



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

ECONOMY SCRUTINY PANEL

31st August 2021 at 6.30 p.m.

Present:

Councillor Furneaux (in the Chair)
Councillors Callison, Cairns, Dawkins, Harness, Hogan, Sheridan and Smith

Officers in attendance:

- Dave Baker (Contract Business Manager - Engie)
- Anne Campbell (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)
- Simon Jones (Assistant Director Law, Governance and Assets [Monitoring Officer])
- Guy Lonsdale (Deputy Section 151 Officer/Finance Group Manager)
- Jacqui Wells (Housing Programme Manager)
- Paul Thorpe (Operations Director)

Also in attendance:

- Councillor Jackson (Leader of the Council)
- Councillor Shreeve (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets)
- Councillor S. Swinburn (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport)

There were three members of the public and one press representative present.

SPE.18 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence from this meeting.

SPE.19 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest received in respect of any item on the agenda for this meeting

SPE.20 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Economy Scrutiny Panel meetings held on 9th June and 6th July 2021 be agreed as an accurate record.

SPE.21 QUESTION TIME

The panel had received two questions, submitted by a member of the public, Mr Stephen Holland. With the permission of the Chair, Mr Holland addressed the panel.

Question one: “North East Lincolnshire Council has applied for £36m from the Levelling Up Fund to construct a relief road as part of the Grimsby West Development plan. In a recent interview on Radio Humberside, the Council Leader stated “that road is there to actually reduce the amount of travel that will be taking place because it will take vehicles out of urban areas and will reduce travel time and travel distance from the urban areas into the industrial areas and the business areas on the South Bank of the Humber and it’s actually designed to reduce the amount of travel and the amount of emissions as a result of that and take vehicles and emissions out of urban areas so we will actually help with that.” The report to Cabinet in support of the bid makes a similar claim. Every study that we have looked at to date clearly indicates that such roads actually increase carbon emissions. More traffic is induced and if driving times are reduced, people are inclined to drive more often and commute further. In addition, according to the local plan, this road is to form an integral part of the housing development and specifically not a ‘by-pass’ to relieve traffic pressure. On what evidence or basis is North East Lincolnshire Council stating that the planned relief road will reduce carbon emissions?”

The Chair assured Mr Holland the panel took a keen interest in developments at Grimsby West and appreciated the level of public interest. He emphasised that matters were currently associated to a bid for funding. However, he envisaged that scrutiny would play a large role in any future proposals.

Councillor S Swinburn, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport, provided the following response: *“It is considered that a strategic link road in this location, meeting appropriate design standards, will divert existing and future north to south traffic from the congested core network of North East Lincolnshire. Traffic modelling will take place in due course and will be used to gauge the level of traffic which should be expected to divert trips to the new link road from A16 Peaks Parkway, A18, Bargate, Little Coates Road and other alternative routes. This data will be used in the assessment of air quality as part of the planning process and will be available publicly via the planning portal. Whilst the road will form part of the western development extent, connect to it and be integrated, the key design requirement and hence the request for Levelling Up funding is to ensure a road scheme provides strategic benefits rather than adding new*

development without addressing existing traffic and environmental matters for the district. Reducing emissions caused by congestion in highly populated areas presents a strategic benefit to North East Lincolnshire.”

Question two: “The second question again relates to the recently submitted Levelling-Up Fund Bid. The Levelling-Up Fund prospectus requires under Section 3.6 for the bidding authorities to consult a range of local stakeholders across the full geography of a place in developing their proposed investments for the Fund. Potential relevant local stakeholders and partners include local businesses, public transport providers, police and emergency services, community representatives, environmental representatives and universities and FE Colleges (FECs). Where relevant, bidding authorities should also consider how to reach stakeholders from harder to reach rural communities in formulating proposals. Bids should demonstrate evidence of this overall local engagement as part of their strategic case through stakeholder letters or similar. Could the council provide assurance this requirement has been met and that community representatives, including those from some of our most deprived areas, and environmental representatives have been consulted through stakeholder letters or similar.”

Councillor S Swinburn, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport, provided the following response: *“The levelling-up fund bid looks to deliver key infrastructure which was consulted on extensively as part of the Local Plan consultation process. This included all relevant statutory bodies, local interest groups, parish councils, local businesses, members of the public, emergency services etc and was consulted on over several years. The consultation for this process was independently scrutinised by the Planning Inspectorate, who agreed that the process followed was sound and appropriate for the Local Plan process. Further engagement and consultation will come as part of the development of the overall levelling-up fund bid. All the Council has done so far is compete for available grant funding to deliver infrastructure embedded in the Local Plan, which was adopted in March 2018. If we are successful with our application then the detail will be worked up, shaped by engagement and consultation with all relevant stakeholders. With an application for funds of this size, some £50m, it follows that there will be a lot of preparatory work and engagement in shaping proposals and getting into a position of delivery. Clearly, we are competing against all local authorities for a finite pot. Until we have an indication of our success, or not, there’s little further to engage upon. Our website now has a dedicated area for “Grimsby West” featuring frequently asked questions (FAQ’s) and background. In addition, any link road will be subject to planning consent and the consultation requirements associated with this.”*

Mr Holland was advised that the responses would be advised to him, in writing.

