

<b>Present:</b>	Councillor Jane Loffhagen ( <i>in the Chair</i> )
<b>Councillors:</b>	Bill Bilton, Alan Briggs, Sue Burke, Liz Bushell, Jackie Kirk, Helena Mair, Lucinda Preston, Christopher Reid, Ronald Hills and Gary Hewson
<b>Also in Attendance:</b>	Simon Walters, Jo Walker, Steve Welsby, Sarah Loftus, Nicola Lockwood and Barry Hepton
<b>Apologies for Absence:</b>	Councillor Naomi Tweddle, Councillor Hilton Spratt and Angela Andrews

13. **Confirmation of Minutes - 20 October 2020**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held 20 October 2020 be confirmed.

14. **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

15. **Scrutiny Review - Impact on Businesses and Employment during the Covid-19 Pandemic**

Jane Loffhagen, Chair of the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee opened the meeting and provided the committee with a brief introduction of the topic for review which was the impact on businesses during the Covid-19 pandemic.

She introduced the witnesses present at the meeting who had been invited to provide a background on how the City of Lincoln Council had helped local businesses since the Covid-19 pandemic began as well as businesses within the city to provide an insight on the difficulties they had faced during the pandemic the past 8 months.

The representatives were as follows:

- Jo Walker, Assistant Director for Growth
- Simon Walters, Strategic Director of Communities and Environment
- Steve Welsby, Communications Manager
- Sarah Loftus, Chief Executive at Lincoln Business Improvement Group
- Barry Hepton, Local Business Owner and Chairman of the Bailgate Guild
- Nicola Lockwood, Local Business Owner and Vice Chair of the Bailgate Guild

The Chair explained that the purpose of the review was to understand the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and how it had affected businesses, whilst also identifying support already being provided and whether there were any gaps of which the City of Lincoln Council could provide further support. Not only would the review look at businesses, it would also look at how the pandemic had affected individuals from the perspective of jobs and employment.

16. **Key Representatives**

- (a) **Jo Walker - Assistant Director for Growth (City of Lincoln Council)**

Jo Walker, Assistant Director for Growth provided a brief presentation on the business grants that had been funded by the government during the second lockdown, she explained the following:

- There were two main schemes for grant funding:
  - 1) Local Restriction Support Grant (Mandatory Scheme)
    - £2,181,584 funding had been given to Lincoln
    - The Mandatory Scheme solely focused on businesses that were forced to close during Covid 19 who provided 'in-person' services and were open prior to lockdown
    - The grants were given based on the rateable value of the business
    - This scheme also supported businesses who had been unable to open since 23 March 2020 i.e. nightclubs.
  - 2) Additional Restrictions Grant (Discretionary)
    - £1,985,980 had been given as a one-off lump sum based on the population of Lincoln
    - The grant was for use at the Council's discretion to support local businesses, the onus being on those severely impacted by the crisis
    - The money could be used for wider support measures
    - Had to be spent by March 2022.
- The Business Closure Grant Scheme had opened for applications on 16 November 2020 and grants of between £250 and £3,000 were available for eligible closed businesses during the 28 day lockdown period.
- 125 applications had been received so far and a test payment was being administered

She invited members' questions and comments.

Question: Was the amount of grant money given sufficient?

Response: Essentially the mandatory scheme was based on the average rent, it was felt that the money given may not be enough but there were other options available for people to receive grants.

Question: Was there a time limit in which the money had to be spent?

Response: Not with the mandatory scheme however the money for the discretionary scheme needed to be spent by March 2022.

Question: Were there two streams for supporting the local businesses?

Response: Yes, they must be within the City boundary and the severity of income would be assessed, officers were trying to be as compassionate as possible.

Question: Will every business receive the same amount of money?

Response: If a business pays business rates it would depend on their rateable value. Officers ask for bank details to check their eligibility and to also be able to make the payment.

**(b) Sarah Loftus, Chief Executive (Lincoln BIG)**

Sarah Loftus, Chief Executive of Lincoln Business Improvement Group (Lincoln BIG) briefly introduced herself to the committee and explained that she had circulated a number of documents to the committee prior to the meeting which were:

- The Lincoln Recovery Plan
- Results from the Residents Survey
- Coronavirus Survey Results that was sent out to all levy paying businesses
- Lincoln BIG Annual Report

She also explained that Lincoln BIG had worked very closely with the City of Lincoln Council over the lockdown period and felt that the key things to continue in the second lockdown were communicating with businesses and providing essential guidance and advice as well providing education to business owners.

She highlighted that the grants were a huge help for the local businesses however retail sectors unfortunately were excluded so making sure grants were received as quickly as possible was essential.

Grants were playing a key role in ensuring the survival of local businesses, there had been a £1.4 million loss in the city since the pandemic began so to be able to deliver COVID secure events in 2021 would be a significant help to getting businesses back up and running again.

With regards to training, Lincoln BIG carried out a scheme every year but struggled with participation, so there needed to be a more creative approach and it was very costly. There needed to be a 6-12 month programme rather than 12 hours which wasn't enough for business owners to benefit.

