

Minutes of a meeting of the **CABINET** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Priory Road, Spalding, on Tuesday, 7 November 2023 at 6.30 pm.

PRESENT

C N Worth (Leader)

G J Taylor (Deputy
Leader)
T A Carter (Deputy
Leader)
J R Astill

H J W Bingham
A Casson
P A Redgate

E J Sneath
J Tyrrell

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A Woolf (Chairman, Policy Development Panel).

The Deputy Chief Executive – Corporate Development (S151), the Head of Revenues & Benefits (PSPS), the Team Leader - Revenues and Recovery (PSPS), the Head of Procurement (PSPS), the Group Manager – Insights and Transformation, the Group Manager – Communications and Engagement, the Democratic Services Manager and the Democratic Services Team Leader.

In Attendance: Councillor B Alcock (Chairman, Performance Monitoring Panel), Councillor A C Beal (Chairman, Governance & Audit Committee) and Councillor R A Gibson (Leader, Independent Group).

24. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.**

Apologies for absence were received from the Joint Chief Executive and the Chairman of the Policy Development Panel.

25. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meetings of Cabinet on 12 September 2023 and Special Cabinet on 26 September 2023 were agreed and signed by the Leader, after the points raised below had been considered:

- Cabinet minutes 12 September 2023 – minute 18. Members believed that no response had been provided to the question asked regarding the building of affordable housing by the developer the properties had been purchased from. Officers advised that a response would be circulated.
- Special Cabinet minutes 26 September 2023 – the Chief Finance Officer (PSPS) was listed as an attendee but had not been at the meeting. The minutes would be amended to reflect this.

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26. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no declarations of interest.

27. QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE PUBLIC UNDER THE COUNCIL'S CONSTITUTION (STANDING ORDERS).

There were none.

28. TO CONSIDER ANY MATTERS WHICH HAVE BEEN SUBJECT TO CALL-IN.

There were none.

29. TO CONSIDER MATTERS ARISING FROM THE POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING PANELS

There were none.

30. LGA CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE REPORT AND ACTION PLAN

Consideration was given to the report of the Assistant Director – Corporate which requested that Cabinet receive the findings of the SHDC LGA Corporate Peer challenge and an associated action plan.

The Leader presented the report, and addressed the particular items for concern as raised by the Peers:

- Overspend in previous year (£842,000 rather than £1 million as quoted in the report) – in line with Councils nationally, there were significant financial pressures aligned to homelessness, contract prices, pay, power and fuel.
- Internal Drainage Boards – This was an area of substantial challenge and although money had been received from central government, it was not sufficient to offset the full impact on the budgets for this or the last year.
- A new Cabinet had been in place following the District Election, and Portfolio Holders were working well with officers to identify options, efficiencies and income for both the current year and future years – this work was ongoing.
- The figures produced in March and reviewed by the Peer Review were now being updated as part of next year's budget setting process, with plans to be produced alongside that budget to address shortfalls.
- The Authority did have solid reserves and good cash balances and was therefore in a good position to manage these challenges over the short to medium term.

The following points were highlighted:

- The Key Recommendation at 2.9 (Strengthen how the voice of residents and communities systematically inform future service delivery and unlock the potential of the voluntary community sector) suggested that systematically routing in service user and community views would strengthen SHDC's intelligence on – and ability to respond to – service performance and community needs. Members

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commented that a number of bodies were invited to Cabinet members but not many took the opportunity to attend – efforts should be made to encourage these bodies to attend so that their views could be heard.

