

Present: Councillor Sue Burke (*in the Chair*),
Councillor Biff Bean, Councillor Bill Bilton, Councillor Alan Briggs, Councillor Kathleen Brothwell, Councillor Chris Burke, Councillor Bob Bushell, Councillor Liz Bushell, Councillor Thomas Dyer, Councillor Geoff Ellis, Councillor Gary Hewson, Councillor Ronald Hills, Councillor Jackie Kirk, Councillor Rosanne Kirk, Councillor Jane Loffhagen, Councillor Rebecca Longbottom, Councillor Helena Mair, Councillor Adrianna McNulty, Councillor Ric Metcalfe, Councillor Neil Murray, Councillor Bill Mara, Councillor Donald Nannestad, Councillor Lucinda Preston, Councillor Christopher Reid, Councillor Hilton Spratt, Councillor Edmund Strengiel, Councillor Ralph Toofany, Councillor Pat Vaughan and Councillor Loraine Woolley

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Yvonne Bodger, Councillor Andy Kerry, Councillor Laura McWilliams and Councillor Naomi Tweddle

62. Confirmation of Minutes - 22 September 2020

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2020 be confirmed.

63. Mayoral Announcements

The Mayor reported that it had been a quiet Mayoral year in view of the impact of the coronavirus, although November had been quite busy.

She had been honoured to have laid a wreath on Remembrance Sunday with the City Sheriff and had published a recording of the Flanders Fields poem on the City Council's Facebook page. The Mayor had also attended a number of meetings and events remotely via Zoom which included learning about the Festival of Lights, World Hello Day and the hosting of a community garden awards ceremony. She was also pleased to see that the Christmas lights had been switched on and had recorded a message whilst on a walkabout which had been published on social media.

64. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Edmund Strengiel declared a personal interest in minute number 69(a) (Statement of Accounts 2019/20) as he was Chair of Lincolnshire County Council's Pensions Committee.

Councillor Pat Vaughan wished it recording that his granddaughter worked in the Council's finance department in relation to minute number 69(a) (Statement of Accounts 2019/20).

65. Receive Any Questions under Council Procedure Rule 11 from Members of the Public and Provide Answers thereon

No questions had been received.

66. Receive Any Questions under Council Procedure Rule 12 from Members and Provide Answers thereon

Question by Councillor Alan Briggs to the Portfolio Holder for Quality Housing

Councillor Alan Briggs asked the Portfolio Holder for Quality Housing the following question:

“Can the Portfolio Holder for Quality Housing outline what his team are doing to ensure our Council estate communities are maintained to the highest possible standard and what more he believes we can do to ensure we build upon place making standards?”

Councillor Donald Nannestad, Portfolio Holder for Quality Housing, reported that Covid-19 and associated regulations imposed had restricted what the Council had been able to do in communal areas in particular. Cleaning had continued but in some areas and some cases this had not always been possible. There had also been issues experienced in relation to staff needing to self-isolate, those placed on furlough and health and safety implications for staff. Councillor Nannestad reported that the Council had been especially careful in respect of its sheltered housing, ensuring the protection of its most vulnerable residents, which had been very successful and he also reported that grounds maintenance works had been continuing.

In terms of the longer term, the Draft Housing Strategy, which had consisted of a considerable amount of consultation including two briefings for all City Councillors, set out the Council’s future housing aspirations. Ward walks had also taken place with local members which had provided valuable insight, comments following which had been reflected in the Strategy document. Further consultation would be undertaken in due course and it had yet to go before the Housing Scrutiny-Sub Committee. The contents of the Strategy would be reflected in the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan, with further engagement scheduled to take place with tenants via a survey.

With regard to place making, Councillor Nannestad highlighted the new housing schemes being developed at Rookery Lane and Queen Elizabeth Road which provided significant opportunities to drive forward high standards of accommodation. He and officers had been to view other examples of high quality council housing provision at local authorities across the country, which he said would help the City Council with its future plans.

Councillor Nannestad closed by saying that he welcomed feedback from all members of the Council.

Councillor Alan Briggs, as a supplementary question, acknowledged the unprecedented nature of Covid-19 but highlighted on walks he had undertaken in his ward of Birchwood that some gardens had become overgrown and there was evidence of a lack of regular grounds maintenance. He had also seen instances of fly tipping, anti-social behaviour and graffiti and also reported that the standard of weed removal had been poor. Councillor Briggs therefore asked whether more

frequent ward walks by officers could be undertaken to address some of these issues in order that the Council's high standards were maintained.

Councillor Nannestad agreed to investigate this further but asked that all members ensure any such instances be reported to officers in order that necessary action could be taken.

Councillor by Councillor Thomas Dyer to the Leader of the Council

Councillor Thomas Dyer asked the following question to the Leader of the Council:

“Can the Leader please provide Council with an update on the payments made by the City of Lincoln Council in relation to the Government's Business Closure Grants, both mandatory and discretionary?”

