



ECONOMY, CULTURE AND TOURISM SCRUTINY PANEL

23rd July 2026 at 10.00am

Present:

Councillor Morland (in the Chair)
Councillors K. Batson (substitute for Mills), Charlesworth, Dawkins, Henderson, Humphrey, Mayne and Parkinson.

Officers in attendance:

- Carolina Borgstrom (Director of 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)
- Guy Lonsdale (Interim Section 151 Officer)
- Bev O'Brien (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)
- Joanne Robinson (Assistant Director Policy, Strategy and Resources)
- Helen Thompson (Investment Team Manager Regeneration)

Also in attendance:

- Councillor Brasted (Portfolio Holder for Culture, Heritage and the Visitor Economy)
- Sue Wells (Chief Executive, Lincs Inspire Ltd)
- Dave Huddleston (Finance Director, Lincs Inspire Ltd)
- Claire Williams (General Manager, Grimsby Auditorium – Lincs Inspire Ltd)
- Paul Sargent (Queensberry CEO)
- Councillor Augusta (Park Ward Councillor)
- Councillors Bright (Freshney Ward Councillor)

There was one member of the press and nine members of the public present.

SPE.5 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Mills for this meeting.

SPE.6 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

SPE.7 MINUTES

RESOLVED - The minutes of the Economy, Culture and Tourism Panel held on 11th March 2026 be approved as a correct record.

SPE.8 QUESTION TIME

The Chair welcomed a question from Mr Dicker. Mr Dicker understood that the Cleethorpes Marketplace regeneration scheme, that was funded by the central government levelling up scheme, was discussed at scrutiny meetings and was passed on the basis that it would improve space for events and traffic to the area. He had not seen one mention of anyone, including Councillor Freeston, attending to oppose the idea, nor providing an alternative. He also understood that a public consultation was held indicating that the regeneration was welcomed. It had now become public that Councillor Freeston, as the new leader of the Council wanted to scrap the scheme at an additional cost to the £4m plus already spent. Despite a pledge to cut wasting money, why did the panel think Councillor Freeston had not followed the democratic process that approved the scheme in the first place.

Mr Jones clarified that in terms of the governance process, the matter came to the panel on 10 July with a proposal to alter the scheme to accommodate 12 seasonal parking spaces. This scrutiny panel recommended prior consultation before making the adjustments, but when Cabinet considered the matter on 15 July in open session, they decided to override the scrutiny recommendation and proceed with the implementation of the 12 parking spaces. Mr Jones therefore stated that proper due process had been followed in an open and transparent way.

SPE.9 FORWARD PLAN

The panel considered the current Forward Plan and 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.

SPE.10 TRACKING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF SCRUTINY

The panel received a report from the Statutory Scrutiny Officer tracking the recommendations of the Economy, Culture and Tourism Scrutiny Panel.

Mrs O'Brien reported that the first two items listed on the tracking report had been approved as being completed at a previous meeting and should have been removed. Regarding SPE.52, the Library Services Select Committee, Mrs O'Brien confirmed that the recommendations and findings had gone to Cabinet and all recommendations were approved. One Councillor expressed a preference to keep SPE.52 on the tracker for future reference and to monitor its implementation.

RESOLVED – That the tracking report be noted.

SPE.11 2025/26 COUNCIL PLAN PERFORMANCE AND FINANCE REPORT – QUARTER 4

The panel considered a report from the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets providing information and analysis of the provisional financial position for the 2025/26 financial year.

A panel member argued that the report was incomplete, inaccurate, and not sufficiently fulsome, particularly in its failure to identify interdependencies between portfolios. Concerns were raised about millions of pounds moving between budget lines without clear explanation of impact, especially cross-portfolio.

Councillor Hendersen proposed that the panel recommended to Cabinet that a specific paper on budget virements be requested from Officers. This paper should detail the virements, their importance, impact (especially beyond a single portfolio), and be presented to this Scrutiny Panel for review. Councillor Dawkins seconded the proposal.

One Councillor sought clarification on whether this would be a quarterly requirement or on a trial basis. Councillor Hendersen believed it was best to do it on a trial basis first, offering to work with officers offline on the terms of reference and structure.

The proposal was put to a vote and, with 5 for, 2 against and 1 abstention, it was carried.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET – That a report be requested of Officers that detailed the virements, their importance, impact (especially beyond a single portfolio), and for it to be presented to this Scrutiny Panel for review.

SPE.12 ECONOMY, CULTURE AND TOURISM SCRUTINY PANEL - WORK PROGRAMME 2026/27

The panel considered a report on the work programme for 2026-27 for the Economy, Culture and Tourism Scrutiny Panel.

Mrs O'Brien presented the timetabled items derived from the informal workshop, noting a busy November meeting and several items yet to be scheduled. Discussions took place regarding a joint scrutiny panel meeting with the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel to consider an update on how the skills strategy was doing. One Councillor suggested receiving a briefing paper first, allowing committee members to review and provide comments in advance, before deciding if a formal meeting was necessary. This suggestion was accepted by the panel.

A panel member enquired about the budget amendment concerning the Preston model of local procurement that was decided at the Full Council meeting in February. Mrs O'Brien confirmed that this item had been re-directed to the Communities Scrutiny Panel where they had already received an update on it.

RESOLVED – That the Economy, Culture and Tourism Scrutiny Panel work programme for 2026/27 be approved.

SPE.13 Lincs INSPIRE ANNUAL REPORT

The panel considered the Lincs Inspire Annual Report.

