

- Present:** Councillor Jane Loffhagen (*in the Chair*)
- Councillors:** Naomi Tweddle, Bill Bilton, Alan Briggs, Sue Burke, Liz Bushell, Thomas Dyer, Jackie Kirk, Lucinda Preston and Christopher Reid
- Also in Attendance:** Paul Carrick, Neighbourhood Manager.
- Apologies for Absence:** Councillor Helena Mair and Councillor Hilton Spratt

1. **Confirmation of Minutes - 10 March 2020**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2020 be confirmed.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

3. **Befriending Scheme - Overview**

Paul Carrick, Neighbourhood Manager, presented a document entitled 'Our Befriending Service During Covid-19', which set out a bespoke service designed and implemented by the City of Lincoln Council to support those residents likely to experience extreme isolation, loneliness and vulnerability as a result of the lockdown measures imposed nationally in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

From the work of the Council's teams in tackling isolation in the community, and the previous scrutiny review of this Committee into Social Isolation, it quickly became apparent how vital it would be to respond quickly but with a robust plan that would effectively support people who were facing extreme loneliness and vulnerability. It was also clear at an early stage that it would not just be those people who had existing isolation needs, but other people who had not faced isolation before and consequently had no coping mechanism.

The creation and implementation of the befriending service was not about being strategic or innovative, it was an impassioned response to what was, for some, a difficult and frightening time. The key elements that the service sought to achieve were:

- a trusted service to support those who were most isolated in Lincoln's communities;
- a service that would provide mutual benefits for Lincoln's residents and staff;
- effective working with a signposting service, created to aid and support organisations to deliver vital help to those most in need.

The service was an excellent example of bringing staff together from across all skill backgrounds and departments to design and run a service that would maintain or even improve residents' lives. As part of the service the Council's staff and residents were more connected, had more support when they wanted and needed it and, above all, were listened to when they felt that they had no one to talk to. Whilst the intention was for light-hearted conversation to ease the potential loneliness of

lockdown, the friendships and meaningful conversations that were created as a result of the befriending service could never have been anticipated.

The Council's staff indicated that they felt supported throughout their involvement with the service and enjoyed undertaking the role. Feedback from residents also highlighted that almost every user had enjoyed receiving the calls and got on well with their befriender, as well as feeling that their mental wellbeing was supported.

In terms of the service's achievements, the following points were noted:

- 54 members of staff across ten different service areas were deployed as part of the befriending service, representing a true example of One Council. This style of work was completely outside of the normal remit of the majority of staff who volunteered to work as part of the befriending service;
- in addition to the Council's officers, the service received excellent support of Ward Councillors, again highlighting the Council's passion and desire to support communities in the city;
- over 18,000 people across the city were contacted to establish whether or not they wished to receive calls as part of the service. 2,500 of these were via telephone in a very short period of time at the outset of setting up the service;
- the average time spent on a befriending call was 18 minutes, which clearly evidenced that these calls were not just drop ins but heartfelt and meaningful conversations, as intended at the outset of the service's establishment;
- the complexity of the initial set up included merging thousands of rows of data into one easy to read system to ensure accuracy and robustness, as well as designing a reporting system for befrienders to use. Huge amounts of effort had gone into ensuring that this was in place to support the launch of the service and was integral to its success;
- a significant amount of positive feedback had been received on social media, letters and emails as well as through surveys and actual befriending calls in respect of the befriending service.

A timeline was included within the report which set out the different stages of the pandemic and the various stages that the befriending service took between 18 March 2020 and 31 July 2020.

The befriending service was set up alongside a separate community helpline the Council had introduced which provided specific signposting and advice to facilities such as foodbanks for those in need. There would often be cross-referrals between these two services which enabled adequate support to be put in place for people.

The report also outlined the results of surveys to befrienders and residents who used the service, both of which consisted of very positive and complementary feedback. Numerous case studies and quotes were included in the report which provided positive examples of how well received the service had been or compliments in relation to the befrienders themselves. Quotes were also documented from those delivering the service, capturing positive experiences from their perspective.

As restrictions started to ease towards the end of June the number of people requiring the service naturally reduced. It was essential, however, that support continued for those who required it. Conversations were therefore held with third sector partners across the city to see whether they had capacity to provide this ongoing support. In addition to the Council's own Lincare service, the following organisations had confirmed their support:

- Age UK
- YMCA/Community Lincs
- Assist

79 residents, who were some of the most isolated individuals in the city, had been transferred onto these providers to ensure that they continued to receive the support they needed.

In closing, Mr Carrick outlined his thanks to all staff for their valuable contributions in setting up and running the service, together with elected members who were also extremely supportive. He added that the report could in no way do justice to the excellent work and support that the befriending service provided.

