



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on 28th July 2022

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL

17th March 2022 at 2.00 pm

Present:

Councillor Silvester (in the Chair)

Councillors Aisthorpe, Batson, Goodwin, K Swinburn, Pettigrew and Westcott
(substitute for Sandford)

Officers in attendance:

- Helen Isaacs (Assistant Chief Executive)
- Carolina Borgstrom (Assistant Director Environment)
- Spencer Hunt (Assistant Director of Safer and Partnerships)
- Simon Jones (Assistant Director Law, Governance and Assets)
- Neil Beeken (Commercial Regulatory Manager)
- Paul Thorpe (Head of Operations – EQUANS)
- Guy Lonsdale (Finance Group Manager)
- Zoe Campbell (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)

Also in attendance:

- Councillor Ron Shepherd (Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities)
- Councillor Stewart Swinburn (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport)

There were no members of the press and two members of the public present.

SPC.52 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from this meeting were received from Councillor Sandford.

SPC.53 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

SPC.54 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Panel held on 31 January 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

SPC.55 QUESTION TIME

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

SPC.56 FORWARD PLAN

The panel received the current 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.

SPC.57 TRACKING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF SCRUTINY

The panel received a report from the statutory scrutiny officer tracking the recommendations of the Communities Scrutiny Panel.

RESOLVED – That the tracking report be noted.

SPC.58 QUARTER 3 FINANCE MONITORING REPORT

The panel received a report from the Executive Director of Environment, Economy and Resources providing key information and analysis of the Council's position and performance for the third quarter of the 2021/22 financial year.

Members were concerned about the budget spend and queried if the service budgets would be overspent again. Mr Lonsdale confirmed that services had focused on their spend and activities and there was an improvement in the latest quarter and most services would come in on budget for this financial year.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

SPC.59 COVID-19 EMERGENCY DECISIONS

The panel received a report from the Chief Legal and Monitoring Officer on the emergency decisions taken within the emergency framework.

The Chair welcomed the process that was put into place during the pandemic, and he queried if officers felt the process had worked well. Mr Jones confirmed that it had, and that it enabled swift and decisive decisions to be made. He confirmed that this emergency decision

process had now ceased but could be brought back into place if required.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

SPC.60 EXPANSION OF PORT HEALTH SERVICES

The panel considered an update on the expansion of port health services following the UK Government announcement of its intention to impose checks on EU (European Union) goods following the UK's exit from the EU, using a staged approach.

The Chair referred to the Freeport status and queried if the expansion would have an impact. Mr Beeken confirmed that the Freeport status did not remove the requirement for sanitary/phytosanitary (SPS) checks and normal processes would apply to any businesses importing or exporting food and feed products from the Freeport area. The Chair suggested that the panel visit the new Border Control Post (BCP) at a future date to gain a better understanding of the processes of checks, which was welcomed by Mr Beeken and panel members.

Members queried if officers were expecting delays when it opened in July 2022. Mr Beeken explained that they were waiting on critical decisions on procedures and reporting at a government minister level. He felt it was inevitable that there would be some delays whilst trade learnt to adapt to the new requirements and systems, but he reassured members that the team was prepared as much as possible to minimise these.

A member referred to the delays and queried who would be charged if these occurred and if this was a risk to the Council. Mr Beeken explained that whilst there would inevitably be focus on Port Health Authorities where delays occurred, ultimately the Central Competent Authority for UK BCPs was DEFRA, who would need to support where possible. The Council must charge for their checks on each consignment imported. Staffing and resources were currently based on freight volume estimations and there may be additional charges implemented by the Port Operator (ABP). He confirmed that together with DEFRA, officers were embarking on a project with the border strategy group to establish if efficiencies could be made at border controls across the country to reduce impact on business from checks.

Members sought reassurance over the ability to recruit staff into the new posts. Mr Beeken confirmed that there was a national shortage in specialist roles in food inspection and health and safety. He highlighted the programme initiated for some years to raise our own qualified staff through training and succession planning. The recruitment of port health support staff to help with the challenge ahead had been successful.

RESOLVED –

1. That the update be noted.
2. That the new Border Control Point be visited by members of this panel at the earliest opportunity.

SPC.61 DIGITAL PROGRAMME

The panel received a presentation on the digital inclusion programme which had a focus on the digital needs and barriers for residents and organisations across North East Lincolnshire.

A member suggested using the learning representatives from the unions to support staff and they could help with the provision of pop up learning centres to get people digitally onboard. Ms Isaacs agreed that the learning representatives were a valuable resource and would be involved in a workforce development activity. A slight reservation was expressed around ensuring that the relevant safeguarding was in place where members of the public could be supported to access computers.

The broadband speed and connectivity across the borough was raised as a concern by a member who felt this needed to be addressed to improve the digital capability of residents. Ms Isaacs asked for any particular feedback from members on this matter as it would help the Council when talking to broadband providers around the plans for 5G and fibre network across the borough.

The Chair queried what involvement were schools and academies having with the digital programme. Ms Isaacs explained that there was a gap in the assessment for schools and academies due to Covid however she confirmed that she would include a recommendation to engage with schools and ask that it be included in the education strategy.

Members sought reassurance that the older generation were included and queried the approach to be used to get them using digital technology. Ms Isaacs confirmed there was a lot of work going on to help, support and guide the older generation in the digital programme, mainly through voluntary and community sector groups, to help people understand how they could access key services online i.e., banks, the NHS, GP's and pharmaceutical services.