Lincs Inspire's financial position was questioned, specifically regarding reserves, and whether they could be used more effectively to benefit residents. Ms Wells explained that Lincs Inspire was formed to be agile, cut bureaucracy, and operate leanly, which also aided in securing grant funding. She confirmed that the majority of funding supported statutory services (libraries, archives, playing pitches) and contributions to the Auditorium. She stated that Lincs Inspire was duty-bound to hold reserves to ensure it remained a "going concern" covering at least 12 weeks of its nearly 500 staff payrolls. Ms Wells noted the decision not to increase leisure membership prices this year was due to household financial pressures. In response to a follow-up question about whether the facilities operated by Lincs Inspire were adequately maintained, Ms Wells acknowledged the Council's buying power for utilities and the challenges of operating ageing assets. Ms Wells praised Council colleagues for their significant efforts in maintaining these buildings, despite difficulties in sourcing parts for older infrastructure.

Another panel member enquired if Lincs Inspire was a Community Interest Company (CIC) or a charity. They questioned the level of reserves, suggesting that they appeared high and that a lower reserve might allow for more direct help to residents, particularly given current

financial struggles. Mr Huddleston clarified that Lincs Inspire held different types of reserves, including restricted reserves for specific grant-funded projects. He explained that reserves were built up from an unsustainably low level when the organisation was formed to reach a sustainable level. The panel member cited publicly available figures (from Company's House) showing unrestricted reserves of £2.3 million and a surplus of £586,902 for the year ending March 2024. He reiterated the question of whether reserves were above the necessary level and if there was an opportunity to reinvest them into services. Ms Wells further explained that the £2-3 million reserve was a minimum to cover 12 weeks of pay, which was a requirement for an organisation of their size to be considered a going concern. She stated that investment in services often required significant infrastructure funding that went beyond their operational reserves, citing the Wellness Hub as an example of a successful tripartite funding scheme. She highlighted ongoing strategies for leisure facilities and playing pitches as future opportunities for similar collaborative funding.

RESOLVED – That the Lincs Inspire Annual Update be noted.

SPE.14 3-MONTH REVIEW FOR GRIMSBY LIBRARY LOCATION.

The panel considered a briefing note on the 3-month review for the Grimsby Library location.

A panel member asked for clarification on Public Network/computer use sessions. They also asked if public access to local history was now available on an appointment basis. The Member expressed a concern that the report might be out of date given recent Cabinet decisions regarding the main library. They questioned whether it would be more effective to focus resources on bringing the main library building back into commission rather than investigating further temporary relocations. He also sought assurance from officers regarding the protection of Royal Academy artworks and heritage items during ongoing asbestos removal work in the main library. Mr Jaines-White explained that while officers had previously advised against further interim relocations due to finite cash, the Select Committee, Scrutiny, and Cabinet had democratically decided to explore alternatives. Officers were now duty-bound to explore these options and report back on costs, with any implementation subject to a financial business case. The panel member pressed whether officers would revise their advice to Cabinet to prioritise the main library's return. Mr Jaines-White reiterated that officers were following the democratic decision to explore alternatives, and any future advice would be given in the normal course of reporting back on the explored options.

Mr Jones advised the panel that they were entitled to make a recommendation to Cabinet to change direction if they wished to do so. Councillor Hendersen proposed a recommendation to Cabinet to cease

exploration of further temporary library provision and instead direct resources towards bringing the Central Library into use more quickly. One Councillor asked for a more accurate timeline for the main library's reopening. Mr Jaines-White explained that the initial programme would probably go into 2029, but that was heavily caveated due to limited access for intrusive surveys until asbestos removal was largely complete. Temporary roof repairs were being tendered to accelerate asbestos removal, with proper assessment and a more accurate programme expected to be produced in 2027. The Chair reminded the panel of previous extensive discussions on this topic and time constraints involved. After a detailed discussion, Councillor Hendersen's proposal failed due to a lack of a seconder.

A panel member argued that the cost of moving to another temporary location would be small compared to the Central Library project, which still required funding. He suggested the current temporary location was well-used and acceptable, and that focus should remain on reopening the Central Library when funds became available. He preferred to continue as was and review it in a years' time.

RESOLVED – That the 3-month review for Grimsby Library location be noted.

SPE.15 QUESTIONS TO THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER

There were no panel members' questions to the Portfolio Holder.

SPE.16 CALLING IN OF DECISIONS

There were no formal requests from members of this panel to call-in decisions taken at recent meetings of Cabinet.

SPE.17 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chair explained that there was an urgent item report to consider, but it was required to be considered in closed session. Therefore, he asked for a proposer to exclude the press and public. Councillor Dawkins proposed that the meeting go into closed session, Councillor Morland seconded this.

There were 7 For, 0 Against and 1 Abstention. The proposal was carried.

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).

SPE.18 URGENT BUSINESS - FRESHNEY PLACE LEISURE SCHEME

The panel received a report that related to the Freshney Place Leisure Scheme. The Chair advised that the reason for urgency was due to the timing of the decision needing to be made. The panel raised some concerns with accepting the recommendations laid out in the report but understood the risks if they were not to support them.

After a lengthy discussion Councillor Henderson proposed that the following recommendations be made to Cabinet:

1. That Cabinet accepts the advice given and that the recommendations as laid out in the report be supported.
2. That there be a strategic review, at pace, of the top end of the Freshney Place development (Leisure Scheme), with the intention being to capture issues such as Marmot, Public Health, alcohol use, and anti-social behaviour generally).

Councillor Dawkins seconded both of these motions.

The first was supported by a vote of 6 in favour, 2 against.

The second was supported by a vote 7 for, 0 against, 1 abstention.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET –

1. That Cabinet accepts the advice given and that the recommendations as laid out in the report now submitted be supported.
2. That there be a strategic review, at pace, of the top end of the Freshney Place development (Leisure Scheme), with the intention being to capture issues such as Marmot, Public Health, alcohol use, and anti-social behaviour generally).

There being no further business the Chair closed the meeting at 12:07 pm.