

Present: Councillor Ric Metcalfe (*in the Chair*),
Councillor Donald Nannestad, Councillor Rosanne Kirk,
Councillor Neil Murray, Councillor Fay Smith and
Councillor Peter West

Apologies for Absence: None.

99. Confirmation of Minutes - 27 November 2017

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2017 be confirmed.

100. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

101. Discretionary Rate Relief Policy

Purpose of Report

To provide the Executive with an opportunity to consider and comment on a new Discretionary Rate Relief Policy to take effect on 1 April 2018, prior to its consideration by the Policy Scrutiny Committee on 16 January 2018 and subsequent final decision by the Executive on 22 January 2018.

Decision

That the new Discretionary Rate Relief Policy be noted and referred for consideration by the Policy Scrutiny Committee prior to a final decision being made by the Executive at its meeting on 22 January 2018.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

Reason for Decision

The report provided the Executive with details of a new Discretionary Rate Relief Policy for the City of Lincoln, to take effect on 1 April 2018.

The current Policy had been agreed by the Executive on 15 September 2003 and had not been reviewed since that date, meaning that it took no account of subsequent changes in legislation. It was noted that approval of a new Discretionary Rate Relief Policy did not impact on the Discretionary Rate Relief the Council was required to implement this year following the Spring 2017 budget. The award of any future funded reliefs announced by the Government had been provided for in the new Policy.

A copy of the proposed Discretionary Rate Relief Policy was appended to the report. The new Policy did not include any proposal to change the criteria used by officers when awarding discretionary relief. Consequently, organisations would

not face an increase or decrease in the percentage of relief awarded should the Policy be adopted.

102. Localised Council Tax Support - 2018/19

Purpose of Report

To provide the Executive with an opportunity to review consultation responses and consider the Council's proposed Localised Council Tax Support Scheme for 2018/19.

Decision

That Council be recommended to:

- (1) Review consultation responses relating to the Localised Council Tax Support Scheme for 2018/19.
- (2) Approve the Council's proposed Localised Council Tax Support Scheme for 2018/19 incorporating the following changes to the 2017/18 scheme:
 - protection for vulnerable households;
 - exceptional hardship fund of £20,000 (increase from £10,000).

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Scheme options for 2018/19 were set out in paragraphs 5.1 to 5.10 of the report.

Reason for Decision

The current Council Tax Support Scheme for the City of Lincoln consisted of the following:

- backdating restricted to one month;
- restricted to Council Tax to Band B;
- inclusion of temporary absence from home rule (four weeks);
- maximum capital allowance of £10,000;
- minimum Council Tax Support award of up to £2 per week.

The current scheme was supported by the following technical amendments:

- any property empty (unoccupied and unfurnished) for less than two months would be granted 50% discount each month;
- if a property was empty (unoccupied and unfurnished) after two months, a full charge would apply;
- if a property remained empty (unoccupied and unfurnished) for more than two years, an additional levy of 50% would be charged making the total charge 150%, from the date the property first became empty;
- occupation of a property for less than six weeks was not counted as a break in the empty period;
- the discount on furnished properties which were no-one's sole or main residence (second home) was 0%.

The financial year 2017/18 was the fifth year of operating the Council Tax Support Scheme with the City of Lincoln's criteria, with last year being the first year where the Council had changed its scheme to include the above conditions, other than changes in legislation or upratings for example. It was noted that some residents had been adversely affected by the changes to the scheme, with some impacts being more than expected when initial modelling had been undertaken. The provision of a higher amount included in the exceptional hardship fund would have helped to mitigate these issues, which were unknown at the time of the modelling.

The process of reviewing the Council Tax Support Scheme was outlined in paragraphs 4.1 to 4.5 of the report, which also set out caseload changes from April 2013 and the current cost of the scheme. Based on modelling undertaken in August 2017, the Executive at its meeting on 25 September 2017 had agreed to consult on the following changes to the scheme:

- restriction on young person's allowance to two dependent children;
- abolish family premium;
- reduce maximum entitlement to either 95% or 90%;
- protection for vulnerable households;
- continuation of the exceptional hardship fund.

