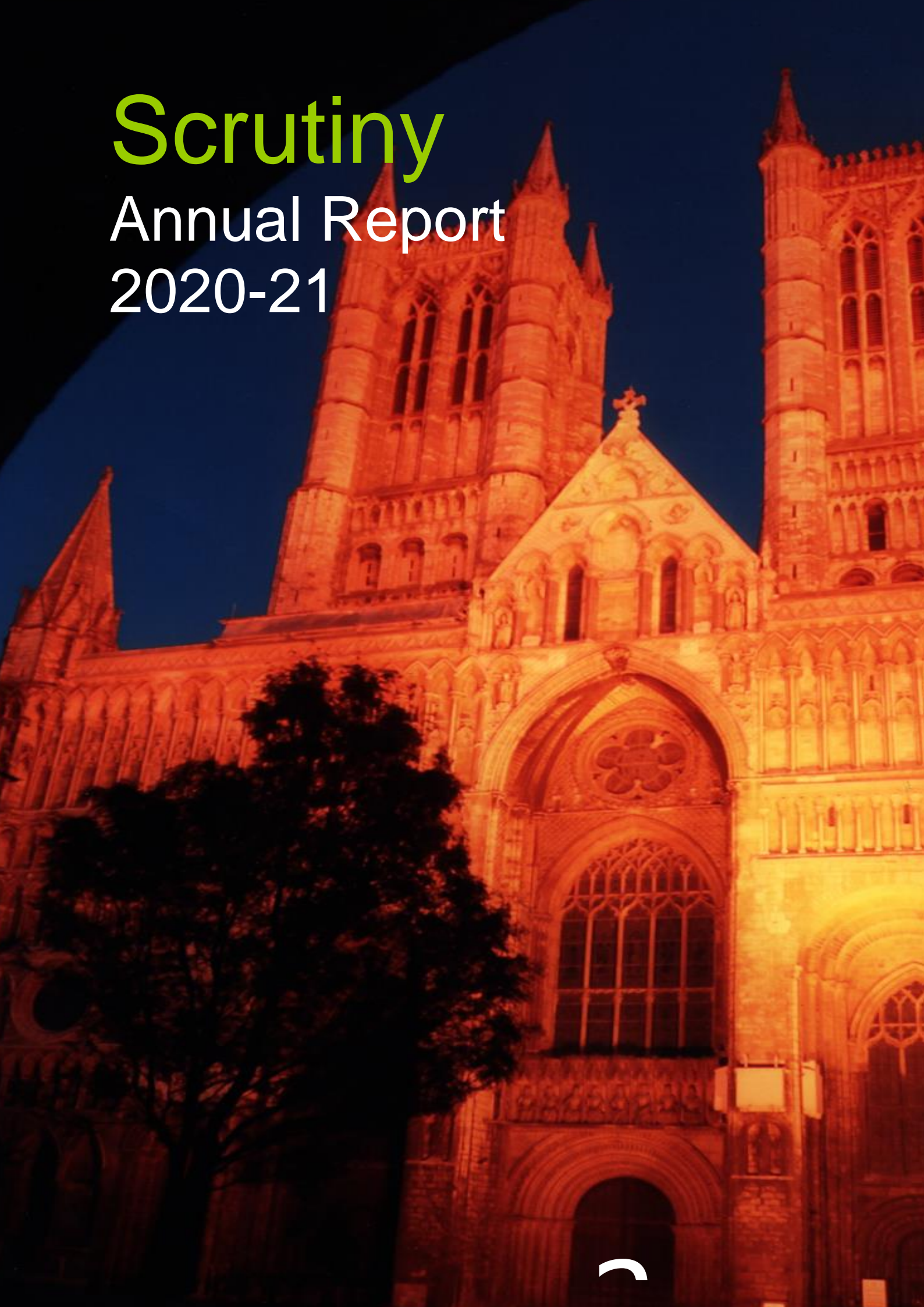


# Scrutiny

## Annual Report 2020-21



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## Introduction

During 2020-21 the City of Lincoln Council continued to operate executive arrangements, with its Executive comprising the Leader of the Council and five other councillors as portfolio holders. Most the Council's important decisions are made by the Executive. To improve the quality of the Executive's decisions, overview and scrutiny committees remained in place, which provided the opportunity for the remaining 27 non-executive councillors to challenge decisions made by the Executive, as well as to help the Executive in reviewing and developing new policies.

