



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

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL

5th September 2024 at 2.00 pm

Present:

Councillor Aisthorpe (in the Chair)

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

Officers in attendance:

- Neil Clark (Regulatory Services Strategic Lead)
- Spencer Hunt (Assistant Director - Safer and Stronger Place)
- Simon Jones (Assistant Director – Law and Governance)
- Helen Isaacs (Assistant Chief Executive)
- Kath Jickells (Assistant Director – Environment)
- Guy Lonsdale (Assistant Director - Finance)
- Paul Windley (Democratic and Scrutiny Team Manager)

Also in attendance:

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

There was one member of the press present.

SPC.15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence had been received for this meeting.

SPC.16 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Silvester declared a potential disclosable pecuniary interest in item SPC.22 as Chief Executive Officer at Foresight as the organisation was involved in the distribution of the Household Support Fund.

Mr Jones advised that the interest would only need to be declared if there was specific reference made to distribution of funding during the discussion on that item.

SPC.17 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the special meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Panel held on 23rd July be agreed as a correct record.

SPC.18 QUESTION TIME

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

SPC.19 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.20 TRACKING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF SCRUTINY

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

At SPC.22 (Registered Housing Provider), it was noted that this item had been included in the tracking report for some time and Mr Windley had therefore requested an urgent update on progress. He advised that he would circulate the update to the panel as soon as it was received.

At SPC.28 (CCTV Update), a panel member requested an update on the provision of CCTV coverage within public parks. Mr Hunt responded that this had been considered as part of the recent capital investment, but it was felt that there was insufficient funding to cover the work required. However, cameras would be updated where there were existing masts covering park areas. If further funding became available, then extending this to parks not currently covered by CCTV would be looked at.

A panel member enquired how play equipment in private park areas was dealt with. Ms Jickells responded that any private areas not in the council's ownership would be dealt with via a service level agreement on a cost recovery basis.

At SPC.52 (Play Areas), it was noted that the briefing paper had been circulated and this could now be marked as complete.

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

SPC.21 2024/25 QUARTER 1 COUNCIL PLAN RESOURCES AND FINANCE PERFORMANCE REPORT

The panel considered a report from the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Economy, Regeneration, Devolution and Skills, and 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 one. This report was considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 21st August 2024 and was referred to all scrutiny panels.

The panel sought clarification of the reason for the increase in the time taken to process Housing Benefit claims. It was highlighted that Age UK and the Citizens Advice Bureau had benefit cases that had been outstanding for some time. The panel was concerned that this was causing hardship within communities.

It was noted that Housing Benefit had been identified as a key area of focus and improvements were starting to be seen. Officers offered to contact Age UK and the Citizens Advice Bureau to ask for examples of delays in the system so that matters could be resolved.

A panel member enquired why reporting on certain performance indicators was limited to one year only. It was noted that this reporting format was relatively new and inclusion of national data sets was ongoing.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

SPC.22 HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND / EXIT STRATEGY

The panel received a report from the Assistant Chief Executive outlining how the council had utilised the Household Support Fund (HSF) and setting out suggested actions following the ending of this funding. It was noted that since this report had been circulated, the Government had announced a six-month extension of the HSF.

The panel raised concerns about the continued uncertainty of future funding. Ms Isaacs reported on measures being proposed by the Government to improve the wellbeing of households.

The panel enquired about the Financial Inclusion Group and whether it would be possible to receive minutes of future meetings of this group. Ms Isaacs explained the role of the group and was happy to share its minutes with the panel.

The Chair thanked Ms Isaacs and partner organisations for the excellent work carried out in North East Lincolnshire as a result of the HSF. However, she felt that more and more people were still struggling even though they were in employment. She was also concerned that partner organisations were feeling overwhelmed. Given that there was no indication of when the Government measures would be in place, she suggested a recommendation to Cabinet and the Portfolio Holder for Safer

and Stronger Communities that a letter be sent to the Chancellor the Exchequer requesting further clarification of the Government's plans beyond the additional six-month funding period. This was supported by the Panel.

RESOLVED –

1. That the high-level delivery plan set out in Appendix 1 of the report now submitted (as previously reported to Cabinet), and the evaluation report from HSF4, as set out at Appendix 2 of the report now submitted, be noted.
2. That the letter sent by the Portfolio Holder Safer and Stronger Communities (Appendix 3 of the report now submitted) which made representations to Government pressing the need for continued funding to alleviate household hardship, be noted.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET –

1. That Cabinet take stock of the funding situation after the Chancellor's statement and the Council's financial settlement, as there may be further decisions that impact on household finances.
2. That the council continue to promote and inform residents of the range of advice and support available to them.
3. That the council continue to work with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) to identify opportunities to alleviate cost of living pressures.
4. That Cabinet receive, in due course, public health plans to address the wider determinants of health in North East Lincolnshire.
5. That the council continue to support food bank and other food providers, as part of the VCS, to reduce demand and dependency on emergency food, promoting growing, healthy eating, budgeting and skills to improve access to and the quality of food in North East Lincolnshire.
6. That a letter be sent by the Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities to the Chancellor the Exchequer requesting further clarification of the Government's plans beyond the additional six-month funding period.

SPC.23 WASTE ON PRIVATE LAND

The panel considered a report from the Director of Economy, Environment and Infrastructure providing an update on the action plan associated with waste on private land, including pathways and procedures for voluntary clearance.

The panel broadly welcomed the report. It was felt that the new Members Portal for logging calls was a big improvement. It was suggested that the review of the rapid deployment camera policy should be prioritised.

The panel enquired whether staff turnover issues had been resolved and whether it was possible to obtain a breakdown of enforcement data by ward.

It was noted that staffing issues were in hand and having a full complement of staff would be of great assistance in delivering the plan.

A ward breakdown of enforcement data was not currently available but was being worked on. It was hopeful that this would be available by the next financial year.

A panel member was concerned that there were a lot of residents who were unable to report issues because they did not have access to computers.

Ms Jickells agreed to seek advice from colleagues about how this could be made easier and noted that any specific access examples would be helpful.

RESOLVED – That the report and the revised target dates against the action plan be noted.

SPC.24 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER

There were no questions for the Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities at this meeting.

SPC.25 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.26 DEPOT RATIONALISATION PROJECT

The panel considered a report from the Assistant Director Environment providing an update on progress with the Depot Rationalisation project.

A panel member questioned the cost of piling as detailed in the report.

Ms Jickells outlined the procurement process and the background for the requirement for the piling to take place. It was confirmed that the cheapest price was obtained via the procurement process and that there were inflationary factors to bear in mind. It was agreed that a more detailed breakdown of the piling work would be looked into and reported back to the panel.

RESOLVED –

1. That the report be noted.
2. That a detailed breakdown of the piling work undertaken as part of this project be investigated and reported back to this panel.

SPC.27 EXCLUSION OF THE 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.28 DEPOT RATIONALISATION PROJECT

The panel considered the closed appendix to item SPC.26.

The panel enquired about contingency plans and lessons that had been learnt from this project. The panel was also keen to understand the timeframe for recovery of the overspend on this project through the estimated overall savings that would be achieved.

RESOLVED - That the appendix be noted.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 3.18 p.m.