



Scrutiny

Annual Report 2018-19

Introduction

During 2018-19 the City of Lincoln Council operated an Executive system, comprising the Leader and five other portfolio holders. Much of the decision-making within the Council takes place within the Executive. To improve the quality of the decisions made by the Council, a scrutiny structure remained in place under the local government modernisation agenda, which provided the opportunity for the remaining 27 non-Executive Councillors to challenge decisions made by the Executive, as well as to help the Executive in reviewing and developing new policies.

Background to Scrutiny

The scrutiny structure is:-

- Performance Scrutiny Committee
- Policy Scrutiny Committee
- Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee
- Select Scrutiny Committee
- Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee

What Did We Achieve in 2018/19?

Main Scrutiny Committees were:

Committee	Chair
Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee	Councillor J Loffhagen
Performance Scrutiny Committee	Councillor Hewson
Policy Scrutiny Committee	Councillor C Burke
Select Scrutiny Committee	Councillor Hewson

With the exception of the Select Scrutiny Committee, the work programmes for these scrutiny committees were formally approved by the respective Committees in June 2018, and updated regularly throughout the municipal year. The Select Scrutiny Committee meets annually in order to consider crime and disorder, as well as considering any call-in requests made throughout the year.

This report identifies some of the key achievements made by the Committees. Current work programmes for scrutiny committees, can be found on the Council's website.

Sub/ Task Groups were:

Name of Group	Chair
Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee	Councillor Hewson

This sub committee sits under Performance Scrutiny Committee and reports back to this meeting on a quarterly basis.

Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee

The Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee considered main topics as scrutiny reviews during 2018/19, as follows:

Local Community Impact of Welfare Reform

With the introduction of Universal Credit to Lincoln in March 2018, the wider impact of welfare reform and the high demand for affordable housing in the city, it was accepted that the topic of welfare reform was broad ranging. Two particular strands, however, had emerged which provided opportunities for review:

- Universal Credit
- Housing

On 3 July 2018 the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee was given some background information regarding key changes to welfare provision including the benefit cap, the spare room subsidy and the roll out of Universal Credit, together with possible areas for the Committee to consider reviewing further as part of its scrutiny review. Martin Walmsley, the Council's Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits was a key witness for the Committee at this meeting and subsequent meetings of the Committee during the review.

On 28 August 2018 the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee was given key information with regards to the challenges of Universal Credit, findings from the National Audit Centre, Impact of Universal Credit on Council Tenants, and feedback from the DWP on Universal Credit payments and evidence from the Council's Universal Credit Support Team. Helen Oliver, Chief Officer at Citizens Advice Lincoln and District was in attendance at this meeting.

On 6 November 2018 the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee explored the topic of Universal Credit and the supply of affordable housing. Those in attendance providing the Committee with valuable evidence were:

- John Stewart, Policy Manager at the Residential Landlord Association
- Kieron Manning, Planning Manager, City of Lincoln Council
- Simon Colburn, Assistant Director of Health and Environmental Services, City of Lincoln Council
- Andrew McNeil, Assistant Director of Housing Investment and Strategy, City of Lincoln Council

On 18 December 2018 a special Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee took place following the announcement by the Department of Work and Pensions that it's Universal Credit Support Scheme which was currently provided by Local Authorities would be delivered by Citizens Advice from April 2019. Graham Metcalfe, Partnership Manager at the Department for Work and Pensions, Martin Walmsley, Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits at the City Council and Helen Oliver, Chief Officer at Citizens Advice Lincoln and District were in attendance for this meeting.

On 8 January 2019 the Committee considered Universal Credit and its links with housing, focussing on accessibility and affordability from the perspective of tenants. The review covered both the social and private rented sector and the following witnesses provided valuable evidence at the meeting:

- James Wilkinson, Strategic Development Project Manager, City of Lincoln Council
- Dave Ward, Acting Tenant Services Manager, City of Lincoln Council
- Martin Walmsley, Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits, City of Lincoln Council
- Helena Mair, Senior Case Work for Karen Lee MP

On 5 March 2019 the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee met to discuss any emerging recommendations in relation to Universal Credit and its link to Housing Supply and Demand. Councillor Bob Bushell, the Chair of Community Leadership Committee, subsequently presented a report to the Council on the findings of the review. Key findings were as follows:

- There was a large need for affordable homes in Lincoln (17,400 across Central Lincolnshire by 2036)
- Development was slow, and material and land costs were high
- Lincoln was constrained by its boundaries
- 70% of landlords felt recent changes reduced profitability of letting homes
- 69% said the changes discouraged investment
- 67% said rents had to increase
- 62% would be unwilling to let to people on Universal Credit
- The Council is taking a tough position on rogue landlords, and driving up standards in the private sector generally

The final recommendations of the Scrutiny Review were agreed by the Committee and submitted to the Executive as follows:

1. That the Council, as part of the City Centre Masterplan and associated work already underway, sought to increase the vibrancy of the city centre and undertake a review of empty commercial units, particularly units above shops to ascertain whether there were any opportunities to convert them to residential use.
2. In view of the fact that the Welfare Advice Team, Universal Credit Team, Customer Service Team and Citizen's Advice all currently worked independently to provide support to Universal Credit claimants and customers and in light of the national decision to withdraw funding from local authorities and relocate this to Citizens Advice, that the Council undertakes a comprehensive review of the areas within its service delivery that supports welfare advice to the city's residents.
3. That the Council agrees to lobby local and regional Department for Work and Pensions representatives to better understand why there continued to be a delay in Universal Credit payments, which caused significant issues for Council's tenants as well as tenants in the private sector.

