

- Present:** Councillor Jane Loffhagen (*in the Chair*)
- Councillors:** Bill Bilton, Matthew Fido, Gary Hewson, Rebecca Longbottom, Helena Mair, Bill Mara, Clare Smalley, Naomi Tweddle and Pat Vaughan
- Also in Attendance:** Councillor Sue Burke (Portfolio Holder for Reducing Inequality), Paul Carrick (Neighbourhood Manager - Sincil Bank), Cheryl Evans (Democratic Services and Elections Manager), Victoria Poulson (Democratic Services Officer), Ben Rollett (Chief Executive of the Voluntary Centre Services), Siân Wade (Active Faith Lead) and Simon Walters (Director for Communities and Environment).
- Apologies for Absence:** Councillor Adrianna McNulty and Councillor Calum Watt

1. **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

2. **Minutes from the meeting of the Committee held on 16 February 2021**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 16 February 2021 be confirmed and signed by the Chair as an accurate record.

3. **Community Integration**

Councillor Jane Loffhagen, Chair of the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee, opened the meeting and provided the Committee with a brief introduction of the topic for discussion which was community integration and social isolation.

(a) **Voluntary Centre Services - Ben Rollett (Chief Executive of the Voluntary Centre Services)**

Ben Rollett briefly explained the current situation with volunteering and social inclusion with emphasis on the Covid-19 pandemic, where the following points were noted:

- During the early stages of the pandemic, there was a greater number of individuals registering to volunteer for the Red Cross; the national NHS volunteer scheme; in local communities; and as part of the Lincolnshire Resilience Forum. He explained that at the Rushton's vaccination site alone, there were 114 volunteers, who combined had undertaken 729 shifts, which if paid £9.30 per hour, would equate in monetary terms to over £40,000 alone.
- The voluntary centre services was working alongside Lincolnshire County Council on how to build on the Covid-19 legacy, with a view of retaining volunteers and how these could be called upon easily in emergency situations. Reference was also made to the NHS responders programme, which had been nationally.
- There had been significant challenges for local community groups and organisations during the pandemic, including a number of volunteers had been advised to shield. Some volunteers were envious about returning to volunteering. This meant that those volunteers could not volunteer in the

traditional way and some had moved to volunteering online, although most volunteers preferred in-person activity rather than remote working.

- Practical advice and remote support was offered to volunteers, including training on DBS checks, and 148 volunteers had accessed online training.
- Groups and organisations were given help to understand how restrictions would affect them and how to deliver their service digitally.
- A significant ongoing challenge faced by the voluntary was access to funding, as this was largely being allocated to Covid-19 related activities and limited for other sectors. Charity shops and animal welfare charities, who rely on donations, were impacted by the loss of funding as a result of the pandemic and associated lockdowns and this was proving to be an ongoing challenge.
- Isolation during the pandemic was an issue for voluntary sector staff and volunteers. It was highlighted that a return to office-based working needed done safely, particularly for those who were shielding, and it remained a large challenge.
- Certain Neighbourhood Boards, for example Birchwood, Bracebridge and Sincil Bank, had continued to meet via virtual technology during the pandemic with the support of the Voluntary Centre Service and the Lincoln Neighbourhood's Together Network (LNTN). The LNTN comprised the chairs and secretaries of the neighbourhood boards and met frequently to discuss any challenges. It also assessed how it could support each other and activity locally. It was proposed that the LNTN would be converted into its own legal entity so it could oversee the insurance arrangements for all of the boards and other similar requirements. It was highlighted that this would also help build resilience with staffing of the boards.
- Support to vulnerable individuals within the community was discussed, which included the introduction of Social Prescribing Link Workers; neighbourhood working; Integrated Placed Based Teams (one in the North and the other in the South); and employability support.
- Support for people with multiple needs had been provided by GP practices and health and other organisations, this provided an additional layer of mental health support, which would help those who had experienced social isolation. In Lincoln North, which included parts of West Lindsey, there were four link workers; in Lincoln Central there was one link worker; and one in Lincoln South.