Question: As the survey was sent out to businesses back in April when we were still in the early stages of the pandemic, would another one be sent out?

Response: A lot had been carried out over the past few months and there was the fear of there being too many sent out and them being ignored, however the concerns for businesses were still the same. Sarah asked Nicola and Barry as business owners if they would appreciate being sent another survey and they both agreed it would be a good idea.

Question: Would there be wardens/PCSO's patrolling areas to ensure rules were being adhered to?

Response: A scheme had been heavily suggested which would help fund some COVID marshals. This scheme would commence once the high street was back up and running.

**(c) Simon Walters, Strategic Director of Communities and Environment (City of Lincoln Council)**

Simon Walters, Director of Communities and Environment provided a presentation to the Committee on how the City of Lincoln Council mitigated the impact of COVID-19 on local businesses. He explained the following:

- Groups such as the City Centre Management Group, City Centre Tasking Group and City Centre and Uphill Recovery group were set up to help combat the impact of COVID-19
- The strategy for lifting lockdown was to:
  - Ensure that the city was made safe and felt welcoming to people, residents and employee's
  - Developing a programme (events & activities) to bring people back into the city in a safe
  - Managing a sensitive marketing campaign which encouraged people back into the city
  - Promoting key messages that included 'shop local, buy local' so the Lincoln business community was supported
  - Offering tailored support to Lincoln businesses re COVID-19
- Referred to Phase 1 (Retail), Phase 2 (hospitality) and Phase 3 (student return)
- Highlighted the feedback that was received from residents on how they would feel safe in the city. The majority of residents were happy with the work the Council was doing to help control the impacts of COVID-19 and felt there was no further action required by the Council
- Laid out the plans for Lockdown 2 which were as follows:
  - Additional funding was received
  - Further communication and online digital campaigns
  - Improving the local environment by carrying out maintenance work to make the City centre more attractive
  - Managing activities with the help of Covid ambassadors and the Police
- Advised what would need to happen next to create a more cultural, unique experience when visiting the city, this involved:
  - Cultural programmes
  - Lincoln BIG programme of activity
  - Developing an Events and Festivals Strategy

Question: Were there any links with the University in relation to any art projects?

Response: There had been constant liaison between the City of Lincoln Council and Lincoln University. £120,000 had been allocated for the cultural element of the Heritage Action Zone and the University would be one of the partners involved in how the money would be spent.

Question: Would there be more scope in relation to toilets/changing facilities for babies to encourage more families to visit the city centre?

Response: Grant funding and working in partnership with other organisations who also provide such facilities would help enhance the city and make it more attractive to tourists.

Question: How severe was homelessness on the streets currently?

Response: It had been mixed. Some areas had dropped, whereas others have increased, activity was more visible in the City centre due to there being less people around. But the Intervention Team and Rough Sleeper teams were engaging with rough sleepers to help them into support.

Question: How could the congregation of people outside pubs and taxi ranks be prevented?

Response: Once the COVID Marshall Scheme was underway and with the extension of opening hours and students returning home it was felt there would be less issues with regards to queueing/people congregating in the streets.

**(d) Barry Hepton, Local Business Owner (The Bailgate)**

Barry Hepton, Local Business Owner, gave an in depth update of the affect that COVID-19 had on local businesses in the last 8 months. In brief, he highlighted:

- The local events and weddings in the area had been stopped and it leading to staff being furloughed
- The grants were very much appreciated by business owners in the Bailgate
- The intervention team were very quick to act on any issues that arose
- The general struggle of 2020 for local businesses owners financially, explaining that his business in particular, the Bailgate Deli, had reduced their days of opening from 6 days to 4

Question: Were there any plans to hold outdoor markets?

Response: A campaign called 'In Lincoln' had been created however officers were awaiting funding from the government.

**17. Nicola Lockwood - Local Business Owner (The Bailgate)**

Nicola Lockwood, Local Business Owner, explained how she had been affected by the pandemic and echoed Barry's presentation, highlighting how it had massively impacted on the businesses in the Bailgate.

She explained that when businesses were able to open, they did begin to bounce back however unfortunately they had to close again.

Providing free car parking was extremely helpful for people who worked in the Bailgate and offering the first hour free for visitors really helped and increased the amount of people visiting the uphill area.

**(a) Steve Welsby - Communications Manager (City of Lincoln Council)**

Steve Welsby provided a brief update on how the Communication Team assisted in ensuring vital information was received by members of the public through various channels.

As the Communication Team were working from home they were able to deliver and create more engaging content i.e. Videos etc.

Over the past eight months the Communications Team had worked on the following:

- Posted videos of the High street when it was open
- Encouraged local businesses to take up grants that were available to them during lockdown
- Grant Scheme updates through Facebook and Twitter
- Particular mentions from the Lincolnite/Lincs Live/City X and BBC Radio Lincs
- Encouraging people to shop locally.

**18. Work Programme 2020/21**

No updates.