4. That the Council's Housing Directorate undertook a review of housing allocations and tenant services in order to increase and improve the sustainability of Council tenants.
5. That the Council reviews the provision and considers a re-launch of a scheme with the Acts Trust, which had previously been set up under a Service Level Agreement regarding the re-use and distribution of abandoned furniture to Council tenants, and identified any further opportunities to work with other charities or organisations to improve access to free furniture or white goods for those tenants struggling to furnish their homes.
6. That recommendations 1) to 5) be referred to the relevant Vision 2020 Groups for consideration and addition to their respective work programmes.

These recommendations were approved by the Executive on 5 March 2019.

Performance Scrutiny Committee

As part of the Performance Scrutiny Committee's remit, it held regular 'portfolio under scrutiny' sessions, where portfolio holders were invited to report on service achievements under their portfolio. Members were then able to ask questions about the performance of these service areas. The consideration of portfolio reports included the provision of a template for reports which placed a focus upon providing performance information relating to the member's portfolio. By doing so, the Committee was able to focus on the performance of a portfolio with fewer diversions into detailed analysis of policy issues.

A regular report was provided in the form of a Portfolio Performance overview presented by the Policy Unit to the relevant Performance Scrutiny Committee meeting with the purpose of bringing out key contextual benchmarking indicators about issues in the city overall in relation to the portfolio under scrutiny. This process helped promote effective scrutiny of the portfolio holder's report.

In addition to the regular scrutiny of portfolio holders, the Scrutiny Committee received reports in the following areas:

- Quarterly financial monitoring to provide members with a summary of actual income and expenditure compared to the revised budget and appropriate allocation of any surpluses to reserves.
- Quarterly performance update reports to ensure regular monitoring of the Council's operational performance as a key component of the Local Performance Management Framework.
- A quarterly review of the Strategic Risk Register - what improvements or issues have been identified.
- A report on Treasury Management and Actual Prudential Indicators as a requirement of the Council's reporting procedures under regulations issued under the Local Government Act 2003.
- An annual report detailing progress made by the Central Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee.
- An update report on Section 106 contributions.

- Income and arrears monitoring reports providing updates to members on the position with regard to amounts of monies owed to the City Council as at 1st April.
- Revenues and Benefits performance updates providing members with an update on performance in the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service.
- A report on the financial and performance position of the Housing Repairs Service at the end of the 2017/18 financial year was received by members of Performance Scrutiny Committee on 24 January 2019. It was highlighted that performance continued to increase among the Housing Repairs Service with tenant satisfaction exceeding the performance target.

Members took part in the budget review process for the scrutiny of the proposed budget and Council Tax for the 2019/20 financial year and the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2019-2024, undertaken in two separate stages; firstly all members were invited to a briefing session to afford all members the opportunity to gain a greater understanding and awareness of the Council's financial position, thus aiding further scrutiny of the budget and in the case of the opposition party if desired the preparation of an alternative budget. This was followed by a more traditional scrutiny process undertaken to review in more detail the MTFs and the robustness of the proposed budget options and Council Tax for the 2019/20 financial year. This was undertaken in a committee format as the Budget Review Group with the appropriate governance arrangements in place.

The Committee held scrutiny reviews during the 2018/19 year in respect of:

Christmas Market Outturn Report 2017

Performance Scrutiny Committee had played a large part in monitoring the operational/performance costs of the Christmas Market for several years. Members were provided with a detailed report for the 2017 market at its meeting held on 12 July 2018.

Members commented that there was too much criticism for the closure of the Christmas Market the previous year and members were to be involved should the decision arise again to close the market.

Electoral Registration

Members received an update on electoral registration within the City of Lincoln at its meeting held on 24 January 2019, outlining the canvass process and stating the total amount of residents registered as at 1 December 2018.

Christmas Market 2018

Members received a Christmas Market Stalls/Budget Brief Pre Event Report at its meeting held on 4 October 2018.

At this meeting it was stated that the overall budget income from stall fee's for the 2018 market was £417,190. At this stage 146 traders had already fully paid and the remaining 28 stalls were under negotiation.

On 24 January 2019 a verbal update on the Christmas Market 2018 Outturn was also received by members, giving updated details on operational and budget matters.

On 22 August 2019 the Christmas Market 2018 Outturn Report was presented to members, providing the Performance Scrutiny Committee with key financial performance in relation to the 2018 Lincoln Christmas Market.

Thematic Review - Homelessness

A report was given by Alison Timmins, Housing Solutions and Support Manager, with information relating to the provision of homelessness services following the enactment of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 on 3 April 2018

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 placed new duties on Councils so that everyone who was homeless or threatened with homelessness would have access to meaningful help, irrespective of their priority need status or local connection to the authority they approached. The new Act was the biggest legislative change in homelessness in the last 15 to 20 years.

