

**REPORT UNDER RULE 2 (vi) OF THE CITY COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES**

**Report by Councillor Jane Loffhagen, Chair of the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee**

Members of Committee: Jane Loffhagen [Chair], Naomi Tweddle [Vice Chair], Bill Bilton, Sue Burke, Liz Bushell Jackie Kirk, Helena Mair, Bill Mara, Lucinda Preston, Hilton Spratt, and Eddie Strengiel.

Officers: Graham Watts, Democratic and Elections Manager and Jess Cullen, Democratic Services Officer.

Since the spring of 2020, the Committee has met on seven occasions. A decision was taken at the scoping meeting in September 2020 that we should focus on two issues relating to the Covid-19 pandemic:

- the effects on local businesses, and what has been / could be done to assist; and
- the effect on individuals and what has been happening, or could happen to assist.

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to the Committee members for their dedicated attendance and participation in these difficult times, and also thanks to Jess Cullen, who is currently on maternity leave, and Graham Watts, who has recently left the council, from Democratic Services.

It was further decided that, because the pandemic was an ongoing and developing problem, that we would change the normal practice of the Committee. Rather than us looking in depth into an issue and then presenting a report at the end of the year with recommendations to the Executive, we would invite senior council staff from relevant departments to the meetings so the information we were gathering could be fed immediately and directly back into practice, and into the council's response to the pandemic report. This means that a great deal of the information gathered can be found to have already been responded to, and a substantial amount is within the council's response to the pandemic report.

Of course, as the issue is a pandemic, we could not control what was happening next or know the likelihood of ongoing outbreaks, restrictions or lockdowns and so had to respond at each meeting to what we did know rather than try to predict events.

Committee meetings were held with contributors as follows:

29 September 2020 – Our scoping meeting was attended by Paul Carrick, Neighbourhood Manager, who outlined the current council community response including the Befriending scheme and the process for signposting residents to other agencies including Age UK,

YMCA, Assist, Network, food banks and many more. It was decided that recommendations and information would be made to the City Council's Response to Covid-19 Plan, and the Recovery Plan.

20 October 2020 – We received contributions from Jo Walker (Assistant Director for Growth), Ric Metcalfe (Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder) and Martin Walmsley (Head of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service). This meeting covered the services provided to local businesses such as distributing both mandatory and discretionary grants, and investment the Council had made and could make with regard to food banks. Links with business agencies such as Lincoln BIG, the Chamber of Commerce and various small business groups were also discussed. Recommendations were made directly to these departments, including those concerning business rate relief, rent deferral for tenants and charity sector/ voluntary agencies, support for Test and Trace, and the Kick Start programme.

16 November 2020 – We received a further contribution from Jo Walker, and contributions from Simon Walters (Strategic Director of Communities and Environment, City of Lincoln Council), Steve Welsby (Communications Manager, City of Lincoln Council), Sarah Loftus (Chief Executive of Lincoln Business Improvement Group (BIG), which is the local business support agency), Barry Hepton (Local business owner and Chairman of Bailgate Guild, which is an association for small businesses in the Bail area), and Nicola Lockwood (Local business owner and Vice Chair of Bailgate Guild). Recommendations and acknowledgments of support concerned the inclusion of the recommendations from the Lincoln BIG coronavirus business survey report and further publicity for support available and encouragements for people to shop locally where possible.

16 December 2020 – This meeting focused on a presentation from Derek Ward (Director of Public Health, Lincolnshire County Council). Recommendations were frequently made by the County Council and these were discussed.

26 January 2021 – We received a contribution from Justin Brown (Assistant Director for Growth, Lincolnshire County Council). The meeting drew together information on the impact on businesses from earlier meetings with input from the Lincolnshire Resilience Forum's Business working group, comprising Lincolnshire councils, University, the Department for Work and Pensions, and the Federation of Small Businesses, amongst others. Our recommendations covered a wealth of issues, including signposting for the council support and the Furlough scheme; advice on rapid digitalisation for businesses; advice for those in the tourism and hospitality industry; and the Lincolnshire Enterprise Partnership. This included business recovery support, and further support for the wellbeing of those affected and advice for people wishing to start up businesses.

16 February 2021 – We moved on to look at impact on individuals with contributions from Graham Metcalfe (Department for Work and Pensions) and Kate Edgar (Development Plus, which is a local charity running projects locally working with individuals about mental health,

access to employment, helping homeless / rough sleepers and people leaving prison). The issue of charity organisations losing a great deal of support was highlighted. Kate Ellis (Director of Major Developments, City of Lincoln Council) was also present to take forward issues that arose from this and recorded everything for her report.

9 March 2021 – We received a further detailed presentation from Kate Edgar (Development Plus) about the Bridging the Gap project run by Development Plus, also lengthy session with Kate Ellis (Director of Major Developments, City of Lincoln Council) to ensure our work and recommendations were included in the Council report on our response to the pandemic.

I would personally like to thank all our contributors and council staff who stayed for long and sometimes late meetings during this year, and whose contributions were so helpful and enlightening.

We learned a great deal during this process about how the pandemic was affecting local businesses and individuals and about what we could do to help the council focus our efforts on where the need was most found. Charities reported a distressing lack of funding rendering them unable to function as they normally would to help those in need , and some of these gaps were filled by council staff and partners.

One of the main things we learned was that our Council's response to this pandemic has been nothing short of amazing -the approach was constructive, practical, flexible and effective and the achievements marvellous. This covered everything from distribution of government grants to businesses, to housing every single rough sleeper.

This is a horrible and totally new situation, but staff of all grades and members alike showed generosity, flexibility and preparedness to step out of their comfort zones to help our residents at such a difficult time. This is ongoing of course. It is a testament to our sometimes much-maligned public services about what can be achieved and how fast by a public sector determined to be effective.

**Councillor Jane Loffhagen**  
**Chair of the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee**