



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on 12th December 2024

## **COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL**

**21st November 2024 at 2.00 pm**

### **Present:**

Councillor Aisthorpe (in the Chair)

Councillors Bonner, Brookes, Crofts (substitute for Silvester), Goodwin (substitute for Augusta) Lindley (substitute for Boyd).

### **Officers in attendance:**

- Levi Anderson Jordan (Environmental Sustainability Manager)
- Carolina Borgstrom (Director of Economy, Environment and Infrastructure)
- Kath Jickells (Assistant Director – Environment)
- Lisa Logan (Head of Open Spaces)
- Guy Lonsdale (Assistant Director - Finance)
- Jo Paterson (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)
- Eve Richardson Smith (Legal Services Service Manager, Consultancy)
- Joanne Robinson (Assistant Director Policy Strategy & Resources)

### **Also in attendance:**

- Councillor Shepherd (Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities)
- Councillor Swinburn (Portfolio Holder for Housing, Infrastructure and Transport)

## **SPC.29 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence had been received for this meeting from Councillors Augusta, Boyd, Farren, Shutt and Silvester.

## **SPC.30 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

## **SPC.31 MINUTES**

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Panel held on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2024 be agreed as a correct record.

## **SPC.32 QUESTION TIME**

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

## **SPC.33 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.34 TRACKING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF SCRUTINY**

The panel received a report from the Chief Executive tracking the recommendations of the Communities Scrutiny Panel. Ms Paterson took members through the tracking report.

At SPC. 22, Registered Housing Provider, Ms Paterson advised that she had requested an urgent update on this, however, this had not been forthcoming.

At SPC.28, CCTV Update, Ms Paterson noted that an update had been provided within the report and asked members whether this still needed to remain on tracking. Members agreed this item should still remain on tracking to monitor progress.

It was agreed that all actions were now complete for items SPC.67 (Grimsby and Immingham Border Control Post) and SPC.10 (Council Plan Year End and Provisional Outturn Review), and they could be removed from the tracking report.

At SPC.22, Household Support Fund Exit Strategy, Ms Paterson advised that a scrutiny recommends paper had been completed and the recommendations would be taken through the next Cabinet meeting in December.

The Chair commented on the update against recommendation 6, noting her concerns that there was no clear commitment in the 2025-26 funding that had been promised. There was also a real risk we may see a further reduction which would only exacerbate challenges within some of our most deprived areas in the borough. Therefore, the Chair proposed a recommendation to Cabinet, duly seconded, that the Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities send a further letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, advocating for adjustments to the Household Support Fund to account for inflation from 2025 onwards. The letter should also

emphasise the specific needs of our area, highlighting why sustained or increased funding was critical, with no reductions compared to previous years.

The Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities also expressed support for this letter, concurring with the Chair's comments that the government's failure to adjust for inflation effectively amounted to a cut in funding.

At SPC.26, Depot Rationalisation Project, the Chair commented on the information provided to members noting that the response given by officers had not adequately answered members concerns. The Chair proposed that a further discussion take place with the Director Economy, Environment and Infrastructure to understand in more detail some of the concerns. It was noted that due to the commercial sensitivity of some aspects of the project this matter would be taken in exempt session at the end of the meeting. The panel agreed with this course of action.

At CDC. 3, Community Safety Partnership Update, Ms Paterson advised that these actions were now complete. The panel agreed that this could be removed from tracking.

RESOLVED - That the tracking report be noted, and all completed actions be removed from future reports.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

That the Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities send a further letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, advocating for adjustments to the Household Support Fund to account for inflation from 2025 onwards. The letter should also emphasise the specific needs of our area, highlighting why sustained or increased funding was critical, with no reductions compared to previous years.

## **SPC.35 COUNCIL PLAN REVIEW**

The panel considered the draft Council Plan 2025-28. Ms Paterson advised that the panel were now invited to comment on the draft plan and put forward any changes.

Under Greener Future, a member queried the upgrade of street lighting to Light Emitting Diode (LED) bulbs. There were also concerns that these were still quite dim. Ms Borgstrom would feed this back to the transport team prior to these being put in place.

The Chair requested that further information on the upgrade to the street lighting be circulated to this panel via a briefing note.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.

2. That further information on the street lighting upgrade be circulated to this panel via a briefing note.

**SPC.36 COUNCIL PLAN RESOURCES AND FINANCE REPORT  
QUARTER 2, 2024/25**

The panel received a report from the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets providing key information and analysis of the Council's finance and resources position at the end of quarter two.

Under the Strategic Housing section of the report, a member queried the the number of rough sleepers identified in the borough. Ms Robinson confirmed this represented the picture up until the end of September.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

**SPC.37 CLEETHORPES COUNTRY PARK NEW MANAGEMENT  
PLAN**

The panel considered a report from the Assistant Director Environment detailing the proposal for a new Cleethorpes Country Park Management Plan 2021-2026, as well as providing a brief update on the management of the park.

The Chair asked if ward councillors had been involved in this process, noting the importance of members input prior to it coming before scrutiny. Mr Anderson-Jordan advised that the Management Plan was not yet scheduled to go to Cabinet and advised that there was still time to incorporate members views.