This report covers the council year from May 2020 until March 2021 and is the first scrutiny annual report since 2018-19, as a report for 2019-20 was not prepared owing to the pressures of the Covid-19 pandemic, with changes to the allocation of staff resources.

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## Background to Scrutiny

The scrutiny committee structure is: -

- Performance Scrutiny Committee
- Policy Scrutiny Committee
- Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee
- Select Scrutiny Committee
- Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee

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## What Did We Achieve in 2020/21?

The Council appointed the following overview and scrutiny committees for 2020/21:

Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Chair
Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee	Councillor Jane Loffhagen
Performance Scrutiny Committee	Councillor Gary Hewson
Policy Scrutiny Committee	Councillor Bill Bilton
Select Scrutiny Committee	Councillor Jane Loffhagen
Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee*	Councillor Gary Hewson

\*The Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee is a sub-committee of the Performance Scrutiny Committee and reports to this Committee on a quarterly basis.

With the exception of the Select Scrutiny Committee and Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee, the work programmes for these scrutiny committees were formally approved by the respective Committees in June 2020 and regularly updated throughout the council year after this time. The introduction of a regular Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee work programme was at its infancy in June 2020 and was formally approved by members at the January 2021 meeting. The Select Scrutiny Committee meets once each year as the statutory Crime and Disorder Committee, as well as considering any call-in requests made throughout the year.

This report identifies some of the key achievements made by the Committees. Current work programmes for scrutiny committees, can be found on the Council's website.

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## Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee

Between September 2020 and March 2021, the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee met on seven occasions and focused on two issues relating to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic:

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

As the pandemic was a continuing challenge, the Committee decided to pass on the information gathered immediately and directly into the organisation to assist the Council's response to the pandemic. This differed from the usual practice of gathering evidence and presenting a report at the end of the year. As a result, a significant part of the information received by the Committee was included in the Council's response to the pandemic report.

In addition to the Council's Executive and its senior and front-line officers, external contributors included:

- Sarah Loftus, Chief Executive of Lincoln Business Improvement Group
- Barry Hepton Local Business Owner and Vice Chair of the Bailgate Guild
- Nicola Lockwood, Local Business Owner and Chair of the Bailgate Guild
- Derek Ward, Director of Public Health, Lincolnshire County Council
- Justin Brown, Assistant Director for Growth, Lincolnshire County Council
- Graham Metcalfe, Department for Work and Pensions
- Kate Edgar, Development Plus

The Committee recorded its thanks to all its contributors and council staff who stayed for long and sometimes late meetings during the year, and whose contributions were so helpful and enlightening.

The Committee's recommendations concerned a variety of topics such as business rate relief; rent deferrals for tenants and charity and voluntary sector; the Test and Trace programme; the Kick Start programme; signposting to the Council's support and the national furlough scheme; advice on rapid digitalisation for businesses; and advice for those in the tourism and hospitality industry.

The Committee also concluded that the Council's response to the pandemic during the year had been constructive, practical, flexible, and effective. Staff of all grades and members alike showed generosity, flexibility, and preparedness to step out of their comfort zones to help residents at such a difficult time. It was a testament to the sometimes much-maligned public services about what can be achieved and how fast by a public sector determined to be effective.

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## Performance Scrutiny Committee

As part of the Performance Scrutiny Committee's remit, it held regular 'portfolio under scrutiny' sessions, where portfolio holders were invited to report on service achievements under their portfolio. Members were then able to ask questions about the performance of these service areas. The consideration of portfolio reports included the provision of a template for reports which placed a focus upon providing performance information relating to the member's portfolio. By doing so, the Committee was able to focus on the performance of a portfolio with fewer diversions into detailed analysis of policy issues.

A regular report was provided in the form of a Portfolio Performance overview presented by the Policy Unit to the relevant Performance Scrutiny Committee meeting, with the purpose of bringing out key contextual benchmarking indicators about issues in the city overall in relation to the portfolio under scrutiny. This process helped promote effective scrutiny of the portfolio holder's report.