Formal consultation was held from 2 October 2017 to 10 November 2017, with details of responses being set out in Appendix 2 of the report. Key results had been summarised and were noted as follows:

- 73% of respondents agreed with the principles of the current scheme;
- 61% of respondents agreed with the restriction of young person's allowance;
- 39% of respondents agreed with the abolition of family premium;
- 29% of respondents agreed with a reduction to the maximum entitlement;
- 86% of respondents agreed to protection for vulnerable households;
- 82% of respondents agreed with the continuation of the exceptional hardship fund.

Additional consultation responses had been received from the Police and Crime Commissioner for Lincolnshire and Lincolnshire County Council as the Council's major preceptors for Council Tax, which were also appended to the report.

103. Council Tax Base 2018/19

Purpose of Report

To consider the Council Tax Base for the financial year 2018/19.

Decision

That Council be recommended to:

- (1) Note that there are no special items as defined in Section 35 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended) applicable to any part or parts of the City of Lincoln local authority area.

- (2) Approve the Chief Finance Officer's calculation of the Council Tax Base for the financial year commencing 1 April 2018 and ending 31 March 2019, as set out in Appendix B of the report.
- (3) Approve, in accordance with the Chief Finance Officer's calculation, and pursuant to the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992 (as amended), that the Council Tax Base for the 2018/19 financial year is 23,943.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

Reason for Decision

Prior to setting the Council Tax Base, the issue of any special items relating to a part of the Council's area must be considered. It was noted that there were no items of special expenditure.

Certain assumptions had been made in order to determine the number of dwellings within the authority's area, as set out in Appendix A of the report.

The calculation of the Council Tax Base, detailed in Appendix B of the report, showed the number of Band D equivalent chargeable dwellings as being 23,943 and assumed that 98.75% of the Council Tax due for 2018/19 would be collected.

The Council Tax Base number of Band D equivalent chargeable dwellings for 2018/19 had been calculated as 28,367. Deducting 4,424 calculated for the Localised Council Tax Support Scheme resulted in a proposed Council Tax Base for 2018/19 of 23,943.

104. Collection Fund Surplus or Deficit - Council Tax

Purpose of Report

To consider the estimated balance for the Council Tax element of the Collection Fund and the surplus or deficit to be declared for 2017/18.

Decision

That the action of the Chief Finance Officer in declaring a Council Tax surplus of £188,270 be confirmed.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

Reason for Decision

Prior to the setting of Council Tax for 2018/19, the City Council was required to estimate whether there would be a surplus or deficit on the Council Tax element of the Collection Fund for the current financial year 2017/18.

It was noted that the Chief Finance Officer would declare a surplus on Council Tax of £188,270 for the financial year 2017/18.

105. Consideration of a Community Grant Funded Lottery for the City of Lincoln Council

Purpose of Report

To report the growing trend in developing Local Authority lotteries to help fund community groups and seek Executive approval to set up a community lottery for Lincoln.

Decision

That the proposal to progress procurement of an external lottery manager with the aim of setting up a Lincoln Lottery in 2018 be approved.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

Reason for Decision

The purpose of the proposed Lincoln Lottery was to help fund discretionary support for local voluntary and community organisations as well as enable such organisations to raise funds directly for themselves. All funds raised would therefore benefit local people and communities.

It had been estimated that the lottery could raise between £15,000 and £20,000 in year one, rising to as much as £100,000 in year five.

Use of an external lottery manager would have a key role throughout the lifetime of the lottery and would be responsible for:

- provision of a bespoke lottery website for the Council, designed in partnership with the Council, as well as individual pages for all of the approved causes;
- ensuring that the website was viewable on all devices, fully secure and PCI compliant;
- provision of bespoke marketing advice to the Council, with updated materials monthly to retain freshness;
- support with both pre-launch and post-launch advice;
- provision of bespoke branded marketing material to all approved causes, in the form of printable and digital leaflets, image files for social media and unique links and QR codes;
- overall responsibility for all operative and administration requirements in the running of the lottery, including the provision of a named account manager;
- provision of a support helpline for the Council, but also customers who did not have access to online facilities.