As a result of the questions to Ben Rollett the following points were made: -

- Volunteers at the vaccination sites at both Rustons and the Lincolnshire Showground were providing an excellent service.
- Activities should be suitable to the local areas for example, it was confirmed that the voluntary centre could support the establishment and the running of a knitting group or any other type of activity, should this support be required.
- Community groups could encounter difficulties accessing premises for their activities, particularly when costs were involved. However it was recognised that owners of buildings in most circumstances needed to charge for the use of buildings to contribute to their own costs. It was commented that an individual could be deemed vulnerable for a variety of reasons and that whilst during the Covid-19 pandemic there was greater focus on those who were deemed clinically extremely vulnerable and shielding, this should not have been the sole focus, as this could have resulted in people slipping through the net, becoming isolated at home and unable to access support.
- It was recognised that the success of neighbourhood boards depended on a number of factors, including the level of involvement from volunteers and the

number of people involved. It was confirmed that the Voluntary Centre Service continued to provide support to boards.

The Chair thanked Ben Rollett for attending the meeting and expressed her thanks for the work of the Voluntary Centre Service.

**(b) Transform Lincoln - formerly the Active Faith Network - Siân Wade (Active Faith Lead)**

The Chair introduced Siân Wade, Transform Lincoln - formerly the Active Faith Network. Siân Wade briefly explained the situation of community integration, partnership and lack of community cohesion in more urban areas. She explained that:

- The global pandemic had highlighted a lack of community cohesion, which had existed previously, including issues in terms of community integration. The drivers for inequality have been strengthened due to Covid-19.
- Villages tended to succeed more with their community response to Covid-19 than city areas.
- Local partnerships had succeeded in offering vouchers within four days. They had also implemented governmental schemes such as Free School Meals vouchers and Pensioner Voucher Scheme in partnership with Lincolnshire Co-operative. People who had been furloughed had volunteered.
- Three weeks before the first lockdown, night light crisis cafés had been launched. The faith sector partnered with the NHS and had to go from a physical café every night to a telephone service, and then returned to an in-person service. This now had circa 100+ volunteers, which was a significant achievement. People realised that there would be mental health issues and there was a real crisis.
- A clothing bank continued to operate to help those in need.
- Following intelligence from other cities, a need for bereavement counselling had been identified and was offered through twelve ministers. Referrals for the service were received from the NHS and other partners.
- Access to goods in short supply, such as pasta and toilet rolls, had been provided for vulnerable people.
- There was a real need for linking the new work that would be commencing, with the new funding that was expected.
- Two new roles in the form of community connectors were created in the North and the South of the city provided by the NHS. This provided a real opportunity to look at how we want the community to look.
- Every community had a church, a school and a Lincolnshire Co-operative and those partners could come together and think about what the community could look like and how they could make that happen.

As a result of questions to Siân Wade, the following points were confirmed:

- Transform Lincoln - formerly the Active Faith Network was Christian-based but worked with other faiths as partners.
- Various types of support could be provided by the City Council, such as a shared vision of what the community could look like. The City of Lincoln Council was good at communicating its ambitions and this resource could be utilised. People did not want to be overwhelmed, but a sense of partnership and support was important, and that everyone was in it together. When a momentum was created, people get excited.

- A lot of money was donated to schools through municipal charities, for example the Dawber Charity, and therefore, there was an established link with the Council through these charities.
- The City of Lincoln had the lowest life expectancy in the East Midlands and all the opportunities for people to better themselves needed to be promoted.
- The City Council excelled at involving partners, and the Council demonstrated that it cared about the City and wanted the City to thrive. If all partners could decide a way forward, there was something in the local strategy. When councillors spoke to constituents on their doorsteps, they were passionate about their areas and they wanted to help.
- The Council could operate as a leader and provide a hub for all the charities, which had been a conclusion of the Committee's previous scrutiny review.
- Between 40 and 45 churches out of over 70 churches were well engaged, and some areas were communicating well together, but the Network had only been established for four years. Re-establishing neighbourhood boards would be helpful also.
- A challenge for any website directory was its provision of up-to-date information at a granular level, so for example people could find out what was going on in Sincil Bank.
- GPs would be expected to be well-connected with their communities, but vulnerability was not solely a health issue and some vulnerable people might not attend GPs. The provision of information by GP practices was variable.

It was asked if Active Faith Network could now be known as Transform Lincoln - formerly the Active Faith Network.

The Chair thanked Siân Wade for her presentation.

