



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on 20th March 2025

## **COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL**

**9<sup>th</sup> January 2025 at 2.00 pm**

### **Present:**

Councillor Aisthorpe (in the Chair)

Councillors Augusta, Bonner, Boyd, Brookes, Farren, Shutt and Silvester.

### **Officers in attendance:**

- Gemma Broderick (Solicitor, Legal Services)
- Paul Caswell (Safer Towns & Communities Service Manager and Grimsby Town Centre Management)
- Neil Clark (Regulatory Services Strategic Lead, Environment)
- Paul Evans (Assistant Director – Infrastructure)
- Spencer Hunt (Assistant Director Safer and Stronger Place)
- Kath Jickells (Assistant Director – Environment)
- Stephen McGrath (Strategic Special Projects Lead – Leadership Team)
- Jo Paterson (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)
- Eve Richardson Smith (Legal Services Service Manager, Consultancy)
- Joanne Robinson (Assistant Director Policy Strategy and Resources)

### **Also in attendance:**

- Councillor Shepherd (Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities)
- Councillor S. Swinburn (Portfolio Holder for Housing, Infrastructure and Transport)
- Mark Coupland (Executive Director of Customers, Lincolnshire Housing Partnership)

### **SPC.43 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

No apologies for absence had been received for this meeting.

### **SPC.44 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

#### **SPC.45 MINUTES**

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Panel held on 21st November 2024 be agreed as a correct record.

#### **SPC.46 QUESTION TIME**

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

#### **SPC.47 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.48 TRACKING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF SCRUTINY**

The panel received a report from the Statutory Scrutiny Officer tracking the recommendations from the Communities Scrutiny Panel.

At SPC.22, Registered Housing Provider, Ms Paterson advised that a report was included on the agenda for this meeting. At SPC.28, CCTV, members agreed this should remain on tracking. At SPC.35, Street Lighting Upgrade, and SPC.38, Food Poverty Action Plan, these were both in hand with officers.

The panel agreed that SPC.34, letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding adjustments to the Household Support Fund, was now complete and could be removed from the tracking document.

RESOLVED – That the tracking report be noted and that SPC.34 be marked as complete and removed from the document.

#### **SPC.49 CALLING IN OF DECISIONS – SELECTIVE LICENSING**

The panel considered a formal request from Councillors Patrick and Kaczmarek to call-in the above decision taken by Cabinet at its meeting on 11th December 2024.

In response to a constitutional query, Ms Richardson Smith confirmed that she had spoken with the Monitoring Officer who had confirmed that both Councillor Patrick and Kaczmarek would be allowed 5 minutes each to speak on the call-in. Currently, the Constitution was not clear around the

time allocation, and this would be picked up in the next Constitution Working Group.

Councillor Patrick described the rationale for the call-in, in particular he was concerned around the use of voluntary schemes on the basis that he did not feel the voluntary scheme would have the right impact and that it could make the council look weak. He also voiced concerns around rogue landlords, who were often not interested in ward boundaries.

Councillor Kaczmarek noted that Sideny Sussex ward shared a boundary with East Marsh ward and concurred with Councillor Patrick's comments around problems with rogue landlords in these areas. In particular, he had received concerns from residents around waste in alleyways and broken windows, both of which were not being dealt with by landlords. He considered a mandatory scheme would be much more viable. Overall, he felt residents needed something robust to be put in place.

Councillor S. Swinburn, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Infrastructure and Transport, responded that this was now due to go out for consultation. He insisted that East Marsh still remained the priority as 90% of its lower super output areas were part of the most deprived 10% lower super output areas in England. He noted that this had come as a recommendation from a cross-party Cabinet Working Group, noting that no wider challenge had come from that. He considered that the scheme could be extended out to Heneage and Sidney Sussex wards in future if needed.

One member highlighted that when the Selective Licensing Working Group had discussed the scheme being extended out on voluntary basis, she understood this to be extended out generally and had specifically asked in that meeting to be allowed more time to consider this. However, officers had advised that there was not enough time but alternatively the call in mechanism was still available to them.

The Chair was surprised by this comment and did not agree that there had not been ample time to consider this. The Chair noted that there had been four meetings prior to that regarding extending the schemes out into areas of action, and the Working Group was meeting again next week to discuss this.

Another member considered there had never been any question of the whole borough being included in the scheme.

Mr Hunt confirmed that officers had initially presented the Safer Streets 4 area of the East Marsh and subsequently it was agreed that this area would be extended to three additional streets. Additionally, to have two geographical areas in Heneage and Sidney Sussex as designated areas of action which, if not successful, could be designated as selective licensing areas at a later date.

He added that nobody was disputing that Sidney Sussex and Heneage would not meet the eligibility criteria, as they would. It was more about

prioritising the right areas taking account of areas of multiple deprivation. The Council needed to start with an area where there was some evidence and that was manageable for staff to deliver and enforce.