The Council would need to nominate a position to be a licence holder within the authority. This would involve applying for an annual licence from the Gambling Commission with the support of the external lottery manager and would grant the person formal authorisation of monthly good cause payments and quarterly Gambling Commission submissions. It was therefore proposed that the Council's Financial Services Manager be named as the Council's licence holder.

A question was raised as to who would decide which charities or community projects would benefit from the lottery's good causes, taking into account that there were numerous national charities working at local level in the city, together with various independent charities and community groups. Appendix A to the report showed examples of other local authority lotteries and the good causes associated with them, which indicated a wide range of charitable and community based projects benefiting. The good causes as part of the Lincoln Lottery would be designed and worked up in due course once the external lottery manager was in place.

106. Lincolnshire County Homelessness Strategy 2017-2021

Purpose of Report

To provide an overview of the Lincolnshire County Homelessness Strategy 2017 – 2021 and seek approval of the Strategy.

Decision

That the Executive endorses the Lincolnshire Homelessness Strategy 2017 – 2021 and the intention to develop a detailed action plan.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

Reason for Decision

The Lincolnshire County Homelessness Strategy Group had worked together to undertake a review of homelessness within the area and to produce the third countywide strategy. A range of stakeholders had been consulted throughout the process.

It was noted that five themes had emerged as part of the strategy, as follows:

- partnership – developing and maintaining strategic partnerships;
- prevent – preventing homelessness wherever possible;
- protect – the most vulnerable from homelessness including rough sleeping;
- place – ensuring the right housing solutions for households;
- possibility – working towards a sustainable future for supported housing.

A countywide delivery plan, which required work from each local authority both individually and as a partnership, was under development to address these themes. Progress against the action plan would be co-ordinated and monitored through the Lincolnshire County Homelessness Strategy Group and District Housing Network.

Emerging challenges for the City of Lincoln were noted as follows:

- access to affordable housing options for all client groups but especially single persons aged under 35, reliant on Housing Benefit or Local Housing Allowance;
- increase in rough sleeping;
- general private sector housing access;

- implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act.

Members agreed that the Council needed to maintain a local perspective, reflecting that Lincoln was very different to other parts of the county. The subsequent action plan would detail how those issues identified in the Strategy would be addressed across the county.

It was emphasised that the Strategy related to families or individuals presenting themselves to the authority as homeless and did not relate to rough sleepers, which, legislatively, were considered as two separate issues. Reference was made to the Social Impact Bond, which commenced in September 2017, and the important support it provided to rough sleepers. Despite it still being very early in the life of the scheme, it was agreed that an update on the impact of the Social Impact Bond should be submitted to the Executive and that Members should receive regular update reports.

107. Choice Based Lettings Allocation Policy - Proposed Amendments

Purpose of Report

To seek approval for proposed amendments to the Choice Based Lettings Allocations Policy.

Decision

That the Executive endorses the proposed changes to the Choice Based Lettings Allocations Policy.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

Reason for Decision

The Choice Based Lettings Allocations Policy was considered by the Executive in January 2015 and a full review of the Policy was proposed for the summer of 2018.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 had been enacted and provisions would become operable from April 2018, which required one change to be made to the Allocations Policy now. In addition, it was proposed to make five other changes to the policy at the same time on the basis that the Choice Based Lettings IT software was currently being upgraded.

A copy of the existing Choice Based Lettings Allocation Policy was appended to the report. Proposed changes to this Policy included:

- a change to the Lincs Homefinder Partnership's membership, removing West Lindsey District Council following its decision to withdraw and procure its own Choice Based Lettings system;
- minimum age to apply for accommodation, clarifying that applicants must be aged 18 or over to apply for accommodation unless there was a statutory duty to accommodate or assist a person aged 16/17;
- direct lets to statutory homeless households, with the Council no longer allowing statutory homeless households to bid for accommodation. Instead, the Council would make a direct match of suitable

accommodation more quickly, moving vulnerable people and families out of temporary accommodation into settled accommodation;

- homeless relief duty, which was now owed to those who were assessed as likely to become homeless within 56 days. It was proposed that such assessed applications were placed in Band 2 of the allocations criteria;
- introduction of a transfer quota, meaning that 25% of general housing would be advertised with a preference to City of Lincoln tenants requiring a transfer to more suitable accommodation;
- refusals and non-bidding – with regard to refusals it was proposed that, following two unreasonable refusals, an application would be moved to Band 4 for a period of six months and at the end of the six month period their application would be reconsidered. In terms of non-bidding, the Council would reserve the right to remove an applicant from the waiting list if no bids were placed during a twelve month period when suitable properties had been advertised.