**(c) City of Lincoln Council's Response to the Pandemic / Engaging with Communities - Simon Walters (Director for Communities and Environment) and Paul Carrick (Neighbourhood Manager - Sincil Bank)**

The Chair introduced Simon Walters, Director for Communities and Environment and Paul Carrick, Neighbourhood Manager – Sincil Bank. Simon Walters and Paul Carrick briefly explained the City of Lincoln Council's Response to the Pandemic and how it engaged with communities. The presentation began with Paul Carrick who explained that:

- Over 18,000 people were contacted to check if they would like a daily or weekly wellbeing phone call. Out of this number, over 500 people had responded expressing an interest in receiving calls.
- Staff members threw themselves into it with over 1,300 telephone calls made and over 300 emails sent – vulnerable people were being contacted.
- The community support was mapped out in terms of the eleven Co-operative stores. It was suggested that in the future this support could be planned ward by ward to see where different support services were.
- In relation to the Lincoln Crisis Fund, £25,000 was allocated to a central collection.

Simon Walters provided information on the second phase of the City of Lincoln Council's Response to the Pandemic:

- Toward the end of 2020 into the early part of 2021, mass community testing began, focussed in the Monks Road and Sincil Bank areas.

- City Council mobilised very quickly but faced a real hurdle to get to communities to get the message across.
- Overall intervention was very successful.
- In August 2021, during phase three of the council response to the pandemic, infection rates had begun to rise once again. Lincoln had the highest infection rate in the country at one point, driven by people enjoying the evening economy. The infection rate had increased from 200 to between 700 and 800 cases per 100,000 in a very short space of time. A response to this increase was mobilised in three days pulling on a range of community partners and was again hugely successful in bringing rates down.

Paul Carrick made the following additional statements on the legacy of the pandemic:

- An informal dialogue began between various community and faith groups. This followed a great deal of work with the BAME community over the last 12-18 months and the group applied for its first grant and had received £11,000.
- Lincoln Embracing All Nations was the name for the new group, which would be a focal point for members of the BAME community.
- There was a need to make the maximum use of the limited resources available.

The Chair commented that the Council was good at coordinating partners and support, but would like to see how the Council could do this on a more local level. She advised that at present, the Council did not have neighbourhood staff in all the areas, and the Council could consider connecting people at ward level. Developing the local argument it was stated that people did not necessarily associate with a ward, as their allegiances were to a more local level.

The Chair thanked Paul Carrick and Simon Walters for their attendance and contributions.

**(d) Councillor Sue Burke (Portfolio Holder for Reducing Inequality)**

The Chair introduced Councillor Sue Burke, Portfolio Holder for Reducing Inequality, who explained that:

- People could feel isolated and lonely even in the wealthiest part of the city and crime and lack of education can make people particularly vulnerable.
- 420 neighbourhoods in Lincolnshire were some of the most deprived areas in the country with almost 1 in 5 (18%) and 1 in 6 in East Lindsey (16%) among the most disadvantaged.
- Working from home could lead to mental and physical health issues, including social isolation.

There was discussion on the trend for working from home, such as the costs and wellbeing of individuals working at home, including the suitability of existing housing and building homes in the future. This was balanced by the view that there were some people who preferred working from home, with different circumstances for different people. However, not everyone had access to a space that allowed for uninterrupted work, especially work involving confidential information.

The Chair thanked Councillor Sue Burke for her contribution to the discussion.

The Chair concluded the item on Community Integration by expressing the need to build on the work during the Covid-19 pandemic by continuing to nurture neighbourhoods and community support, of which City of Lincoln councillors could play an active role, as they had very good understanding of the wards they represent. The Chair reiterated her thanks for everyone's attendance.

#### **4. Work Programme 2021/22**

The Chair advised that scoping documents for the meetings on 12 October and 2 November 2021 were detailed at Appendices B and C to the report.

The Committee was scheduled to consider an item on Cultural Consortium at its meeting on 12 October and the Director for Communities and Environment; the University of Lincoln; Lincoln BIG; and the Zest Theatre would be invited to attend to contribute to the discussion.

It was suggested that an additional meeting be arranged for December 2021.

There was a discussion on hybrid meetings where it was advised that the temporary legislation, which enabled formal committee meetings (for example, scrutiny committees) to be held online had come to an end in early May 2021. There was now a requirement for councillors to attend formal committee meetings in person. However, it was possible for key contributors; officers or members of the public to join remotely. Testing was ongoing in the committee rooms to establish whether it was possible to utilise the equipment already in place to enable this to happen. It was noted that for other meetings, such as pre-meetings; councillor training and meetings such as the commons advisory panel could continue to meet remotely. The agenda and calendar appointment would state the location of a meeting and members were encouraged to check this.

**RESOLVED**

That the work programme for the Committee be approved.