



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on 25th September 2025

ECONOMY, CULTURE AND TOURISM SCRUTINY PANEL

7th July 2025 at 3.00pm

Present:

Councillor Holland (in the Chair)

Councillors Boyd (substitute for Lindley), Brookes, Crofts, Farren, Mickleburgh, Morland and Parkinson

Officers in attendance:

- Carolina Borgstrom (Director Economy, Environment and Infrastructure)
- Nick Browning (Head of Culture, Heritage, Leisure and Tourism)
- Damien Jaines-White (Assistant Director Regeneration)
- Simon Jones (Assistant Director Law and Governance, Monitoring Officer)
- Beverly O'Brien (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)

Also in attendance:

- Councillor Dawkins (Portfolio Holder for Culture, Heritage and the Visitor Economy)
- Councillor Aisthorpe (East March Ward Councillor)
- Councillor Augusta (Park Ward Councillor)
- Councillor Bright (Freshney Ward Councillor)
- Councillor Clough (Heneage Ward Councillor)
- Councillor Downes (Freshney Ward Councillor)
- Councillor Hendersen (Yarborough Ward Councillor)
- Councillor Kaczmarek (Sidney Sussex Ward Councillor)
- Councillor Patrick (Heneage Ward Councillor)
- Councillor Shutt (Heneage Ward Councillor)

There was 1 member of the press present and 20 members of the public present.

SPE.1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN AND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN

It was noted that at the Annual General Meeting of the Council held on 22nd May 2025, Councillor Holland had been appointed the Chair and Councillor Mickleburgh, the Deputy Chair of the Economy, Culture and Tourism Scrutiny Panel for the ensuing Municipal Year.

SPE.2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology of absence was received for this meeting from Councillor Lindley.

SPE.3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

SPE.4 CALL IN –TEMPORARY LIBRARY RELOCATION OFFICER DECISION

The panel considered a formal request from members to call-in the above officer decision.

The Chair introduced the Call In and gave the background to the officer decision. He also explained that there may be a need to go into a closed session, which would be dealt with appropriately at the time, but he wanted to give members of the public assurance that nothing was being discussed behind their backs, but in terms of financial implications and tenancy agreements these would legislatively need to be taken in closed session.

The Chair then introduced Councillor Farren and Councillor Patrick who submitted their request to call this officer decision in, and he gave them ten minutes to present their reasons why.

Councillor Farren explained that the re-location was not appropriate for a temporary library, she believed that some of the alternatives should have been considered. The officer decision noted that ICT would take 90 days to get up and running and given that so many people used this space and relied on it, it was unacceptable for it to be closed this long on top of the library being out of action for 90 days already. Councillor Farren explained that a more detailed costed plan was needed, and more security needed to be implemented. She felt that there were a lot of unanswered questions, particularly around who would be billed for the temporary library locations (Lincs Inspire or the council) and there seemed to be a confusion on the condition of the unit it would be moved into. She stated that a more detailed plan was needed on the unit, and they needed to know where it was.

Councillor Farren noted that the officer decision stated that the temporary location could increase footfall, but she believed that was a spin and footfall data would be used to boost shopping centre figures. She added that there were also no details of where all the valuable irreplaceable items from the Central Library were being stored. Councillor Farren asked why the Grimsby Town Hall had not been considered as it was an existing infrastructure, had public amenities, close to the bus stop/parking and provided minimal fit out cost. The room was in good condition and been used as a temporary library before. She stated that using this location felt like it would only be a temporary measure. She asked whether we could have the same plan as what was used previously.

Councillor Patrick stated that Freshney Place was an easy unimaginative option. The Portfolio Holder for Finance had stated that there was a need to occupy units in Freshney Place. If that was the case and the library were to move in, then that unit could not be occupied by a paying tenant. This would mean a lack of rent coming into the Authority and a loss of opportunity to create jobs in the Town Centre. He noted that temporary could be a dangerous word. The library service had been a contentious matter for 15 years and future plans may involve making this a permanent measure.

The Chair then welcomed Councillor Hendersen who submitted the second call in of this officer decision. He also received 10 minutes to give his presentation.

Councillor Hendersen stated that he welcomed the review on the library services so that it could fit in with the 21st Century. He noted that it was a statutory obligation to provide a library service, which had already been dented by being closed for 3 months now. Their concern was with the move and whether it would be temporary. He doubted that it would ever come back to the traditional Central Library building and he believed that this may be a creeping death to the Central Library. Councillor Hendersen believed that Officers were trying to dampen it down by saying it was a small project, but this wasn't helping anyone. Their request was that this scrutiny panel referred it back to make a proper assessment to make sure the Central Library building was opened again.

Councillor Hendersen felt that Officers need to address what improvement works were needed, the cost and when the works could be done. There was now a need to accelerate works, but they wondered how that could be when they were still waiting on the results of a survey. He added that there should be an assessment of short-term options for the service. Three months was ample time to survey the timeline and expected costs. There was a need to see costed options and previous surveys, which also required an explanation of the usefulness of the previous survey. The council couldn't show that there was a need to pay a significant sum if the survey results had not been considered. Officers still don't know if any work was required, people just perceived it to be concerns of asbestos. He added that they didn't know who was looking at what, how it had been

tendered and when it was last appraised, they were told work was not needed. He wondered who was saying it needed it now and who said it was unsafe. If it was thought to be unsafe, why did the Council use the money intended for works to the Central Library building for Freshney Place instead. If they needed the money for the library, it needed to be given back. He questioned whether the millions were ever needed at all.