In closing, the Chair confirmed that should the bid be successful, this scrutiny panel would include relevant items within its work programme.

SPE.22 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.23 TRACKING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF SCRUTINY

The panel noted there were no outstanding items in relation to tracking its recommendations made at previous meetings.

SPE.24 HOUSING DELIVERY MODEL

The panel received a report from the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Housing and Tourism on the council's housing delivery model. The panel noted this report would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting to be held on 8th September 2021 and was submitted to the panel for pre-decision consideration and comment. The Leader introduced the report and explained the rationale behind the report and the delivery model.

Members raised the following issues:

Regarding expressions of interest in developing the Western site, the Leader confirmed that there was considerable interest in the site.

In response to questions about the preferred number and blend of developers, the Leader explained that the delivery model gave flexibility to determine whether multiple small developers or one single development would best suit the site(s).

Ms Wells clarified that the Matthew Humberston playing field site referred to a single site behind Davenport Drive. The development would likely consist of 58 small retirement or first-time buyer homes plus a number of extra-care homes. The site would be promoted at market value.

Ms Wells reassured the panel that deliverability of the developments and any other risks related to the impacts of Brexit, Covid-19 and competing development sites were properly taken account of in the risk assessment. This was not included in the report now submitted.

The Chair was pleased to see that on-site charging points were to be included in new builds and gained assurance, from Ms Wells, that Homes England's timescales would be imposed within developers' contracts to ensure sites were completed in agreed timescales.

RESOLVED – That the report and panel's comments be noted.

SPE.25 FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT 2021/22 - QUARTER 1

The panel received a report from the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources providing key information and analysis of the Council's position and performance at the end of quarter one of the 2020/21 financial year. The panel noted this report was considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 11th August 2021 and referred to all scrutiny panels.

Mr Lonsdale highlighted elements of the report within the remit of the panel. The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets added that, as this report was the first quarter, it was an achievement for 'economy' to be projecting an underspend. Notwithstanding continuing challenges from the impact of COVID-19 and demands from adult and children's social care, he was confident that current restructuring would bring stability and control to budgets

In response to questions, Mr Lonsdale advised that the council had not been notified of any additional funding. The usual spending review announcements from Government were expected in October. He reminded the panel that the financial strategy was closely linked to the economic strategy. Growing the business and council tax rates was key to council funding. The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets added that central Government had allocated additional funding to local government over the pandemic with each council making claims for special cases and unique circumstances. He stressed that, to be sustainable in the long term, the council must grow its business and council tax base. To illustrate this, he gave an example of the impact of increasing council tax band D properties.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

SPE.26 REGENERATION PARTNERSHIP PERFORMANCE REPORT - QUARTER 1

The panel received a report from ENGIE containing a summary of performance against key performance indicators for the period April to June 2021.

Members raised the following issues:

In response to a question, Mr Thorpe responded that the staffing capacity of civil enforcement officers (CEO) was 11.5 full time equivalent (FTE). Officers worked rotating shifts ensuring the service operated over seven days; Monday to Friday 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday to Sunday 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. This was in excess of the contracted requirement for 9.5 FTE. He added that a current review would see an increase in enforcement software and street based closed circuit television early in the new year. New ways of working would greatly enhance the CEO's ability to successfully enforce contraventions.

Regarding empty homes, Mr Thorpe acknowledged the current target and advised that the numbers of empty homes were increasing but so too were the numbers being returned to use. Empty homes were a priority and additional capacity was being brought to bear.

Mr Thorpe committed to respond in writing to a member regarding the number of demolitions affecting targets relating to planning policy.

Regarding the number of work orders created from safety inspections (footways), Mr Thorpe advised that whilst this was a challenge, the practice of risk-based inspection and regular site visits to the network ensured that sufficient resources were in place. The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport added that all sites were visited twice a year and risk assessed against agreed standards. This function was taken seriously and the council did all it could to ensure that people were safe.

Mr Thorpe assured the panel that highways officers visited utility companies works to footways and the highway to inspect quality of finish. The service also operated a permit scheme and follow-up visits to ensure that works were completed to an acceptable standard.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

SPE.27 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER

There were no members' questions to the Portfolio Holder.

SPE.28 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 7.19 p.m.