With regard to direct lets and statutory homeless households, a question was raised as to whether there was any evidence to confirm that some applicants did not place bids on suitable properties. It was noted that the Choice Based Lettings system was an online system that required registration and could be monitored to ascertain whether bids had been made.

Clarity was sought as to what would constitute an 'unreasonable' refusal. It was reported that this would be clarified in the Policy itself but an example was given of school provision or local ties that would need to be taken into consideration. There were also circumstances whereby people in temporary accommodation were not bidding for properties when they became available.

Discussion ensued on the homeless relief duty and it was noted that a slightly different approach applied to homeless people in that there would be no refusals as there was one offer of accommodation. The main aspect of the duty was about homelessness lettings, intervention and preventing people becoming homeless in the first instance.

It was agreed that an update on the outcomes of these changes to the Policy should be reported to the Executive in due course.

108. Lincoln Central Bus Station - Bus Station Order

Purpose of Report

To seek authority to confirm the making of a City of Lincoln Council (Lincoln Central Bus Station) Order 2018 and revocation of the City of Lincoln (City Bus Station) Order 1992.

Decision

That the making of the City of Lincoln Council (Lincoln Central Bus Station) Order 2018 be approved and the revocation of the City of Lincoln (City Bus Station) Order 1992 be authorised.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

Reason for Decision

As part of the Lincoln Transport Hub project, the Lincoln Central Bus Station element of the scheme was scheduled to commence operation on 28 January 2018.

The previous bus station was governed and operated in accordance with the City of Lincoln (City Bus Station) Order 1992.

As the new Lincoln Central Bus Station would operate from a new location, albeit close in proximity to the previous bus station, it had been necessary to pursue a new Order to designate the Lincoln Central Bus Station as a station for public service vehicles to be used. This would be subject to the provisions of the Order, as appended to the report.

The new Lincoln Central Bus Station was scheduled to officially open on 28 January 2018, subject to adverse weather impacting completion of some of the required works or anything significant resulting from final bus trials due to take place on Sunday 14 January 2018.

109. Proposals for Revision of Public Health Funeral Provision

Purpose of Report

To seek approval to amend the current level of public health funeral service provision to that of a direct crematorium service.

Decision

That the adoption of the direct cremation model for providing public health funerals be approved.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

Reason for Decision

The Council had a legal duty under the Public Health (Control of Diseases) Act 1984 to make arrangements where there were no known next of kin or other person who was able or willing to make those arrangements.

The number of public health funerals undertaken by the Council had grown significantly over recent years, with an associated rise in costs to the Environmental Health service area. The Council currently provided a full funeral service at the City Crematorium, which was an enhanced level of service over and above that which it was legally required to provide. It was therefore proposed that an alternative direct cremation model was used for public health funerals. This would provide significant financial savings, with the cost of a direct cremation being more than 50% less than the current model.

It was noted that the Council would continue to undertake public health funerals in a respectful and dignified manner, with a committal relating to a person's religion or belief being arranged should that be known.

110. Exclusion of the Press and Public

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business because it was likely that if members of the public were present there would be a disclosure to them of 'exempt information' as defined by Section 100I and Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

111. City Hall Cleaners

Purpose of Report

To consider a proposed increase in establishment for City Hall cleaners.

Decision

That option two, as set out in the report, be approved.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Alternative options considered were outlined in the report.

Reason for Decision

As a result of the Department for Work and Pensions moving into City Hall there was a requirement to increase the number of hours for cleaners to ensure that cleaning standards were maintained.

112. Asset Rationalisation

Purpose of Report

To approve the purchase of a property.

Decision

That the Executive approves the recommendation as set out in the report.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

Reason for Decision

The purchase of the property would generate revenue income for the authority which would contribute to the Towards Financial Sustainability Programme.