A member referred to the care providers and suggested that they could help to identify vulnerable people who needed support. Ms Isaacs confirmed that a lot of work had already been done with adult social care, including investment in residential care home ICT infrastructure during the pandemic.

The panel welcomed the update on the digital programme and requested that further updates on the outcome of the recommendations from the programme be received as part of its work programme for 2022/23.

RESOLVED – That further updates on the outcome of the recommendations from the digital programme be received as part of this panel's work programme for 2022/23

SPC.62 CCTV

The panel considered a verbal update from the Assistant Director of Safer and Partnerships on the provision of CCTV within North East Lincolnshire which set out an additional capital investment of £1.25m.

Members queried what safeguards had been put in place to ensure the new system, once up and running would not fall into disrepair. Mr Thorpe confirmed maintenance costs were included as part of the project and that any future regeneration schemes would be required to include CCTV provision linked to the central system within their designs, with relevant costs built into the project.

Members asked why the additional budget of £1.5m was required. Mr Hunt explained that the additional costs reflected the inclusion of a number of Council owned stand-alone CCTV systems used in buildings being incorporated into the project that were not part of the original scope. In addition, 51 new camera locations would be added, and additional costs had been incurred as part of the Suggitts Lane footbridge which again was not part of the original project. Additional rapid deployment cameras had also been added and the electrical infrastructure would benefit from some improvement, which had not been identified by Capita as part of the original assessment. Another significant factor had been the uplift in market conditions.

A member enquired where the extra money was coming from for the CCTV system. Mr Hunt confirmed that a Cabinet report would be submitted in April 2022 to request additional capital monies.

Welcoming the new system, a member queried the timescales for the roll out. Mr Thorpe confirmed it would be six months.

A member asked why there was a £70k cost for coverage of Suggitt's Lane Bridge and queried if this cost should have come from Network Rail. Mr Thorpe explained that there was a condition in the planning permission suggested by the police to ensure that CCTV was installed for safety purposes.

Members queried how many extra camera locations there were. Mr Thorpe confirmed that following extensive consultation and looking at evidence and police intelligence, there would be 51 additional cameras supplemented by the rapid deployment cameras to give greater coverage across North East Lincolnshire.

A member queried what consultation had taken place with members around camera locations. Mr Hunt confirmed that consultation had taken place previously with elected members and Town and Parish Councils.

Mr Hunt confirmed that camera locations would be shared with members ahead of final decisions being made but caveated that camera locations had been chosen based on crime mapping in consultation with Humberside Police.

Members queried how the control room staff felt about the manning of the new CCTV systems. Mr Thorpe reassured members that the staff in the control room were consulted and their feedback had been considered in the design of the new control room and they welcomed the improved facility. The new system would make it easier for the team to monitor activity and feed information on to the police if required.

The Chair suggested a visit to the CCTV control room to see the system in operation when it was up and running.

RESOLVED –

1. That the update be noted.
2. That a site visit be arranged to the new CCTV control room for members of this panel.

SPC.63 ENFORCEMENT REVIEW

The panel received a briefing paper on the enforcement review following the recommendations made from the scrutiny working group in February 2020.

Members queried why there appeared to be a shortage and high staff turnover in roles such as Litter Enforcement Officers. Ms Borgstrom confirmed that it was not an easy job to carry out due to the level of verbal aggression that officers may experience and unfortunately, from time to time, the Council experienced difficulties in recruitment for this working environment.

Referring to the environmental crime reporting, members asked if the reporting could be simplified. Ms Borgstrom gave an example of fly tipping and highlighted that there were approximately 3000 cases a year consistently reported and without good quality evidence it was hard to prosecute. She confirmed that whilst the Council would like the outcome of each case to be fed back to the person who reported it, this was very time consuming because the back office systems were not currently linked to the customer contact centre reports. The review recognised the benefits of improving how digital systems communicated with each other, to improve the customer journey and feedback on outcomes.

The Chair felt the work that went into the working group had made a difference to residents of North East Lincolnshire and he thanked the staff for supporting and actioning the recommendations that were made.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

SPC.64 COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL WORK PROGRAMME

The panel considered a report from the Statutory Scrutiny Officer (Assistant Chief Executive) summarising the panel's agreed 2021/22 work programme and the timetable of activities to undertake this work. The panel also considered any issues it may wish to retain in or add to its work programme for 2022/23 and agreed for the following areas to be covered:

- Joint work with the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel on monitoring the priorities in the Drugs and Alcohol Strategy.
- The panel referred to the Executive and Scrutiny Liaison Board its request to have a role in monitoring the Ukraine refugee crisis locally added to their panel remit.
- To understand the latest county lines figures and the work that was going on to reduce this.

RESOLVED –

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the items listed above be added to the Communities Scrutiny Panel work programme for 2022/23.
3. That the items in the report be carried over to the work programme for 2022/23.
4. That permission be sought from the Executive and Scrutiny Liaison Board for the Ukraine Refugee crisis help locally to be monitored by the Communities Scrutiny Panel.

SPC.65 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER

There were no questions for the portfolio holder at this meeting.

SPC.66 CALLING IN OF DECISIONS

There were no formal requests from members of this panel to call in decisions of recent Cabinet and Portfolio Holder meetings.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 3.55p.m.