee with an outline of the process and what the actual current situation was.

He reported that over 28,000 customers had signed up to the green waste service which had generated an income of over £950k. In previous years the 16,000 online customers had to set up an account in order to carry out a transaction. There would no longer be a requirement to have an account to carry out an online transaction but the option would still be available for those who wanted to track their account. Currently 59% of customers paid by direct debit. Customers would be notified of the annual charge for the coming year and the amount would then automatically be taken by direct debit if they wanted to continue paying this way.

There had been an increase in online demand of around 65%. The Committee was shown a presentation which demonstrated how demand had exceeded previous levels. The system now tracked every transaction including abandoned transactions. Abandoned transactions accounted for around 2% of recorded transactions. These could be as a result of customers changing their mind, incorrect orders, wrong payment type or two people in one household attempting to order the same thing. Other challenges faced by customers were difficulties in finding an address or their software not being compatible with the Council's software. An option directing the customer to a recommended browser was available and transactions could still be taken over the phone.

The Strategic Lead – Programme Delivery noted that consideration had also been given to the timing of the issuing of notifications so they did not clash with other large mail shots such as Council Tax. Large mail shots and notifications created significant demand on Customer Service systems which meant that some customers may not get the support they required.

“How to Guides” would also be available to help customers if they were stuck in a particular process.

In response to a Member’s query about direct debit cost savings per property, it was noted that estimated face to face transactions cost between £6 to £15 per transaction, phone transactions were around £3 to £4 per transaction plus a card charge. The aim was to incentivise online transactions rather than recover costs. Encouraging customers to move to direct debit payments and online transactions would enable more support for those customers who required it.

Further discussion ensued around what percentage of households had taken up green waste collections; what was done for those people not paying by direct debit and whether it was offered to them when the renewal reminders were issued; whether the cost saving should be passed on to customers and whether the generated £950k covered the running costs of the scheme.

There were 65,000 households within the district and around just under half had taken up the green waste service. Around 25,000 transactions had been undertaken which was significantly higher than previous years. In respect of those customers currently not using the direct debit system but where the Council had their e-mail addresses, a notification email containing links to

access the Direct Debit process was sent. For those with no e-mail address, a notification letter was issued which also included details of the direct debit process. These letters were processed by an external printer which was an additional cost saving.

The Committee was reassured that those customers currently paying by the alternative means available were offered the option to pay by direct debit.

The Scrutiny Committee welcomed the work being undertaken to encourage customers to pay by direct debit and noted that customers currently not paying by direct debit were also being provided with the option to pay by those means. The Scrutiny Committee acknowledged the systems that were in place to support customers and that there was an awareness that support was required for customers who were not computer literate and required additional support.

16. QUARTER 1 PROGRESS REPORTING ON CORPORATE PLAN

The Performance and Projects Team Leader presented report number PPM004 for the Quarter 1 Corporate Plan Performance Report. This was the first report in the new style format and set out the progress against outcomes detailed in the Corporate Plan together with the corporate priority measures that underpinned them.

The Corporate Plan is a key document that had been approved by Council on 16 June 2016. Senior Officers had worked with Members to develop the priorities and define the outcomes required.

To achieve its goals, the Council was working towards two priority themes; Open for Business and being Commercially and Customer Focused.

Members were informed that fourteen outcomes and thirty-one measures would be monitored this year. Seventeen of the measures are either annual measures, or used to demonstrate the effectiveness of key strategies such as the Housing Strategy and would be reported on later in the year. For this particular quarter under Open for Business the report would focus on six outcomes and nine measures. Under Commercially and Customer Focused, there would be five outcomes and five measures.

The six tasks covered under the **Open for Business Priority** were: Local Plan; Register of Brownfield Sites; Build new Council housing; St Peters Hill; Southern Quadrant and Gravity Fields.

The Local Plan: This task was expected to meet the due date. It was proposed that the final version would be published in early 2018 after it had been submitted to the Secretary of State in 2017.

There were no questions for this item.

Register of Brownfield sites: This task was on track and the register of brownfield sites and land available for development would be routinely monitored. A bid to be a pilot scheme had been submitted but this had been unsuccessful. A new bid would be submitted should a second phase be announced.

There were no questions for this item.

Build new Council housing: The task was expected to meet the due date. A total of 27 new homes are in the process of being completed and further plans were being prepared for more low cost housing within the district.

There were no questions for this item.

St Peter's Hill: There were two alerts showing for this item. These were because of the delay in the Grantham Senior Citizen Club signing the agreement for lease later than anticipated due to delayed contract negotiations. The Grantham Senior Citizen Club was now temporarily based at the Jubilee Church Life Centre. Protection fencing was in place around the building and work was expected to start on site after Gravity Fields.

A market prospectus to engage cinema and A3 operators had been submitted.

In response to Members queries about what negotiations with neighbours were being undertaken, the Executive Manager – Property explained that an initial notice had been issued in respect of the right to vary access to the doctor's surgery. A more official notice would be served once work began.

In respect of the public house, discussions were taking place regarding providing an appropriate "pull in" area for delivery vehicles.

Southern Quadrant: It was noted that one or two milestones had passed the due date. This was due to timelines for a number of external elements being outside the Council's control.

There were no questions for this item.

Gravity Fields: It was noted that preparations were well under way. A grant of £89,000 had been secured from the Arts Council towards the outdoor programme.

In response to a query regarding whether there were any areas where ticket take up was low, the Executive Manager, Commercial noted she would provide this information outside the meeting.

