

Present: Councillor Stewart Ogden (*in the Chair*),
Councillor Donald Nannestad, Councillor Ray Cucksey
and Councillor Ric Metcalfe

Apologies for Absence: None.

1. Confirmation of Minutes - 23 February 2016

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 February 2016 be confirmed.

2. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

3. Communications Update

Purpose of Report

To update the Committee on communications in respect of the City of Lincoln Council/North Kesteven District Council Revenues and Benefits shared service.

Decision

That the report be noted.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

Reason for Decision

Members had requested that they be updated regularly on joint communications undertaken in respect of the shared service and so were updated on topics including:

- Partnership working with Citizens Advice;
- Digital Inclusion rollout;
- Educational Courses project with Lincoln College;
- Press releases that had recently been in the media regarding Council Tax.

The report was therefore noted.

4. Performance Update

Purpose of Report

To provide members with an update on performance in the shared service.

Decision

1. That the performance information be noted.

2. That a further performance update be presented at the meeting of Shared Revenues and Benefits on 6 September 2016. It was agreed this meeting would include the changes to the measures being reported for 2016/17.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

Reason for Decision

In order to ensure effective oversight of the performance of the shared service, members were provided with regular updates on performance in key areas of the service, including:

- Council Tax collections;
- Business Rates collections;
- Outstanding Revenues correspondence in the Document Management System;
- Housing Benefit overpayments;
- the collection of prior year arrears;
- benefits performance.

In addition to the performance measures provided within the report, the Head of the Shared Revenues and Benefits Service provided verbal updates regarding the latest performance information. Members therefore noted both positive and negative changes in performance, and any actions taken by officers to ameliorate relevant issues.

5. Revenues and Benefits - Financial Outturn 2015-16

Purpose of Report

To present to members the final performance and the forecast financial outturn in respect of the shared service for 2015/16.

Decision

1. That the actual position at the end of 2015/16 be noted.
2. That the budget adjustments for 2016/17 be approved as set out in paragraph 5.2 to the report provided, subject to the inclusion of an additional £47,461 in New Burdens funding across the shared service.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

Reason for Decision

The forecast outturn for 2015/16 predicted an underspend against the approved budget of £3,086 which was a variance of 0.1% of the revised budget. The previously approved budget for 2015/16 was based on revenue savings of £475,270 per annum following the implementation of the new staffing restructure on 1 February 2012 being realised across both councils.

A contingency budget of £50,000 had been included within Revenues and Benefits Management costs to cover unforeseen events and potential increased demands. In addition, a further amount of new burdens funding had been provided by the Department for Work and Pensions in relation to the provision of support for fraud investigations and welfare reform changes and so was also incorporated within the budget.

6. Discretionary Housing Payments and Welfare Reform Update

Purpose of Report

To update on Discretionary Housing Payments expenditure and any impacts from changes to procedures, Universal Credit preparation, and progress with the shared service's Welfare Reform Strategy Action Plan.

Decision

1. That the position in relation to Discretionary Housing Payment expenditure as well as the government grant figures for Discretionary Housing Payments in 2016/17 be noted.
2. That the Department for Work and Pension's Universal Credit progress be noted for the shared service.
3. That progress with the Welfare Reform Strategy Action Plan be noted.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

Reason for Decision

Demand against 2015/16 Discretionary Housing Payment grants remained high, particularly for the City of Lincoln Council with all the government grant having been utilised. The introduction of 'conditionality' in respect of Discretionary Housing Payments had not adversely affected customers.

There had been notification of 52 Council Tax support claims between 30 November 2015 and 1 May 2016 in relation to Universal Credit. Members noted that the impact to date had been low in terms of numbers and changes to processes.

Members were informed that there had been no further update in relation to the no TUPE arrangements and therefore the associated impacts could not be measured at this time. Members would be provided further detail regarding the timeline and Universal Credit rollout as this became available.

Members therefore considered and noted the report provided, which had been provided for their information.

7. Business Rates Agreement with West Lindsey District Council

Purpose of Report

To update Joint Committee with regard to a new agreement for our shared service to deliver Business Rates administration for West Lindsey District Council.

Decision

1. That members note the 5-year agreement for the Shared Service to administer Business Rates for West Lindsey District Council.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

Reason for Decision

At the 24 November 2015 meeting of the Shared Revenues and Benefits Committee it was agreed to formally transfer the administration of Business Rates on behalf of West Lindsey to the City of Lincoln Council as host of the shared service.

West Lindsey expressed a desire for a longer-term agreement. Following discussion from officers of all three authorities a five year period from the 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2021 had been agreed at a fixed cost per annum.