A member commented that the wildlife area of the lake was congested with reeds quite badly and asked when this was going to be cleared.

Ms Logan noted that when the works had taken place a further update via a briefing note could be circulated to the panel. A member further commented on the flooding that had occurred over Easter. Ms Logan reported that since her last update, there had been some repairs to the bridges and waterways including the removal of some reeds.

The Chair asked whether the management plan could be adapted to create a strategy for every park in the borough. Mr Anderson Jordan advised that his team were working through all their management plans at present.

A member referred to the map of the main entrance noting that Japanese Knotweed was present and asked for assurance that this was being appropriately controlled and managed. Officers confirmed that they were going through the process for removal of the plant.

Members sought assurance that the new management plan would be adhered to. Mr Anderson Jordan advised that the management plan was in place to set out how they intended to deliver their plans.

#### RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.
2. That this panel continue to be updated on works within the Cleethorpes Country Park via a briefing note.

### **SPC.38      WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE 2024/25**

The panel considered a report from the Chief Executive providing panel members with the opportunity to reflect on the progress of the panel's work programme at the half year stage and provide a formal opportunity for the panel to update its work programme.

A member commented on the report that was due on phasing out the use of Glyphosate and asked whether the Council were actively looking at other alternatives. Mr Anderson Jordan confirmed that officers were looking at possible options.

The Chair asked what the current position was with the Food Poverty Action Plan. Ms Paterson was aware that this plan was not yet completed and therefore could not come before scrutiny. Mr Windley confirmed that the decision of Council was for a Food Poverty Action Plan to be produced by the Health and Wellbeing Board and that this be considered, in due course, by this panel and the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel. Ms Paterson agreed to seek an update on progress with production of the action plan.

Another member asked whether the council was actively publicising the hardship fund around the borough for our residents. Ms Robinson advised that the council worked with partners in the Voluntary and Community Sector to identify eligible residents and distribute the funding. Further information on the distribution and advertising of the Household Support Fund (HSF) could be submitted to panel members via a briefing note. The panel suggested this briefing note be circulated to all members, and not just this panel, given its importance. Ms Paterson confirmed this could be actioned.

Councillor Shepherd commented on the number of applications for the HSF and the importance of ensuring it was means tested and eligibility was for those most at risk.

The Chair reiterated the importance of a more permanent solution with this issue given the levels of deprivation in some areas of the borough.

## RESOLVED –

1. That the report be noted.
2. That a further update on production of the Food Poverty Action Plan be circulated to members of this panel.
3. That a briefing note detailing how the Household Support Fund was being distributed and advertised, be circulated to all council members.

## **SPC.39 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER**

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Infrastructure and Transport received the following question from Councillor Goodwin:

Could the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Infrastructure and Transport approach Lincolnshire Housing Partnership (LHP) and other housing associations to ascertain why it was taking so long to get empty properties ready for new tenants to move into. The reason for asking this question, was the shortage of houses, the number of residents on the bidding system (Home Choice Lincs) and the knowledge that there were several properties that had been empty for months which further elevated the housing shortage and, as such, cost the council money.

Councillor S Swinburn, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Infrastructure and Transport, explained that this was a very relevant question and one he was aware the council's housing team were asking our housing partners. Councillor Swinburn stated that this administration was keen to ensure the Home Choice Lincs (HCL) system worked as efficiently as possible to reduce waiting times on the HCL register and also to reduce the number of empty properties voids within the council's wider housing stock. With this in mind, he confirmed he had tasked the Assistant Director of Infrastructure to meet with LHP to better understand the obstacles that have been restricting the turnaround of void properties within LHP.

Councillor Swinburn confirmed that he had asked the Assistant Director to widen this discussion with other housing providers. He also suggested that members request that LHP be invited to attend a meeting of this panel to question them directly on this very issue.

The Chair was keen to approach all housing providers to review plans to upgrade their properties and discuss new builds and overall performance.

The Chair raised concerns around rogue and private landlords and wished to understand further what was in place to deal appropriately with rogue landlords.

Ms Borgstrom advised that LHP was in transition to a new Chief Executive and although she supported a letter from the Portfolio or this panel to

invite a representative to attend, this panel could not compel them to attend, nor could this panel hold them to account.

The panel supported approaching LHP to attend a future panel meeting. Ms Paterson agreed to take this forward with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Infrastructure and Transport and the relevant Assistant Director.

RESOLVED –

1. That the question and answer be noted.
2. That a representative of the Lincolnshire Housing Partnership be invited to attend a future meeting of this panel to discuss empty properties.

#### **SPC.40 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.

#### **SPC.41 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RESOLVED – That the press and public be requested to leave on the grounds that discussion of the following business was likely to disclose exempt information within paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

#### **SPC.42 DEPOT RATIONALISATION PROJECT**

As agreed at SPC.34, the panel further discussed the Depot Rationalisation Project.

Ms Borgstrom gave a brief presentation to the panel. The presentation covered the following:-

- Project Timeline.
- Organisational project journey.
- Challenges with existing delivery model.
- What had been learnt/how things could be done differently.
- Grounds maintenance building tender.

The panel were given the opportunity to ask questions, further to which responses were provided by officers.

RESOLVED – That the update on the Depot Rationalisation Project be noted.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 3.40 p.m.