Councillor Sue Burke took this opportunity to thank Mr Carrick and all officers and members for their involvement in this service. She was particularly impressed and thankful that the service did not just stop once lockdown restrictions were lifted and that 79 people who clearly still needed an element of support would continue to receive it.

Councillor Naomi Tweddle reflected on the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee's previous scrutiny review into social isolation and its scrutiny review of integrated communities which it commenced at the beginning of the year, both of which set out significant concerns in relation to social isolation and loneliness. She added, however, that the befriending service was a true example of what could be achieved when everyone pulled together and worked towards the same goal which she said had ultimately made a huge difference to people's lives. Councillor Tweddle was pleased the support was continuing and thanked Mr Carrick for managing the service.

Councillor Jackie Kirk highlighted the numerous positive examples of calls and cases that were regularly reported by the Chief Executive in respect of the befriending service and thanked all those who had contributed to its establishment and operation. As well as providing clear benefits to residents, it also provided staff with an opportunity to develop new skills and work in a service completely different to their normal day-to-day role at the Council. Councillor Kirk commended the work of the three voluntary organisations in continuing the support provided as part of the befriending service and highlighted that the YMCA and Community Lincs was in the process of engaging with the Good Neighbourhood Scheme with funding in place to develop schemes in Lincoln. Further information would be circulated in due course, but it was noted that three such schemes were proposed for Lincoln with support from the Lincolnshire Co-operative and churches across the city.

Councillor Jane Loffhagen had volunteered as a befriender in the service and reflected on her own experience of making calls and engaging with residents. She emphasised that the role was not easy and extremely stressful, but equally very rewarding. She commended the fantastic ongoing support that staff received, congratulated all staff involved and praised Mr Carrick and those responsible for setting the service up and operating it in such a well organised and efficient manner.

It was RESOLVED that the report be noted.

4. Overview of Integrated Communities - Going Forward

Graham Watts, Democratic and Elections Manager, provided an update on the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee's Integrated Communities scrutiny review which it commenced earlier this year.

Two meetings held been held to gather evidence for the review from the Council's officers, external stakeholders and partners. A survey to residents had also been carried out, which generated in excess of 100 responses. The Committee had not met since March 2020 due to Covid-19 and it was agreed that the evidence collated as part of the review, given the circumstances relating to the pandemic, would be out of date and no longer relevant to the situation currently facing communities in the city. It was agreed that this review should therefore be postponed at this time.

Mr Watts agreed to investigate what progress had been made with the development of a webpage on the City Council's website to signpost residents to the various activities, events and services available across the city from the perspective of community engagement, as recommended as part of the Committee's scrutiny review into Social Isolation.

It was RESOLVED that the scrutiny into Integrated Communities be postponed.

5. Topics for Discussion

Councillor Jane Loffhagen, Chair of the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee, in view of the postponement of the Committee's scrutiny review of Integrated Communities, invited members to put forward suggestions for further topics to review.

The following topics were suggested:

- alcohol and substance misuse in Lincoln, particularly in light of Covid-19;
- the prevalence of racism in Lincoln and the Black Lives Matter movement;
- the promotion of Lincoln's tourism offer and attracting more people to the city;
- Support to businesses, the impact of Covid-19 on the high street and what support the Council could provide;
- The Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic and lessons learnt
- Local Government Reorganisation.

It was agreed that, from a community leadership perspective, the Committee should consider a topic in relation to Covid-19. It was acknowledged, however, that the implications of Covid-19 impacted everything the City Council did and all of the City's residents, so it was a significant subject for the Committee to consider. Also acknowledged was the uncertainty surrounding the virus in terms of how long it would continue to be an issue for the country, what further lockdown measures or restrictions would be put in place and what further guidance would be issued by the Government moving forward in response to the pandemic.

The Chair and Vice-Chair agreed to meet outside of the meeting to consider a more detailed scoping of the proposals put forward in relation to Covid-19 and share this with all members of the Committee in due course. It was noted that the following key stakeholders would be useful contributors to the review from the business community:

- Lincolnshire Chamber of Commerce;

- Lincoln Business Improvement Group;
- the Bailgate Guild;
- the Federation of Small Businesses;
- Business Lincolnshire.

It was agreed that meetings of the Committee should be held on a monthly basis with a final outcome report scheduled for March 2021, prior to the pre-election period.

It was RESOLVED that the next topic of review by the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee be focussed on Covid-19 and that this be further scoped by the Chair and Vice-Chair.

6. Work Programme 2020-2021

It was RESOLVED that a schedule of meetings be programmed on a monthly basis to accommodate a scrutiny review into Covid-19.