

Present:	Councillor Jane Loffhagen (<i>in the Chair</i>)
Councillors:	Naomi Tweddle, Bill Bilton, Alan Briggs, Sue Burke, Liz Bushell, Jackie Kirk, Lucinda Preston, Christopher Reid and Hilton Spratt
Also in Attendance:	Councillor Ric Metcalfe, Martin Walmsley, Jo Walker, Graham Watts and Jess Cullen
Apologies for Absence:	Councillor Helena Mair and Councillor Neil Murray

7. Confirmation of Minutes - 29 September 2020

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2020 be confirmed.

8. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

9. 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.

The representatives were as follows:

- Ric Metcalfe, Portfolio Holder for Our People and Resources and Leader of the Council
- Jo Walker, Assistant Director for Growth
- Martin Walmsley, Head of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service

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.

She thanked and praised all members and officers who were particularly involved in projects following the outbreak and helped the City of Lincoln Council provide a key service to businesses and individuals who were in desperate need of support over the past 7 months.

The chair asked members to confirm that they were happy with the topic that had been agreed.

All members concurred that they were.

10. Scoping Document

It was agreed by the Committee at the previous meeting that it would meet on a monthly basis to investigate and gather evidence from key businesses and individuals that had been directly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The scoping document, set out by Graham Watts, Democratic and Elections Manager provided a breakdown of the review in several stages which could be identified at item 3a of the agenda.

11. Evidence Gathering

Jo Walker, Assistant Director for Growth provided a brief presentation which outlined the following:

- A group of several officers had been set up to support businesses and a range of different teams were involved.
- The main challenge was administering the £22m that had been awarded as a Grant Fund for supporting businesses during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The money was received by the Government on 1st April and 600 payments were made to businesses on the same day it was received as part of the Small Business Grants and the Retail and Hospitality Scheme.
- On 1st June, a means tested scheme called The Discretionary Grant Fund was launched. It adopted a phased approach identifying the businesses most in need and resulted in supporting 126 businesses of the 171 that applied. It supported businesses sectors such as:
 - Restaurants and café's
 - Pubs, bars and nightclubs
 - Sport & Leisure
 - Charities
- In total, 988 businesses also benefitted from rate relief to the value of £27.2m through the Expanded Retail Discount Scheme.
- City of Lincoln Council tenants were offered a rent deferral for April, May and June 2020 as well as charitable, community and voluntary sector tenants that were not eligible for a Business Support Grant being given a rent free period for April, May and June 2020.
- As well providing direct support to businesses, wider support was also delivered which involved:
 - Answering calls and emails
 - Regular meetings
 - Continued support to businesses
 - Payment plans for rent/business rates
 - Publishing information and links on the website
 - The "City Centre is open" campaign.

- In addition, officers looked into what further support would be required taking into account any lockdowns and further restrictions, these included:
 - Planning and implementing recovery measures
 - City Centre recovery
 - Development of the Towns Deal Board and Town Investment Plan to drive long term economic growth which was being referred to Executive on Monday 26th October.

Martin Walmsley, Head of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service provided a brief presentation on the impacts of benefits and support since the Covid-19 pandemic and outlined the following:

- With regards to Universal Credit statistics, unsurprisingly there had been a significant increase in claims this year, this was due to the furlough scheme ending and redundancies that had been made
- Deferrals of Council Tax and Business Rates payments had been made
- Awarding of Extended Retail Discount for three local authorities.
- Outlined the Test and Trace Support - Mandatory Scheme. A £500 payment would be awarded if:
 - An individual had been asked to self-isolate by the NHS Test and Trace either because they had tested positive for Covid-19 or had recently been in close contact with someone who had tested positive.
 - Were employed or self employed
 - They were unable to work from home and would lose income as a result; and
 - They were currently receiving Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based Employment and Support Allowance, Income-based jobseekers allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit

Test and Trace Support - Discretionary Scheme. A £500 payment would be awarded if:

- The individual was not in receipt of Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, Income Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit; and
- On low income and would face financial hardship as a result of not being able to work while they were self-isolating; and
- Had savings/capital of less than £1,000.
- If people were not struggling and did not qualify for the Test and Trace Support Scheme, they were encouraged to contact the City of Lincoln Council as they could be entitled to help elsewhere.
- Detailed the Government Kick-start Scheme which helped 16-24 year olds receive Universal Credit and be given placements within organisations. This scheme had received full support from CMT.

Officers welcomed the committee's questions and comments.

Question: How much of an opportunity was the Town's fund?

Response: It involved a bidding process with £25m to bid for capital projects. The benefit of the fund would in principle, lead to future skills and job benefits, some of the projects being directly delivered by the City of Lincoln Council and others by organisations such as Lincoln College and Lincoln City Football Club, for example. 11 towns had put in a bid before the City of Lincoln and no towns were successful in receiving all the funding but still had the opportunity to receive something. From the date of submission, which would be around the end of October, the process would take nine weeks. Officers hoped to have a response regarding the funding by January 2021.

Question: Had there been a staggering impact due to the increase in applications?

Response: Yes there had been significant impacts due to the increase in applications. The number of queries in relation to managing payments were regularly being received, but on a bigger scale.

Question: Whilst supporting businesses, did officers receive any fraud related cases or abuse from business owners?

Response: Not to a large degree. Some claims were identified prior to the payment being made but in order to be able to qualify, businesses needed proof that they were trading on 11th March 2020. There was a duplicate case due to a business moving address but despite that, payments were dealt with very positively.

Question: With regards to the Discretionary Scheme, what was meant by having less than £1,000 savings in order to be able to qualify?

Response: It meant £1,000 in their mainstream bank account or current savings account.

Question: With regards to the Discretionary Scheme, were the parameters set by government or locally?

Response: Nationally. The individual had to be NHS traced and a reference number presented in order to be able to qualify.

Question: Were there gaps in additional support i.e. Towns Fund?

Response: There were limitations to the support that could be bid for and there were so many challenges with regards to recovery, however, ensuring that the resources and knowledge was utilised along with effective partnership working, it helped make responses to businesses seamless.

The chair thanked the City of Lincoln Council and officers for their tremendous efforts in ensuring the payments were delivered to businesses as soon as possible.

Ric Metcalfe, Portfolio Holder for Our People and Resources and Leader of the Council, echoed the Chair's comments and highlighted that without the fantastic teamwork from officers it wouldn't have been achieved.

He also stated that going forward with the review, there had been enquiries in relation to higher tiers and further restrictions and as it couldn't be ruled out that

things were likely to change over the next coming months, it would be particularly useful to consider inviting the following to a future meeting:

- A representative from Public Health to explain the levels of tiers and the impacts of Covid-19 locally.
- A representative from The Lincs Enterprise Partnership to explain what had been done so far in the City to help businesses survive and report on different sectors of the economy.
- An officer from the City of Lincoln Council to report on what officers had been doing to provide support on the streets since the local restrictions of Tier 1 were announced.

Members supported the suggestions and were happy for this to be arranged for the next meeting.

12. Work Programme 2020/21

Jess Cullen, Democratic Services Officer:

- a. presented the draft work programme for 2020/21 as detailed at Appendix A of her report
- b. advised that the work programme for the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee was put forward annually for approval by Council; the work programme was then regularly updated throughout the year in consultation with the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee and its Chair
- c. reported that items had been scheduled in accordance with the existing work programme and officers' guidance regarding the meetings at which the most up-to-date information could be reported to the committee; the work programme also included the list of portfolio holders under scrutiny
- d. requested any relevant comments or suggestions to the proposed work programme for 2020/21.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) The work programme 2020/21 as detailed at Appendix A to the report be noted.