- The Peer Review stressed the need to look at more independence on scrutiny committees. The Constitution currently did not allow for lay people to serve on the Governance and Audit Committee (BBC and ELDC did have lay people on their equivalent committees). The Peer Review also stated that the Constitution was to be reviewed – what was the timescale for this?
 - The Leader responded that there was currently no specified timescale for the review however, it would be useful to have a lay person on the Governance and Audit Committee. This would tie in with the review of the Constitutions across all three councils. The review would take some time but the issue of lay people serving on the Governance and Audit Committee would be brought forward as soon as possible.
- There were a number of actions under the action plan – 1) Was there the capacity to deal with all of them; 2) What were the most important areas to contrate on; and 3) Within the Action Plan, a number of the housing–related actions were marked as N/A – why was this?
 - It was confirmed that there was the capacity to deal with the actions, and they were all priorities. The Leader commented that he believed the Medium-Term Financial Savings Action Plan was particularly important and good progress was being made with appointments within PSPS. A report would come forward in 6-12 months to provide progress on actions. Some were already ongoing or complete.
 - With regard to the items marked as N/A, it was confirmed that some of these were already being dealt with. It would however be worthwhile refreshing the Action Plan to make the status clearer.

DECISION:

- 1) That the findings from the LGA’s Corporate Peer Challenge at Appendix A be noted;
- 2) That the action plan at Appendix B be approved; and
- 3) That the update regarding the recommendations from the Housing Peer Review (Appendix C) be noted.

(Other options considered:

- *That the recommendations not be agreed.*

Reasons for decision:

- *To ensure that Cabinet is formally sighted on the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge findings and has an action plan in place to take forward the recommendations.)*

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31. **SUB-REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE SOUTH & EAST LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCILS PARTNERSHIP**

Consideration was given to the report of the Assistant Director – Corporate which recommended to Council the South & East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership Sub-regional Strategy.

The Leader presented the report, after which the following points were raised:

- At Appendix B within the comments relating to Vision, members commented that they seemed to imply progressing with BBC and ELDC to a standalone unitary authority – was this the case?
 - The Leader commented that when the Partnership had been set up, there had always been the option in the future to investigate the possibilities of becoming one council if required. This could provide many benefits and was an ambition laid out within the comments.
- Members stated that the missions from central government were very ambitious- it was hoped therefore that issues such as digital connectivity and transport infrastructure could be progressed more quickly. There was a need for considerable input in these areas.
- At 2.6 within the covering report under feedback from the SHDC Joint Policy Development and Performance Monitoring Panel meeting of 11 October 2023, one of the responses to the feedback was ‘specific reference to parish councils removed in all three to avoid confusion’ – why was it believed that there would be confusion?
 - Officers advised that one of the other authority’s had requested it as it was felt that there was too much detail in the Strategy, that the number of Parish Councils was found elsewhere and that it was not relevant to the Strategy itself. Consistency across all three authorities was required.

DECISION:

That Cabinet agree to recommend to Council:

- 1) That the Sub-regional Strategy at Appendix A be agreed, subject to any final consultation feedback as agreed by the Leader as portfolio holder; and
- 2) That the Sub-regional Strategy becomes a line of inquiry in the Partnership’s Annual Scrutiny.

(Other options considered:

- *Do nothing. It had already been agreed by councillors, via the Annual Delivery Plan, that a Sub-regional Strategy for the Partnership should be developed. As such, this option was discounted.*

Reasons for decision:

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- *The opportunity to align strategic priorities across the Councils through a single Sub-regional Strategy provided a Partnership platform to further realise the benefits of collaborative working;*
- *Having the single Strategy would demonstrate to external partners our alignment in key areas and collective focus on addressing the issues of strategic importance to our sub-region. This would be particularly helpful when engaging with Government and funders.)*

32. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION REGULATIONS POLICY

Consideration was given to the report of the Assistant Director Governance and Monitoring Officer which presented a draft updated FOI/EIR policy for the Council and sought approval from Cabinet.

The Portfolio Holder - Corporate, Governance and Communications presented the report.

DECISION:

That the draft FOI/EIR Policy be approved.

(Other options considered:

- *That the recommendations not be agreed.*

Reasons for decision:

- *To ensure the Council was meeting its statutory requirements in relation to FOI and EIR.)*

33. PROCUREMENT STRATEGY - 2023-2026

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Procurement and Contracts which asked Cabinet to consider a new Procurement Strategy for 2023 – 2026.