No further questions were asked.

LACC (Local Authority Controlled Company): It was noted that one or two milestones had passed. This was due to the company having no name at present which meant it could not be registered with Company's House. A Shareholder Committee had been agreed at full Council on 21 April 2016. Members would be: Councillor Bob Adams, Councillor Terl Bryant, Councillor Mrs Cartwright, Councillor Mike Cooke and Councillor Ashley Baxter. Target dates for the registration of the Council's company would be confirmed following the next Shareholder Committee meeting in October.

There were no questions for this item.

Flexible Organisation: It was noted that the task was expected to meet the due date.

The Customer Relations Management System (CRM) was now in place and kept a record of customer queries and previous contact. Freedom of Information (FOI) requests had also been moved from Covalent to CRM.

The Document Management System (DMS) was also up and running. This system kept track of workflow and directed work items to the relevant area. Both systems enhanced the range of service delivery and enabled more availability of services through the website for customers. This in turn freed up time for staff to help customers who were not computer literate or required additional support.

Mobile technologies for officers to access when working out in the field were also being enhanced.

The Chairman commented that it was anticipated the report next year would show the benefits of streamlining these systems.

Customer Service centre re-design: It was noted that the task was expected to meet the due date. The aim was to re-design the customer service centre, reduce the cost of office space used by SKDC, maximise flexible working arrangements which would enable space to be shared with other public sector organisations. A project team had been established and terms of reference were being drafted for outside partners wanting to come into the building. The space would provide self service opportunities for people but there would also be floor walkers directing people to the appropriate area.

There were no questions for this item.

Delivering Differently: It was noted that one or more milestones had passed the due date. Timelines had been re-cast and milestones re-aligned. A report had also been lodged and matters were in hand.

There were no questions for this item.

Open for Business Corporate Measures: It was noted that Quarter 1 performance had shown a slowdown in the housing market. A review of the Housing Strategy was in progress. Discussions were taking place with land owners and utility companies to ensure that services would be available once future schemes had been approved.

There were no questions for this item.

Percentage of Planning Applications approved: It was noted that of the 316 applications received this quarter 284 had been approved. A high turn over of staff in the section had meant a slow down in processing applications. A householder team had been established and the new team members fully trained so the processing of applications would be back on track.

In response to a Member's query about whether the report included land charges it was noted that it did not. It was also noted that the RAG for this item was "data only" because it was not a targeted measure.

There were no questions for this item.

Occupancy rates of retail units in town centres: It was reported out of the 881 units across the four town centres 51 were vacant. Three quarters of these units were in Grantham. Occupancy rates had improved due in part to the Council's investment in shop front improvements and other town-wide improvements which had been supported by the Growth Point. Stamford rates were close to 100% and Bourne had seven vacant units.

There were no questions for this item.

Percentage of Food establishments in the area broadly compliant with food hygiene law: It was noted that there were currently 1468 registered food premises in the district. Broadly compliant business remained at a high level of 98%.

There were no questions for this item.

Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting: It was noted that good recycling continued to be promoted through the web and media. Levels of contamination had increased but a countywide campaign was planned. Take up had increased due to easier access to green waste services.

There were no questions for this item.

Percentage of streets that meet clean streets standards: This was a quarterly measure with 91% of the streets meeting the (national) clean streets standard and was on target.

There were no questions for this item.

Number of fly tipping incidents received: It was noted that education campaigns and target actions were being undertaken. Fly tipping was on the increase nationally. Locally there had been a slight reduction with 245 incidents for the current year compared to 278 and 289 in previous years.

There were no questions for this item.

Percentage of self service transactions: It was noted that the performance levels for 2016/17 would be used as a baseline for future years in order that realistic targets could be set. There had been around 2057 online transactions during June which was 56% of demand for services. 38% of demand was via the telephone and 6% face to face.

There were no questions for this item.

Percentage of Council Tax Collected; Percentage of Non-domestic Rates collected and Percentage of Rent collected:

Two of these were at amber partly due to the reduction in the number of hearings that could be heard at Lincoln Magistrates Court. The Grantham Magistrates Court had recently been closed. The hearings had now been increased from one to two which would enable an improvement in the figures. The rent collection process was being monitored and a review of the recovery process was being undertaken.

There were no questions for this item.

Right to Buy Sales: The number of right to buy sales continued to be at a high level and were expected to exceed targets.

There were no questions for this item.

The Chairman thanked the Performance and Projects Team Leader for a concise report and for the work that had been undertaken. He commented that future reports would contain more information.

17. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16

The Committee considered its draft Annual Report 2015/16, which was appended to report number LDS182. Scrutiny Members were reminded that under Article 6.8 of the Constitution, the Scrutiny Committee had to report annually to the Council on its activity. Those members who had served on the

Committee during the period covered by the report agreed it was a fair reflection and approved its submission to Council on 17 November 2016.

18. REPORTS FROM WORKING GROUPS

The Committee currently had no working groups.

19. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair reminded the Scrutiny Committee that they could submit ideas for consideration by the Committee.

20. REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

There was no feedback from representatives on outside bodies

Discussion took place around inviting Members who were representatives on outside bodies but not a Member of the Scrutiny Committee to future meetings.

The Community Engagement & Policy Development Officer suggested that a list of Members on Outside Bodies could be provided to Members at a future meeting. The Committee could then consider and determine whom they would like to invite and they could be asked to provide a report or presentation for that body.

21. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting was closed at 12.05pm.