A member asked what the measure of success was for a voluntary scheme. The member asked how the council would deal with the ward boundary where one side of the street was covered by a voluntary scheme and the other not and how this could be justified to residents.

Mr Hunt explained that the Council needed to draw a boundary somewhere and this was something they had to manage. In terms of managing success, this was similar whether it was the voluntary scheme or the formal selective licensing scheme, around monitoring measures such as anti-social behaviour levels, landlord compliance and improved housing conditions.

Another member did not feel the use of ward boundaries was an effective way to determine which areas would be piloted. The Chair commented that this point was not addressed at the Working Group and reminded members that there had been ample opportunity.

Another member explored issues around capacity should this scheme go ahead, wondering if officers may become stretched.

Ms Jickells responded that Selective Licensing was a proactive approach to enforcing housing standards, but that powers already existed to deal with tenant's concerns. The team responsible for private sector housing enforcement currently sat within Equans but would transfer into the Council in July. If Selective Licensing was approved, it would need to be resourced with new and suitably qualified staff.

Ms Jickells considered it more effective to have a team that could focus on a Selective Licensing Pilot really well and be a success rather than doing too much with less staff and falling short of expectations. Ms Jickells reminded members that there were already powers in place to deal with housing standards. The Landlord Charter was effectively putting landlords on notice that an extension to Selective Licensing was a future possibility if the voluntary scheme did not deliver improvements.

Two members maintained that they were under the understanding that Sidney Sussex and Henage wards would be included within the Selective Licensing scheme.

Ms Richardson Smith outlined the options available to the panel with the call-in.

It was proposed and seconded that the decision be released for implementation as per the Cabinet report, with a commitment from this panel to evaluate the Landlord's Charter within a year of this being implemented.

Upon being put to the vote, the proposal was carried.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Cabinet decision of 11<sup>th</sup> December 2024 regarding Selective Licensing be released for implementation.
2. That the Landlords Charter be reevaluated by this panel within a year of it being implemented.

## **SPC.50      EMPTY HOMES**

The panel received a presentation and update from a representative from Lincolnshire Housing Partnership (LHP) on the above.

The presentation focused on LHP's approach to reducing turnaround times on void properties, some of the key highlights included:-

- The new Empty Homes process.
- A full review of all empty homes in North East Lincolnshire.
- Review of budgets and investment in our Empty Homes team.
- The council and LHP undertaking partnership meetings bi-monthly.
- Open channels of communication between the HOT (Home Options Team), HCL (Home Choice Lincs) and LHP.

Mr Coupland outlined the key activities, challenges and actions being taken and hoped, going forward, to work more closely with the council around empty properties.

Members raised the following comments:-

- The previous reputation of LHP and it was now refreshing to hear that the relationship with partners would improve.
- A request that the data in the presentation be broken down by Ward.
- Another member suggested a ward sponsor system; by developing a pro-active approach with members this would bring a more long-term advantage.
- Given the council were currently exploring the option of becoming a registered housing provider, a member asked for thoughts on the challenges faced with this.

In response to queries raised, Mr Coupland advised that when the data came back this could be broken down by ward. In terms of the specific data, it was about how this was aligned to wards for it to be easier to report.

He further added that from April there would be a new Place Based Strategy. There was also a move away from patch-based plans and a move towards Neighbourhood Action Plans. Overall, he hoped to have a more holistic approach.

Mr Coupland confirmed that a ward sponsor system was already in place at a corporate level.

In terms of exploring becoming a registered provider, Mr Coupland noted that it was about getting their service right. He noted that the development programme had previously been poor, acknowledging it was still a modest programme but recognising that LHP had not been the most active partner, with a need to embrace the partnership element.

In terms of LHP, the current development programme was running at 60 homes in Grimsby and Boston. There was also now more of a focus on getting our services right with the main priority being empty homes.

RESOLVED – That the presentation be noted.

## **SPC.51 PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDERS**

The panel received a report from the Director of Economy, Environment and Infrastructure that provided an update on the current operating model of the Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) within North East Lincolnshire.

Members considered that although there had been some positives, there were still anomalies with the data noting that both Croft Baker and West Marsh wards had received the highest number of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs). In response, Mr Clark advised that Croft Baker was aligned to beach restrictions only and, in terms of patrol times, this was linked to activity.

Another member referred to the issuance data and was concerned that there had been 360 FPNs issued in East Marsh and wished to understand the reason why this figure was so high. Mr Clark explained that more accurate recent data had been circulated to the panel by email which addressed this, which members acknowledged.

Councillor Swinburn noted that no FPN's had been recorded as issued in Immingham Ward and asked if this could be added in future. Mr Clark encouraged more community reporting that would be followed up.

Mr Caswell reminded the panel that every three years a refresh of the PSPO's was undertaken, and the Council would shortly be evaluating the current PSPOs and consulting on the continuation where appropriate or the introduction of new areas based on the data.

