

Present: (Chairman), Councillor Anton Dani (Vice-Chairman), Councillors Tom Ashton, Alison Austin, David Brown, Frank Pickett, Judith Skinner and Yvonne Stevens

Councillor Paul Skinner Portfolio Holder / Councillor Jonathan Noble Portfolio Holder and Councillor Richard Austin Portfolio Holder.

In attendance:

Officers –

Assistant Director - Assets, Assistant Director - Economic Growth, Assistant Director - Finance (Deputy S151 Officer) and Strategic Finance Manager

39 MINUTES

On seeking committees' approval to sign the minutes of the previous meeting a member noted that they were relieved to see the exempt minute tabled on pink papers, following an initial tabling within the public report pack.

A further member noted that they had been named in their role as Mayor within the minutes, which should not have been recorded and their attendance should be correctly noted as a non-committee member.

It was agreed that the amendment be made in respect of the use of the term 'Mayor' and that the Chairman would sign an amended set of minutes thereafter.

40 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were tabled by Councillors Paul Goodale, Yvonne Stevens, Peter Watson and Judith Welbourn.

41 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None recorded

42 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

None recorded.

43 FIRST DRAFT SELCP ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2023-2028

The Assistant Director – Assets (and Lead Officer for the committee) presented the report confirming that as Sovereign Councils and as a Partnership, it had been recognised that the effective use of land and property assets formed one of the essential ingredients for high quality service delivery and creating and ensuring value for our residents. The aim was to manage a well-planned and well maintained property portfolio, ensuring that the Partnership could demonstrate value for money and, more importantly, that by using its' assets well, secure wide value for our community.

Whilst previous plans had been taken into consideration, the Asset Strategy was purposefully drafted to be high level in that it set out the guiding principles of Asset Management for SELCP, and only set a focussed number of high level actions, in order to shape and drive the detailed work necessary to manage and maintain our assets.

Although it superseded each Council's highest level Asset Management Plan, it did not immediately supersede the various process and policy documents that sat below those Plans that existed across the SELCP, as those documents may or indeed may not need amendment following a 'detailed review of the detail'; for example, South Holland District Council's 2020 Industrial Unit Lettings Policy remained fit for purpose and would not become defunct as a result of the Strategy.

The strategy would have a five year scope with five strategic priorities set out, driving the monitoring, review and updating of the Strategy to ensure it remained relevant and fit for purpose throughout. It also covered all of each Council's operational and non-operational general fund assets.

HE Partnership Councils each had a diverse asset base which included land and buildings used in part or wholly to deliver services, with many car parks and open spaces within each respective areas. They further had income generating assets including commercial and industrial units along with land and property concessions let to the market at commercial rates. Community assets included country parks and various recreational areas.

The guiding principles of this strategy were to:

- Promote the efficient, effective and sustainable use of land and buildings and protect and optimise the value of all general fund Council assets to each Council and the communities they serve
- Generate efficiency gains, capital receipts and most importantly, maximise revenue income in order to 'self-fund' repairs and maintenance as far as possible and use any surpluses to support other council services
- Ensure that our assets are appropriately maintained and that all statutory land and property requirements are always met or exceeded
- Pursue innovative accommodation solutions that meet each council's current and future needs
- Reduce carbon emissions and improve environmental sustainability wherever a and whenever it is reasonably practicable to do so

Committee deliberation followed which included:

On questioning the first two bullet points on page 16 a member queried that they did not read in a compatible manner and it was agreed to remove the word only from the first bullet point to read assets should be retained.

A further suggestion noted that it would be beneficial to have a member briefing on the subject too enable members to understand the process moving forward.

There was overall agreement at the alignment to a single team to create resilience across the partnership but caution was urged in respect of any disposal of an asset which was emotive to the electorate and members were reassured that consultation would take place ahead of any final determination by the Cabinet, with significant assets being declared as surplus to go through to full scrutiny ahead of any decision being made.

Confirmation was further provided that Boston and SHDC would raise their current level asset management to that of ELDC with reiteration that all decision would be at Sovereign level with all decision being made by for Boston assets by Boston.