The Portfolio Holder – Finance, Commercialisation, UKSPF and Levelling Up presented the report, after which the following points were raised:

- The Governance and Audit Committee had considered the document which was very welcome. Procurement was being dealt with by PSPS – it was important to ensure that appropriate management controls were in place. In addition, was there a procedure in place for officers within PSPS to declare any interests?
 - Officers explained their process for declarations of interest and confirmed that procedures were in place.
- Members commented that scrutiny was mentioned but not defined – how would scrutiny take place, and how would success be measured? It was again stated that there was a great reliance on IT and this must be a priority. Additionally, the question of affordability was a concern to be noted. Finally, were there any added costs to the authority for PSPS taking on the responsibility for procurement?

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- Officers responded that an Action Plan with timescales would be produced and this would be shared on an annual basis with all that wished to scrutinise it. The action plan would focus on articulating the main areas of focus for the services being provided. With regard to the cost of the service, this had already been incorporated into the budget. The service was already identifying savings and areas where price increases could be avoided through smarter procurement.

DECISION:

- 1) That the Procurement Strategy at Appendix 1 be approved;
- 2) That the feedback from Policy Development Panel be noted

(Other options considered:

- *To do nothing – this would result in the Council continuing to have no formal Procurement Strategy in place.*

Reasons for decision:

- *To ensure that the Council had a clear Procurement Strategy for the next 3 years;*
- *To agree a single approach to procurement across the Partnership that maximised the savings opportunities for the Councils;*
- *To ensure compliance with audit requirements as some of the Partner Councils have had audit recommendations to update their Procurement Strategies.*
- *To help support key Council priorities, such as sourcing local suppliers, procuring sustainably and ethically.)*

34. LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME (CONSULTATION) 2024/25

Consideration was given to the report of the Deputy Chief Executive – Corporate Development (S151) which requested that Cabinet agree consultation proposals for the local Council Tax Support scheme, 2024/25.

The Portfolio Holder – Finance, Commercialisation, UKSPF and Levelling Up presented the report, after which the following points were raised:

- The report mentioned that the review provided the opportunity to simplify scheme administration – this was welcomed.
- Under Financial Implications, it was noted that further investment may be required for software – the importance of IT was again stressed.

DECISION:

That consultation on continuation of the current Council Tax Support scheme, including uprating in line with DWP's annual update of allowances and premiums for 2024/25 be approved.

(Other options considered:

- *To do nothing – this would see the current scheme retained without uprating.*

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Reasons for decision:

- *To continue to align the CTS scheme and uprating for working age customers with DWP provisions for Housing Benefit and the CTS scheme for pensioners. This had been consistent each year since the introduction of the local scheme;*
- *Additional analysis work as part of this year's review added further emphasis to the need for a more fundamental scheme review, and work would be in the next few months with any resulting new scheme being implemented 2025/26).*

35. DEBT WRITE OFF

Consideration was given to the report of the Deputy Chief Executive – Corporate Development (S151) which sought approval for the write off of uncollectable debt.

The Portfolio Holder – Finance, Commercialisation, UKSPF and Levelling Up presented the report.

Members agreed that only the principles of the report would be discussed and there was therefore no need for the meeting to go into private session.

DECISION:

That the amounts identified in the report, as detailed below, be approved for write off:

Council Tax	£ 2,582.45
Business Rates	£39,997.17
Housing Benefit Overpayment	£ 4,240 30
Total	£46,819.92

(Other options considered:

- *Not to approve the amounts for write off, however this would leave uncollectable debt showing on the Council's records.*

Reasons for decision:

- *All recovery methods have been considered and where appropriate pursued, before making the decision to write off. Debts will be written off against provisions in the Council's accounts.*
- *Officer time can be maximized on greatest returns, at the same time as ensuring robust procedures for debt management are in place across all revenue streams.*

36. ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE LEADER DECIDES ARE URGENT.

There were none.

(The meeting ended at 7.14 pm)

(End of minutes)

Any RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL detailed above will be submitted for consideration to the meeting of the full Council on **22 November 2023**.