Another member asked about the total patrol times per ward, noting that Yarborough and Freshney wards had very low numbers and the reasoning for this. Mr Clark reminded the panel that the contract with Doncaster was a commercial contract driven by footfall and intelligence data and encouraged members to report any hotspots in their wards through to his team.

Another member was concerned around cycling in and around the town centre. Officers advised there would be a geographical review of extending the no cycling areas to include St. James Square and Riverhead Square. This included engaging with experts within the local authority who had advised against extending due to the associated risks involved.

Officers suggested that if members wished to have a more detailed discussion on cycling within the Town Centre, this topic be considered for the panel's work programme for next year. Ms Paterson advised that the informal workshops would be taking place in June to plan for the next year.

Mr Clark reported that there had been issues recently with PSPO signage being removed and vandalised, stating that, if this signage was not clearly displayed, FPNs could not be issued. Overall, the department were spending regularly on signage at some cost to the council.

A member asked for a summary to be provided around the types of PSPO signage, placement and costs. Mr Clark would look to gather the data for the panel if it was available.

The Chair asked about the time taken for an FPN to be issued, noting that the last report had showed roughly four FPNs issued for dog fouling and dogs off leads. However, the report showed a noticeable improvement in this. The Chair subsequently asked for a breakdown of the FPN's issued under the dog control PSPO by type to be provided for the panel. Mr Clark agreed to provide this data.

Mr Clark added that they continued to work closely with street cleaning to resolve these issues. In terms of wider issues with signage, this needed to be addressed through educating local communities.

The Chair asked that a briefing note be provided around educational work that was underway to educate residents on dog fouling and the impact on the community.

Another member had ongoing concerns with dog fouling and suggested the council explore a campaign around encouraging the community to clear.

Another member commented on cycling through the town centre, noting that this was due to a lack of safe cycle routes across the town centre to separate cyclists from pedestrians. Councillor S. Swinburn assured the panel that improved safe cycle routes had been looked at through the Active Travel Funding.

Overall, members considered the latest data had been positive and thanked officers for their report.

RESOLVED –

1. That the report and next steps be noted.
2. That the topic of cycling within the Town Centre be considered for this panel's work programme for next year.
3. That a further summary be provided to this panel around the types of PSPO signage, placement and costs.
4. That a breakdown of the FPN's issued under the dog control PSPO by type be provided for this panel.
5. That briefing note be provided to this panel around education work underway to educate residents on dog fouling and the impact on the community.
6. That the council explore undertaking a campaign around dog fouling and encouraging the community to clear.

## **SPC.52 REPORT ON PROGRESS OF THE COUNCIL REGISTERING TO BECOME A HOUSING PROVIDER**

The panel received a report from the Director of Economy, Environment and Infrastructure that provided an update on the council registering to become a housing provider.

Mr Evans stated that the main advantage of the council registering to become a housing provider was allowing wider access to funding. Mr Evans noted that some key considerations were highlighted in detail within the report.

Mr Evans felt it would be useful for the panel to undertake a field trip to look at sites in Doncaster and Scunthorpe with 'Ongo'. The Chair and panel supported this idea and felt it would be useful.

A member noted that there was a government push towards social rented housing and the complexities faced by the council in relation to tenants and financial challenges. The member asked if there were any examples of other authorities that had become housing providers and collaborated on a joint initiative.

Mr Evans confirmed that Ongo and North Lincolnshire Council were an example of partnering to launch various initiatives.

A member fully supported the progress made and looked forward to a way forward with our housing provider.

**RESOLVED –**

1. That the report be noted.



2. That a field trip be organised for this panel to look at sites in Doncaster and Scunthorpe with Ongo.

### **SPC.53 EQUANS REVIEW CABINET REPORT**

The panel considered a Cabinet report that provided an update on the current status of implementing the strategic and operational delivery model for Equans services, prior to the expiry of the contract on 30th June 2025.

Councillor Holland was invited to feedback to the panel on the work of the Equans Working Group noting that members on the Working Group had been given opportunities to raise key concerns they had through this forum. Some of the key highlights from the Working Group so far included:-

- The monitoring of operational matters including risk.
- Meetings scheduled every two months up until the implementation stage.
- 3 key phases; planning, implementation and post-implementation.
- Planning timeline, various resource required, risk registers and HR matters.
- Third party company consulted to provide expert advice and another level of assurance to the council during the transition period.
- Post implementation, including measuring KPIs and performance matters.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

### **SPC.54 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER**

There were no questions for the Portfolio Holder at this meeting.

### **SPC.55 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.56 EQUANS REVIEW CABINET REPORT**

The panel received the closed appendices to the Equans Review Cabinet report referred to at SPC.53.

Members discussed the exempt appendices in some detail, in particular seeking assurances over the TUPE process, further to which Officers provided detailed responses.

RESOLVED – That the closed appendix to the report be noted.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 4.00 p.m.