Policy Scrutiny Committee

During 2018/19, the Committee met five times, principally to scrutinise decisions due to be taken by the Executive or Council. The Committee provided its insights and recommendations on a variety of topics, which were suitably reflected in the eventual decision-making process.

The Committee scrutinised the following topics in particular detail:

Joint Municipal Waste Strategy for Lincolnshire

The Committee was presented with a draft Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy as part of the consultation process. This set out how members of the Lincolnshire Waste Partnership could work together to protect the environment by delivering sustainable waste management services through the establishment of best value waste management practises across the County. A representative from Lincolnshire Waste Partnership gave a power point presentation and Councillor Poll, Lincolnshire County Councillor was also in attendance to answer any questions.

The committee debated the presentation and raised the following main points:

- Members were broadly supportive of the draft Strategy, and supported the comments in the proposed draft response.
- Members felt that communication was key to promote what could be included in bins for recycling and suggested that information could be sent out with Council Tax bills, social media and Your Lincoln.
- Members felt that it was important to simplify the current recycling system and if possible all of the local authorities have the same or very similar system.

- Members raised issues on fly tipping in the City and commented on the causes of this associated with HWRC restrictions, and added that enforcement needed to be increased.
- Members commented on the waste disposal centres and the difficulty for people in full time work to use them. They suggested that the service could be improved by amending the opening times which would encourage more people to use them.
- Members commented that it was important that the consultation was as wide as possible to ensure it captured everyone's views and suggested that more social media be used to promote the consultation.
- Members suggested that recycling should be promoted at the University on a regular basis as it was a large demographic and there was a lot of movement in the attendees at the University.
- Members supported the food waste proposals in principle and noted the implications on disposal resulting.
- Members supported the South Kesteven District Council pilot scheme for food waste collections, and they recognised that this was not straight forward and that there were wider implications to be considered before a full roll-out. They noted that the waste was producing bio-methane, which was being used to produce electricity
- Members recognised the need for significant changes to the current position and that officers needed to be supported to implement well thought through and financially viable change in due course
- Members supported the plastic straw campaign of some drink retail outlets.

The committee recommended that the draft consultation response be supported and that the comments made by the Policy Scrutiny Committee be considered by the Portfolio Holder for inclusion in the formal consultation response.

Business Rates Growth Policy

The committee was presented with the draft City of Lincoln Business Rates Growth Policy for comment prior to consideration by Executive. The committee were advised that the policy aimed to provide a time limited rate relief discount to new and extended premises within the City, in the interest of building the Business Rates base, supporting economic growth and job creation.

Members of the committee discussed the report and generally supported the principle and initiatives of the scheme.

Following the discussion members recommended to Executive that the Policy be approved and that they consider an addition to the eligibility criteria to include a commitment to signing up to the Social Responsibility Charter.

In addition to the key topics, the Committee also scrutinised the following items and forwarded its comments for consideration by the Executive:

- Fair Trade Policy
- People Strategy
- Customer Experience Strategy
- Modern Slavery Statement and Charter
- Review of Mandatory Houses in Multiple Occupation Licensing Scheme

- Proposed Commemorative Plaque Scheme for Lincoln
- Proposals to Introduce a Public Space Protection Order to Allow St Peters Passage Lincoln to be gated.
- Protecting Vulnerable People
- Joint Protocol on Unauthorised Encampments in Lincolnshire
- Localised Council Tax Support Scheme 2018/19
- New Build Strategy

The committee also reviewed the following policies:

- Review of Mutual Exchange Policy
- Review of Fraud and Sanction Policy

The Committee also received regular updates from the Health Scrutiny Committee.

Select Scrutiny Committee

The principal functions of the Select Scrutiny Committee are to meet as the Crime and Disorder Committee and to consider any requests for the Call-In of Executive decisions.

The Call-In process allows scrutiny members to challenge a decision made by the Executive or any of its individual portfolio holders, prior to the implementation. This gives the Select Scrutiny Committee the opportunity to examine a decision where particular concerns have been raised and respond accordingly. There were no call-in requests in 2018/19.

The Committee met on one occasion sitting as Crime and Disorder Committee on 25 July 2018 considering the following items:-

- Lincolnshire Police – Lincoln Performance Overview
- City Centre Intervention
- Lincoln Business Improvement Group

Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee

The Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee is a sub-committee of Performance Scrutiny Committee. It was established in 2008 to increase engagement between backbench Members and Tenant Advisory Panel representatives. The Sub-Committee has continued to meet and tenants on the Committee consider that it has helped them have their say when scrutinising housing matters. The Committee met six times during 2018/19 and considered many reports which included the following topics:

- Role of the Housing Officer
- Tenant Involvement Strategy
- Annual Report to Tenants and Leaseholders 2017/18
- Portfolio Holder for Quality Housing Annual Report
- Repairs

- LTP Annual Report
- Resident Involvement Update

The Committee also effectively scrutinised Housing performance on a quarterly basis and received regular updates on the progress of the Lincoln Tenants Panel.

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