Responding to questions raised by a non-committee member the Assistant Director – Assets advised that all assets would be under review including the Municipal Buildings with ELDC having already downsized its office infrastructure which had proved highly successful and cost effective. The new strategy would not only look at disposal of assets but also enable consideration of acquisitions moving forward. SHDC housing stock income was not included. The intent was that that the three authorities would each have an independent stand-alone contract with Technology Forge and in response to a question asking if an outcomes of the strategy would involve redundancies, replied that he anticipated growth and not redundancies.

RECOMMEDED:

That the Corporate and Community Committee having considered the draft at Appendix 1 commented on:

- its form and purpose;
- the 'guiding principles' suggested at section 1.4;
- the suggested 'strategic approach' to asset management at section 2.6;
- the five draft 'strategic priorities' set out and the delivery date proposed
- and subject to the amendment to the first bullet point on page 16 to take out the word only from the context,
- Recommends to Cabinet that it considers the final version and formally adopts the Strategy.

44 PARTNERSHIP POLICY ALIGNMENT

The Business Intelligence and Change Manager presented the report confirming that following the Partnership scrutiny recommendation regarding the alignment of key policies, the update aimed to provide a list of those policies identified for review and alignment in 23/24 as part of the emerging Annual Delivery Plan. Members were advised that as part of the Partnership's scrutiny a recommendation was made stating With regard to the alignment of key policies, a list of those identified on the policy register to be part of the Annual Delivery Plans going forward, to be taken to each Council's relevant committee for review.

Committee deliberation followed which included:

There was recognition of the possibility of a change in elected members who would be reviewing the new policies after the forthcoming election, but support was tabled for the introduction of the street naming policy enabling both the borough and parish councillors to have input into suitable and relevant street names for their respective areas.

Questioning the scheduled review dates a member asked if the customer access strategy, the homelessness strategy and the markets review be presented prior to quarter 4 of the current year. The Business Intelligence and Change Manager advised that the review dates listed had been based on the soonest expiry date of the subject for review, however the request tabled for the items to be reviewed ahead of Q4 would be taken forward.

Committee noted the report.

45 NATIONAL PORTFOLIO ORGANISATION

The Assistant Director – Economic Growth presented the report confirming that it provided an overview of the National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) funding from Arts Council England (ACE) and the proposed recommendations for Boston Cabinet.

Arts Council England (ACE) had confirmed investment for the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership (SELCP) from the 2023-2026 Investment Programme for National Portfolio Organisation.

Funding per annum of £651,993 (total of £1,955,799) would commence from April 2023 to March 2026.

Arts Council England (ACE) had also confirmed investment for the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership (SELCP) area from the 2023-2026 Investment Programme for National Portfolio Organisation. Funding per annum of £651,993 (total of £1,955,799) would commence from April 2023 and continue to March 2026.

The funding would be awarded to East Lindsey District Council as the accountable body for activity across the SELCP area. In 2021, East Lindsey District Council and Boston Borough Council received ACE funding to develop a Cultural Strategy. Both Councils had agreed a Cultural Framework with two place based action plans, along with a commitment to extending to reflect the new geography of the Partnership and incorporating South Holland District Council. The principles of the strategy – Cultural Framework for Renewal – were reflected in the application for NPO status. Following notification of NPO Investment in November, documents providing details of the activity plan and financial profile for the period April 2023 – March 2024 were submitted to Arts Council England (ACE) for approval prior to the funding award in April 2023.

Prior to moving into committee deliberation the Portfolio Holder pointed out that the designation to National Portfolio Holder status was a very important move for Boston. It enabled a step up for the area for culture and heritage and he tabled his congratulations to the Assistant Director – Economic Growth on achieving the status for the Borough. He noted his priority would be to ensure a smart management in place to get the best out of the £2mil allocated to Boston.

Significant committee deliberation followed which included:

On questioning the reasoning for ELDC being selected as the accountable body for funding, a member was advised that they had been selected as they already had systems in place with Magna Vitae.

Noting the Guildhall as being the nominated hub for Boston a member asked who would run it as Boston had previously turned down Magna Vitae as they solely concentrated on sport and mass cultural events and not on heritage assets. Reassurance was provided that there would be no change to the running of the Guildhall, the growth directorate would work collaboratively with the community's director and any activity at the Guildhall would take into the consideration the outcomes of its recent review.

Referencing the proposal for independent representation onto the board a member asked who would make the decision on who that would be. In response, committee were advised that it was a requirement of funding to oversee the programme and ACE had proposed a one of their own members along with one from each Council area and that representation from external organisations would also be welcomed.

The majority of members voiced their support and enthusiasm at the future use of the Guildhall and at the success of the application.

In response to a number of questions from a non-committee members, the Assistant Director – Economic Growth advised that Magna Vitae had independently bid for funding in their own right as an NPO and that funding was to solely fund the SO festival in the summer on the coast. Initially the Councils had considered running the scheme in-house, but with ELDC's relationship with Magna Vitae who had experience and expertise in the field it had been agreed that was the best route forward at the current time, but no final decision had been made as the final reporting would go through all three Cabinet/Executives simultaneously for final decision making.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Corporate and Community Committee:

- Agree to East Lindsey District Council as the Accountable Body for the Funding.
- Support the Activity Plan, the in-kind commitment, including Boston Guildhall as a Cultural Hub, and propose representation for the Culture Board.

46 BUDGET OVERVIEW 2023/24 AND DRAFT BUDGET

Prior to presenting the report the Assistant Director – Finance apologised for the lateness of the report resulting from the covering report needing to be re-published and confirmed that section 7 was the only difference in the papers issued. The report for the draft budget at Appendix A, including the areas of pressure that would be considered as part of this year's budget setting process, the details of the Council's Provisional Funding Settlement and the proposed level of Council Tax for 2023/24. The Treasury Management Policy and Draft Strategy Statement for the 2023/24 financial year was also included at Appendix B to the report. The Section 151 Officer apologised for the lateness of the report and advised Members that she was happy to offer a further briefing when the budget setting process was complete. A presentation the followed which was attached to the as Appendix A to the minutes.

Significant committee discussion followed which included:

A member questioned the large jump from 155 to 220 in charges for 'other small areas' within the table for fees and charges and was advised that the information would be provided after the meeting, alongside information requested by the same member for an explanation for the increase in rental income from 696 to 968.

On questioning checks were in place to cover costs and what mitigation measure were in place if not, a member was advised that service cover and costs formed part of the review to ensure those that should break even, did so. Some fees were statutory which could not be changed and some were regulatory and required to meet costs.

Concern was noted at the proposed salary increase of 5% for staff resulting in the Council expecting its staff to take a possible 6/7% pay cut in relation to inflation, which could result in the Council being unable to secure specialist staff and also the potential of losing valuable staff with inflation currently at 11%.

The Portfolio Holder addressed the meeting to respond to some questions and stated that it was important to keep public pay sector demands to a reasonable level and noted that inflation had been higher. He agreed that certain areas needed to pay a good salary to get the experienced staff required.

Responding to a query in respect of the decrease in leisure income he advised that the service lost money each year and was in need of an efficient system of management as it was not realistic to take such a loss in income each year.

A non-committee member questioned the reference to supporting economic growth within the medium term and was advised it would be achieved by working with local business to encourage them to take up residence.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Corporate and Community committee:

Recommends that Cabinet recommends to Council to approve the budget setting report 2023/24 and associated financial strategies 2023/24 to 2027/28 which includes the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy.

47 CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

The Chairman addressed the meeting stating he wanted to ensure that a mechanism would be in place to ensure no repeat of the failure to provide Christmas Lighting for Boston and, as the Council would be moving into Purdah in the future weeks which would prevent any discussion taking place, that the subject be deferred until after the forthcoming elections.

Suggestions were made for a review by a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group, but it was also suggested that the subject go to the Boston Town Area Committee who could apply for funding for the future provision of Christmas Lights.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Corporate and Community committee agreed to defer the item for consideration by the BTAC as an urgent matter at its first meeting of the year 2023/24 allowing time prior to that meeting for funding to be applied for and that the new BTAC be provided with an overview of the reasons for the request aligned with the concerns and issues raised by the previous members of the Council.

48 WORK PROGRAMME

Committee noted the work programme.

The Meeting Closed at 8.50 pm