In addition to the regular scrutiny of portfolio holders, the Committee received reports in the following areas:

- Quarterly financial monitoring to provide members with a summary of actual income and expenditure compared to the revised budget and appropriate allocation of any surpluses to reserves.
- Quarterly performance update reports to ensure regular monitoring of the Council's operational performance as a key component of the Local Performance Management Framework.
- A quarterly review of the Strategic Risk Register - what improvements or issues have been identified.
- A report on Treasury Management and Actual Prudential Indicators as a requirement of the Council's reporting procedures under regulations issued under the Local Government Act 2003.
- An annual report detailing progress made by the Central Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee.
- An update report on Section 106 contributions.
- Income and arrears monitoring reports providing updates to members on the position with regard to amounts of monies owed to the City Council as of 1<sup>st</sup> April.
- Revenues and Benefits performance updates providing members with an update on performance in the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service.
- A report on the financial and performance position of the Housing Repairs Service at the end of the 2019/20 financial year was received by members of Performance Scrutiny Committee on 21 January 2021. It was highlighted that performance continued to increase among the Housing Repairs Service with tenant satisfaction exceeding the performance target.

Members took part in the budget review process for the scrutiny of the proposed budget and Council Tax for the 2021/22 financial year and the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021-2026, undertaken in two separate stages; firstly all members were invited to a briefing session to afford all members the opportunity to

gain a greater understanding and awareness of the Council's financial position, thus aiding further scrutiny of the budget and in the case of the opposition party if desired the preparation of an alternative budget. This was followed by a more traditional scrutiny process undertaken to review in more detail the MTFS and the robustness of the proposed budget options and Council Tax for the 2021/22 financial year. This was undertaken in a committee format as the Budget Review Group with the appropriate governance arrangements in place.

The Committee held scrutiny reviews during the 2020/21 year in respect of:

#### A Review of 2019/20 including our COVID-19 Response

A report was given to members of performance during 2019/20 including details of our response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It included Q4 performance outturn for the year, as well as the period of the emergency response starting in March 2020, and the services that were deployed from then.

#### Our Befriending Service

Members received a report regarding the befriending service which was set up in the final days leading up to the COVID-19 lockdown on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020. The report covered the following areas:

- An introduction to our Befriending Service
- The issue our lonely, vulnerable, and elderly population faced
- What we wanted to achieve
- Who was involved and why it was effective?
- Our Timeline
- How our staff felt
- How our residents felt
- Feedback and compliments
- The future of the service

#### Fire Safety Update

On 21 January 2020, members received a report on the actions and progress that had been taken on fire safety in light of the Hackitt review following the tragic events at Grenfell Tower.

The report included recommendations taken from the Hackitt report accepted by The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and the progress that had been made in advance of the proposed implementation through legislation.

#### Service Delivery During our COVID-19 Response

During the whole of the financial year, measuring performance had been a challenge for the majority of service areas – some services had little or no data to report as they had been closed e.g., Leisure Centres, whilst others had been under extreme pressure to deliver a different service and existing measures had not been applicable, such as Food Health and Safety. It was therefore agreed to delay Quarter 3 reporting, as was done in Quarter 1, and produce a combined Quarter 3

and Quarter 4 report to capture performance for the second half of the financial year, subject to performance data being available.

Instead of the usual performance report, this report provided an overview of how services across the council had been operating during the pandemic with a focus on the period from October, just before the second lockdown. It reported not only on how services had adapted to changes during the ongoing restrictions, but also provided an insight into how services were planning for an easing of restrictions and return to a 'new normal' in the months ahead.

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## **Policy Scrutiny Committee**

During 2020/21, the Committee met six times, principally to scrutinise decisions due to be taken by the Executive or Council. The Committee provided its insights and recommendations on a variety of topics, which were suitably reflected in the eventual decision-making process.

