



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on 16th September 2021

ECONOMY SCRUTINY PANEL

6th July 2021 at 6.00 p.m.

Present:

Councillor Harness (in the Chair)

Councillors Callison, Cairns, Dawkins, Smith, Westcott and Wilson (substitute for Sheridan).

Officers in attendance:

- Dave Baker (Contract Business Manager - Engie)
- Carolina Borgstrom (Assistant Director for Environment)
- Anne Campbell (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)
- Wendy Fisher (Estates and Business Development Manager, Assets)
- Luke Greaves (Head of Highways and Transport – Engie)
- Damien Jaines-White (Assistant Director Regeneration)
- Simon Jones (Assistant Director Law, Governance and Assets [Monitoring Officer])
- Ian King (Spatial Planning Manager – Engie)
- Guy Lonsdale (Deputy Section 151 Officer/Finance Group Manager)
- Mark Nearney (Assistant Director of Housing, Highways and Transport)
- Dave Tipple (Relationship Manager)

Also in attendance:

- Councillor Jackson (Leader of the Council)
- Councillor Shreeve (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets)

There was one member of the public present.

SPE.5 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from this meeting were received from Councillors Furneaux and Sheridan.

Apologies for absence from this meeting were also received from Councillor S Swinburn, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport.

SPE.6 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Councillor Dawkins declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in SPE.13 as his spouse is employed by Engie.

SPE.7 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meetings of the Economy Scrutiny Panel held on 9th February and 9th March 2021 be agreed as a correct record.

SPE.8 QUESTION TIME

There were no questions from members of the public for this meeting.

SPE.9 FORWARD PLAN

The panel received the published Forward Plan and members were asked to identify any items for examination by this Panel via the pre-decision call-in procedure.

RESOLVED – That the Forward Plan be noted.

SPE.10 TRACKING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF SCRUTINY

The panel received a report from the Statutory Scrutiny Officer (Assistant Chief Executive). Members noted that there were no items remaining in its tracking report.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

SPE.11 ECONOMY SCRUTINY PANEL - WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22

The panel considered a report from the Statutory Scrutiny Officer (Assistant Chief Executive) summarising the panel's 2021/22 work programme and a draft timetable of activities to undertake this work.

Introducing the report, the Chair again thanked members for their enthusiasm to challenge and influence the wide range of items covered within the programme. It was noted members and substitute members had met to determine a draft programme at an informal workshop held on 15th June 2021. The programme remained a 'work in progress' and would be regularly updated to react and reflect changing priorities.

RESOLVED – That the 2021/22 work programme for this panel be agreed.

SPE.12 LEVELLING UP FUND BID

The panel received a report from the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport regarding approval to submit a bid for the Government's Levelling Up Fund. Members noted this report was considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 16 June 2021 and was submitted to this panel for comment. In the absence of the portfolio holder, the Leader introduced the report. He acknowledged local media and community interest associated with potential future housing development and encouraged the panel to focus on the strategic link road and other projects detailed in the report.

Members raised the following issues:

There was a query regarding why the A180, Westgate roundabout and Gilbey Road traffic lights had not been included as a priority project given the constant congestion. Mr Greaves advised that there was explicit guidance around bidding for funds. Pyewipe, Westgate and Gilbey Road had been the subject of previous, unsuccessful, bids as funding had been withdrawn and re-directed by central government. However, the bid did include improvements to Westgate. He added that the rationale around the Western link road was to take traffic away from urban Grimsby and redirect it via the new link road. This would achieve access to employment and address pinch point junctions.

In response to comments about the safe access and egress on to new cycleways, Mr Greaves advised that consultation and design development was still to take place. Mr Nearney confirmed that detailed designs would be brought back and members would have an opportunity to undertake a check and balance of final proposals. He went on to reassure the Chair that cyclists were considered in the original design rather than as a retrofit.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets responded to question about an unsuccessful bid advising that if funds were not received the priority element may displace other projects in the capital programme. Alternative funding sources would also be pursued. He confirmed that this bid was specifically aimed at transport with a regional levelling-up fund bid targeting inward investment. It was not yet known if the funds would be ringfenced in any way.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

Note – Councillor Dawkins left the meeting at this point, having declared an interest in the following item.

SPE.13 ENGIE PERFORMANCE - END OF YEAR REPORT

The panel received a report containing a summary of performance against key performance indicators for the above period.

Members raised the following issues:

In response to the Chair, Mr Nearney confirmed that he would be presenting a report to the panel on empty homes and the achievement of targets. There were various projects across the borough, with different partners working with the council. It was true that projects were taking time to complete mainly due to financial and legal aspects.

Referring to cycleways (A46), a member urged that consideration be given to the ease with which a cyclist was able to enter and leave cycleways. The member was willing to meet with officers and/or to arrange a cycle tour to demonstrate his concerns. Mr Tipple acknowledged the member's offer.

Regarding house completions (new homes), Mr Tipple confirmed this was a concern but added that a number of future completions were anticipated. The panel noted that demolitions affected this performance indicator.

In response to a question from the Chair, Mr Tipple acknowledged that the land supply yearly figure fluctuated. This indicator would depend upon the outcome of the Government's consultation on the 'planning for the future' white paper and eventual legislation.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

Note – Councillor Dawkins returned to the meeting following consideration of this item.

SPE.14 ENERGY CARBON ROADMAP

The panel received a briefing note from the Assistant Director for Environment updating the panel on the Council's response to the climate emergency declaration.

The Leader introduced the report alluding to the Council's 2019 climate emergency declaration and the area's reliance on industries associated with high carbon emissions. New renewable industries in the borough were reversing this tradition; moving North East Lincolnshire (NEL) towards a low carbon economy.

Members raised issues including carbon capture, carbon mitigation, offshore wind farms, employment impact, Humber Zero, the Humber-side Leadership Board, Myenergi, the increase in high tech well-paid jobs in NEL, green transport, electric vehicle charging, the potential for new homes to be 'greener', hydrogen gas versus north sea gas, access to grants and schemes for residential properties, and transportation of hydrogen gas.

Ms Borgstrom and the Leader responded to all queries within the debate and invited any further comments or questions to be sent via email, which would receive a written response.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

SPE.15 2020/21 PROVISIONAL OUTTURN REPORT

The panel received a report from the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets providing key information and analysis of the Council's position and performance against its Finance and Commissioning Plan at the end of the 2020/21 financial year. The panel noted this report was considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 16th June 2021 and was referred to all scrutiny panels.

The portfolio holder introduced his report stressing the challenges of presenting a balanced budget in these difficult times. He highlighted key elements within the terms of reference of this panel and invited questions from members.

Members raised issues including small business rate relief extension, the challenge of collecting business rates post-COVID, emergency decisions and decision records, loss of fees and charges, the adequate level of council reserves, resource capacity issues and delivery of the capital programme:

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

SPE.16 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER

There were no members' questions to the Portfolio Holder.

SPE.17 CALLING-IN OF DECISIONS

There were no formal requests from members to call in decisions taken at recent meetings.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 7.25 p.m.