Councillor Hendersen stated that the portfolio holder had mentioned that we could give ourselves a rent holiday, but he asked why we were then charging the NHS for their unit, which was funded by the taxpayer. He wondered whether Freshney Place was a commercial entity or not. If free to the council, what other similar plans did they have. Councillor Hendersen thought that it was good to hear that the aim was to resume the service quickly, but there was no evidence of this happening. Councillor Hendersen added that any temporary option required a better view on timescales. Temporary could be for a very long time. The recommendation was based on the need to increase footfall, but this was at the expense of investment in library services. He wondered whether the council was sacrificing essential projects to keep Freshney Place afloat. He hoped the panel agreed that it would be recognised that more detail was needed before this move happened. It seemed the paper was pushing them down the pre-determined path with insufficient evidence and he believed it was not an appropriate way to do business.

Councillor Dawkins, the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Heritage and Visitor Economy, responded to the call-in and could not stress enough that this was just going to be a temporary relocation for the much-needed library. He stated that leasing a private building would be expensive and timely and if they were to use the Grimsby Town Hall there would be a loss of income from the use of the rooms. He explained that the other temporary locations listed in the report would not be big enough to have a permanent library and the cost to put it somewhere else would increase the liability of the council. He stated that as portfolio holder, he would not be happy with that. At least with this temporary location they would be getting value for money. He fully supported the Officer's decision and stated that as soon as they were able to get out of this temporary location, they would.

Councillor Dawkins added that in March 2025 there was an unexpected leak. It was known that there was asbestos, but the leak created even more issues. It meant that they needed to close the site for safety and for a full building survey to be done; none of which could be done whilst all the different materials were in the building. They had assessed the size of the unit available, ease of access and costs and because it was a service they want to have available again as soon as possible, this was the best option.

The Chair reminded Panel Members that they were only to discuss the issues regarding the temporary relocation of the library.

Some Panel Members raised concerns over the 90 days for internet connection and the timeline for going back to the Central Library building. Officers present answered these concerns and stated that 90 days was the advice from the supplier on the maximum amount of time it would take, so it could potentially be done sooner and in terms of the timeline, they needed to receive the results of the full building survey before they could comment further.

The Chair referred to the timeline of issues occurring with the Central Library building and noted that Officers had known of existing problems with the site. He added that a lot of money had been awarded to the Council as part of an improvement scheme. He wondered why this hadn't been spent on the library repairs then. He felt that the library issues had been left until there was a need for it to be moved to a temporary relocation. He wondered where the money would come from now. Ms Borgstrom explained the money the council received was part of the Town Fund, with the approved use set out in the Town Fund Investment Plan. The money had not been allocated to general repairs of the library. Instead, the grant output was to invest to bring the three upper, and currently empty, floors back into use to create a green skills hub. Any essential repairs for the library service would have been in addition to the Town Fund funding. The Chair was worried that the same thing was going to happen that happened at Leeds City Council where they had no money to do the repairs so the library never moved back to its original building. He wondered whether it would be better if the situation was reviewed every three months instead of 12 months.

Ms Borgstrom added that in relation to reviewing operations, decisions around funding and repairs took time. Funding would be a political decision and there was a lengthy decision making process to follow when it came to financial planning. She added that a full structural survey was needed. They were hoping that by the end of August they would have received the results of the full structural survey and then they would be able to look at options and costings for repairs. She stated that there was a need to set up a temporary provision so that essential services could carry on being provided for the public during this time, and also allow the necessary scrutiny of all future options for any changes in the provision to take place.

One Councillor asked whether a cost analysis had been done for all the different temporary relocation options listed within the report. Mr Browning stated that it had. They needed to take into account the scale of the move for these core services and materials that were being handled, particularly with it just being a temporary location.

Another Panel Member asked if the location where all materials were being stored could be used as the temporary location. Councillor Dawkins confirmed that it could not be.

At this point of the meeting Councillor Mickleburgh proposed to exclude the press and public. Councillor Crofts seconded this. All Members agreed.

RESOLVED – That the press and public be excluded for the following business on the grounds that its discussion was likely to disclose exempt information within paragraph 6 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

During the closed session, panel members raised concerns on whether work with vulnerable groups and other services would still take place in the temporary location or whether they had been placed elsewhere. One Member thought it would be good if ward councillors knew where all services had been temporarily moved. Mr Browning explained that Lincs Inspire would operate these services, and a range had been relocated to other library branches, but it was something he would find out the detail for and report back.

Panel Members also enquired about financial costings of the temporary move and some members believed there were still gaps around some of the finances. Officers present provided reassurance on operational costs and detailed information on cost analysis of the other options.

Following all of the closed business being adhered to, the meeting went back into open session and the press and public were invited back into the room.

Some of the panel shared how they did not feel comfortable with releasing the decision for implementation without receiving further detailed information.

The Monitoring Officer reminded panel members that scrutiny was not a decision-making body. The recommendations they put forward to the Director should be around whether or not the library should be temporarily placed in Freshney Place.

A range of the panel members did not feel comfortable with the decision that had been made, particularly around the 90 day timeframe for internet connection.

Councillor Crofts proposed that the recommended Officer Decision be released for implementation and the review period be reduced from twelve months to every three months. Councillor Boyd seconded this.

Upon a vote, the proposal was carried by five votes to three.

RECOMMENDED TO THE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMY,
ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE – That the Officer Decision be released for implementation and the review period be reduced from twelve months to every three months.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 4.32 p.m.