The Committee scrutinised the following topics in particular detail:

### Review of Trusted Landlord Scheme and Proposed Changes

The Committee was presented with the proposed changes to the City of Lincoln Council's Trusted Landlord Scheme and were asked to review the changes. They were advised that the Trusted Landlord Scheme provided collective public recognition for responsible landlords who delivered private rented accommodation in the City. The purpose of the Scheme was to improve standards of accommodation and management, help improve neighbourhood relations and to recognise and support those landlords participating in the Scheme. The Committee received an overview of the current scheme and were asked to consider the following proposed changes:

- Updated Privacy Notice for GDPR compliance
- The inclusion of checks for Banning Order Offences, Civil Penalties, and the Rogue Landlord Database to determine Fit and Proper Person Compliance
- Recent inspections for other purposes would be taken into consideration when arranging compliance visits
- Virtual inspections would be acceptable at the discretion of the City Council
- Criteria set out of the circumstances where an application would be rejected.
- A broadening of the compliance checks for affiliate Letting and Managing Agents
- Amendments to the Terms and Conditions in respect of the above changes

Members of the committee discussed the report and generally supported the proposed changes to the scheme.

Following the discussion members recommended to Executive that the proposed changes to the Trusted Landlord Scheme be approved.

### Proposal to Introduce a Public Space Protection Order to Prevent Anti-Social Behaviour at Lucy Tower Multi-Storey Carpark, Broadgate Multi-Storey Carpark and Lincoln Central Multi-Storey Carpark

The committee was presented with a proposal to implement a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) within the Councils multi-storey carparks namely Lucy Tower, Lincoln Central and Broadgate. They were advised that the PSPO would provide additional tools and powers to reduce and manage incidents of Anti-Social Behaviour and drug use within the Councils multi-storey carparks.

The Committee considered the evidence provided, including reported incidents and discussed the responses received from both the public and private consultation.

Members were generally supportive of the proposed PSPO and commented that this approach was sympathetic but also the process would make dealing with anti-social behaviour quicker and simpler.

Following the discussion members recommended to Executive that the proposal to implement the PSPO be approved.

In addition to the key topics, the Committee also scrutinised the following items and forwarded its comments for consideration by the Executive:

- Lincoln Social Responsibility Charter
- Planning White Paper Consultation
- Draft Housing Strategy 2020-25
- Lincoln Tenants Panel Grass Verge Survey Proposal
- Localised Council Tax Support Scheme 2021/22
- Facilities Strategy
- Physical Activity Strategy
- Housing Strategy 2020-25 Response to the Consultation Draft
- Proposals for the Review of Existing Public Space Protection Order within the City Centre
- Management of Change in Development Management

The Committee also received regular updates from the Health Scrutiny Committee.

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## **Select Scrutiny Committee**

The principal functions of the Select Scrutiny Committee are to meet once per year as the Crime and Disorder Committee; and to consider any requests for the call-in of Executive decisions, which allows scrutiny members to challenge a decision made by the Executive or any of its individual portfolio holders, prior to the implementation. This gives the Select Scrutiny Committee the opportunity to examine a decision where particular concerns have been raised and respond accordingly.



There was one call-in request during 2020/21 on the update of the position of the Lincoln Arts Trust Ltd, which was considered on 27 October 2020. After consideration of all the evidence and submissions made, the Committee decided to refuse the call-in request.

Owing to the pressures of the pandemic, the Committee was not able to sit as the Crime and Disorder Committee during the 2020/21 council year, but has been able to reinstate this for 2021/22, with a meeting on 21 July 2021.

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## **Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee**

The Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee is a sub-committee of Performance Scrutiny Committee. It was established in 2008 to increase engagement between backbench Members and Tenant Advisory Panel representatives. The Sub-Committee has continued to meet and tenants on the Committee consider that it has helped them have their say when scrutinising housing matters. The Committee met six times during 2020/21 and considered many reports which included the following topics:

- LTP Matters
- LTP Grass Verges Survey
- Sheltered Housing
- Cleaning of Communal Areas
- Sustainment of Tenancies
- Housing Service Delivery COVID Update
- Befriending Service during COVID
- Housing Finance
- Homelessness and Rough Sleeping
- Allocations Policy
- Housing Register
- Mutual Exchange Policy
- Resident Engagement Building Safety
- Rents
- Voids
- Target Setting

The Committee also effectively scrutinised Housing performance on a quarterly basis and received regular updates on the progress of the Lincoln Tenants Panel.

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