Councillor Neil Murray, Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, provided a response on behalf of the Leader of the Council. He reported that the City Council was currently operating two grant schemes to assist businesses impacted by the national restrictions. The first was a scheme for businesses mandated to close during the restriction period and the second scheme was for businesses which had remained open but have been severely impacted by the restrictions.

In terms of the scheme for closed businesses, which commenced on 16 November 2020, a total of 615 applications had been received, with 428 paid equating to £727,902. 94 applications were in the system being processed and 41 applications had been judged as being ineligible for the grant.

The scheme for those businesses open but impacted as a result of the restrictions had only commenced on 30 November and at the time of the meeting four applications had been received.

Councillor Murray reported that applications were being processed as quickly as possible on a rolling basis and the team were working as hard as they could to get through the workload, whilst making sure the Council was making payments to the correct businesses.

As a supplementary question, Councillor Dyer asked whether there were any further updates on additional support packages and, considering that Lincolnshire had been placed in Tier 3, whether an assurance could be given that the Council would make payments promptly.

Councillor Murray reported that the two grant funding schemes, as set out above, were those which the Council was currently administering to support businesses, with the second scheme in relation to those businesses still open providing the Council with more discretion. Details of that scheme were still in the process of being considered in terms of its scope and eligibility criteria. He provided an assurance that the team would ensure the money received from Government was allocated to as many eligible businesses as possible in Lincoln, and as promptly as possible.

67. Motion Under Council Procedure Rule 14 - Review of the City of Lincoln Council's Scrutiny and Decision Making Process

Councillor Thomas Dyer, Leader of the Opposition, proposed the following motion:

'That the Full Council of the City of Lincoln Council calls upon both political groups, senior officers and itself, to fully review the Council's scrutiny and decision making process.

That a member and officer working group be established to conduct the review, with an ambition to implement the new procedure by May 2022.

That the guiding principle of this review be to increase both the transparency and effectiveness of the Council's decision-making process, ensuring that members are given the opportunity to scrutinise policies, whilst reviewing which decisions should be made by the Full Council and Executive and which are officer delegated decisions.'

Councillor Dyer, in proposing the motion, questioned whether the current process was the most democratic and effective way of making decisions. He cited recent examples of Executive decisions which, in his view, had undergone no pre-decision scrutiny with Call In being the only alternative option by which to scrutinise and hold the decision-taker to account.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Christopher Reid, Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

Councillor Ric Metcalfe, Leader of the Council, welcomed the opportunity to review the ways in which things were done if there were reasonable and well-founded reasons for doing so. He was of the view, however, that the proposition as set out in the motion did not represent well-founded reasons to justify such a review or highlight the value of carrying one out and was actually based on assertions that were incorrect. Councillor Metcalfe reminded members that the jurisdiction of Full Council in the Constitution had not changed whatsoever as a result of the abolition of the committee system in 2000. It remained the same supreme decision-making body of the Council that it had always been in respect of the authority's policy and budgetary framework. He reminded members that scrutiny committees had the power to make direct referrals to Full Council on any matter they saw as necessary.

In terms of the Call In procedure providing limited opportunities for scrutiny, although Councillor Metcalfe could understand Councillor Dyer's disappointment in respect of a recent Call In that had been considered by the Select Scrutiny Committee, he felt it was wrong to imply that the Committee's hands were tied when considering Call Ins. He highlighted that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government had recently, through statutory guidance, re-emphasised that scrutiny should offer constructive challenge as a critical friend, be undertaken independently, amplify the voice of the public and be aimed at driving improvements. It was therefore not an opportunity to enter into political point scoring, which he felt had occurred at the previous Select Scrutiny Committee meeting. Councillor Metcalfe was of the view that the Council's scrutiny committees currently in place were doing an excellent job.

Councillor Edmund Strengiel said that if any member felt as though inadequate scrutiny was taking place they were quite right to bring the matter to the attention of Council. He did share a concern in respect of decisions going through officers without proper scrutiny and questioned whether the Executive was being used as a rubber-stamping mechanism. Councillor Strengiel highlighted that the motion solely sought a review and said that if the outcome led to greater levels of transparency it could only be a good thing.

Councillor Hilton Spratt in relation to the independent nature of scrutiny reflected that committees were composed based on the political composition of the Council, which he accepted fully. However, he questioned how independent members of an authority could really act on scrutiny committees when part of such a large majority. He asked whether consideration could be given to offer the position of Chair or Vice-Chair of scrutiny committees to members of the opposition, which he felt would be seen by third parties as the committees themselves facilitating a more independent role. This was the case at Lincolnshire County Council, who's overarching Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee was chaired by a member of the opposition.

Councillor Jane Loffhagen was of the opinion that lines were becoming crossed as part of this debate between political campaigning and scrutiny. She emphasised that scrutiny should be non-political and, in her experience, said that all members at the City Council took the opportunity to challenge and ask questions at meetings of scrutiny committees irrespective of their political group.

Councillor Ron Hills reflected on the current structure which had been in place for some time. In terms of the Performance Scrutiny Committee in particular, having been a member and chaired the Committee previously, he said that it ran extremely well, was always impartial and fed recommendations through to the Executive. However, in respect of the Select Scrutiny Committee and Call In, he questioned its meaningfulness based on the fact that, as far as he understood it, a Call In had never been referred back to the Council's Executive for reconsideration of a decision. He agreed with the motion on the basis that it was only seeking to look again at the procedures in place to ensure they were fit for purpose.

Councillor Gary Hewson agreed that the scrutiny function should be carried out on the basis of being a critical friend which, as Chair of the Performance Scrutiny Committee, he believed scrutiny committees at the City Council did. He reminded members that scrutiny committees had no decision-making powers and could only make recommendations. Councillor Hewson referred to the recent Executive decision which was called in and considered by the Select Scrutiny Committee and was of the view that it was given a fair hearing and made the point that the specific decision in question could have been made by officers under delegated powers. In line with the current structure and procedures, there would always be opportunities for any member to call items in and hold decision takers to account, which was their entitlement.

Councillor Lucinda Preston agreed that the City Council's practice of scrutiny was not political and that meetings were rigorous, providing opportunities to ask questions and challenge.

Councillor Christopher Reid stated that the motion was not seeking to highlight what was right or wrong with what was currently in place, it was just seeking to see whether they represented the right way of doing things. He said it was naïve

to think that the way in which things were historically done was the right way to do things and that there was nothing to be lost in undertaking a review. As a County Councillor, he felt that there were things in place at the County Council which the City Council could implement to improve its scrutiny function. He highlighted pre-decision scrutiny as an example which he said was much more significant at the County Council.

In voting on the motion, it having been proposed and seconded, the motion was lost.

68. Receive Reports under Council Procedure Rule 2 (vi) from Members

(a) Report by Councillor Gary Hewson, Chair of the Performance Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Gary Hewson, Chair of the Performance Scrutiny Committee, presented a report to Council which set out the work carried out by the Committee since his last report in January 2020.

It was noted that the ten months covered in the report had been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Since meetings resumed in July the focus of the Committee had largely been on core business, namely financial and operational performance as well as continuing to receive reports from Executive Portfolio Holders.

Councillor Hewson thanked officers for their continued support and all members of the Committee for their contributions.

The report was noted.

(b) Report by Councillor Rebecca Longbottom, Member Safeguarding Champion

Councillor Rebecca Longbottom, Member Safeguarding Champion, presented a report to Council which set out the work undertaken over the last year in relation to safeguarding.

It was reported that protecting vulnerable people encompassed a range of legal duties and responsibilities to protect people's health, wellbeing and human rights to support people in preventing problems from escalating and enabling people to live free from harm, abuse, fear or neglect.

Councillor Longbottom placed on record her thanks to Paula Burton, Safeguarding Officer, for all of her hard work and support.

Councillor Thomas Dyer referred to the PREVENT scheme which contained duties on specified authorities, which he understood the City of Lincoln Council qualified as. He asked whether there was anything to add in that respect as there was no specific reference to PREVENT within the report.

Councillor Longbottom responded by saying that the report referred to training the Council's staff had undertaken which was in relation to safeguarding and radicalisation. She suspected this therefore covered the PREVENT scheme but agreed to look further into this matter and provide a direct response outside of the meeting.

Councillor Christopher Reid made reference to a sentence within the report which stated that it was difficult for officers to be assured that vulnerable people were able to access help and support in these unusual times. He was concerned by this statement and asked what the Council was doing to address this.

Councillor Longbottom provided Councillor Reid with reassurance that the Council's safeguarding team took their responsibilities in relation to supporting vulnerable people very seriously.

Councillor Chris Burke commended an excellent report and the important work of officers. He was proud of the huge amount of work that had been undertaken to protect the city's most vulnerable people during this time of crisis, particularly in relation to homelessness and rough sleeping.

Councillor Gary Hewson reported that the Performance Scrutiny Committee in considering the Council's Strategic Risk Register had recommended that safeguarding be added as a strategic risk onto the register. This had now been actioned and the Committee would therefore receive further updates in relation to safeguarding at future meetings as part of scrutinising the Strategic Risk Register.

The report was noted.

69. To Consider the Following Recommendations of the Executive and Committees of the Council

(a) Statement of Accounts 2019/20

Councillor Geoff Ellis proposed that the Statement of Accounts 2019/20 be approved. The proposition was seconded by Councillor Ric Metcalfe.

Councillor Christopher Burke highlighted the huge amount of work that had been done in terms of the Council's Information Technology, as referred to in the report, which had made a huge difference to the way in which the Council had responded to the coronavirus pandemic. He placed on record his thanks to officers for the hard work they had undertaken in response to the pandemic but also for the development of a strategy which would see the largest investment in Information Technology ever made by the Council. He saw this as a massive step forward for the authority.

It was proposed, seconded and RESOLVED that the Statement of Accounts 2019/20 be approved.

(b) Equality and Diversity Group Terms of Reference

It was proposed, seconded and RESOLVED that the Equality and Diversity Group Terms of Reference be approved.

70. Membership Changes

It was proposed, seconded and RESOLVED that the membership changes be approved.