

Present: Councillor Calum Watt (*in the Chair*)
Councillor Joshua Wells, Councillor Debbie Armiger,
Councillor Martin Christopher, Councillor Matthew Fido,
Councillor Jackie Kirk, Councillor Jane Loffhagen,
Councillor Hilton Spratt, Councillor Rachel Storer,
Councillor Naomi Twedde and Councillor Emily Wood

Apologies for Absence: None.

Also in Attendance: Charlotte Brooks (LocalMotion), Martin Walmsley (Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits), Kate Bell (Climate Change Manager), Sara Boothright (Food Health and Safety Manager), Simon Walters (Director for Communities and Environment), Cheryl Evans (Democratic Services and Elections Manager) and Victoria Poulson (Democratic Services Officer)

10. Confirmation of Minutes - 28 June 2022

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Chair as an accurate record.

11. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

12. Poverty Truth Commission

Councillor Calum Watt, Chair of the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee, opened the meeting and provided the Committee with a brief introduction to guest speakers and the topic of discussion which was the Cost of Living Crisis.

(a) Local Motion - Charlotte Brooks, Director for Local Change

The Committee received a presentation from Charlotte Brooks (Director of Local Change, LocalMotion). During consideration of the presentation, the following points were noted: -

- LocalMotion was founded on building a social, economic, and environmental justice movement of six communities across the UK.
- It was created by six established funders in the UK who shared a desire to find new and better ways to tackle the common social, economic and environmental issues communities faced.
- The six places were Lincoln, Enfield, Torbay, Middlesborough, Oldham and Carmarthen.
- Lincoln was selected to benefit from additional funding from LocalMotion until November 2023.
- After investigating what was happening from the perspective of individuals and organisations over the eleven wards within Lincoln, three common themes occurred: community prosperity, aspiration, and sustainability.
- The purpose of the Commission was to hear from people who had a story to share or who had experienced struggle. This may include those who suffered

from issues surrounding mental health, housing, education, employment, and digital poverty.

- Launched in September 2022, Poverty Truth Lincoln sought to identify approximately fifteen community commissioners to take part in the overall commission. In addition, the cohort of collaborative working would include fifteen civic/business commissioners.
- The ten-year LocalMotion programme was currently in the exploration stage, phase 2. This phase was less 'outcome focused' and more person centred.
- The ambition was to have tested a number of projects by June/July 2023 and to secure future funding up to 2030/31.
- The Commission was resourced until August 2024 with an 8-year collaboration action plan to be co-designed by the commissioners.
- There would be an annual impact report and analysis post 2024.
- The 2025-30 strategy plan, by Lincoln, for Lincoln, would ensure that delivery of ideas.

The Chair thanked guest speaker Charlotte Brooks for her work, informative update and presentation and welcomed comments and questions from the Committee. As a result of the discussions between Members and Charlotte Brooks, the following points were made: -

- The scheme would address absolute and relative poverty. Within the eleven wards of Lincoln, there were approximately 17,000 people Just About Managing (JAM'S). If the cost of living continued to rise, it was suspected that over the duration of the next six months this figure could significantly increase.
- The panic and pressures of poverty could not be understood unless experienced and the exit routes from poverty could not be executed in isolation – a collaborative and holistic approach was essential.
- Concerns were raised about the difficulties of reaching those in need and whether individuals that suffered from poverty realised that they were in poverty. This was often subjective.
- Development Plus allowed community connectors who worked with communities in Lincoln to have personal conversations. In addition, Civic commissioners could potentially share their stories of struggle.
- There was a positive working relationship with Poverty Truth Network and the term 'Poverty Truth' was chosen to represent the reality of the crisis faced.
- Rather than be spoken about, people needed to be involved.
- There appeared to be a bias towards those in financial hardship by way of significantly higher interest rates for borrowing money and a resolve to the bias was needed.
- The commission was embedded in the voluntary sector in Lincoln.
- National organisations or institutions that had an interest in supporting people but could not formally commit officers to the process, would continue to engage and offer expertise through a 'friends of the commission' network.
- Commissioners would be recognised for their contributions to the commission.

NOTE: - Councillor Matthew Fido joined proceedings at this stage.

- Members recognised that a number of community groups that would have ordinarily been leant upon would have been inactive due to the pandemic and therefore people requiring help may have been missed.
- The concept for LocalMotion began prior to the pandemic however the process of early collaboration was made difficult in an online world.

- There would be a review of the core group every six months.
- It was noted that the regular commitment for the group of 30 commissioners would not begin until January 2023 when regular meetings would begin with capped numbers to ensure sensitivity of subject content.
- The Chief Executive's remit will be to appoint representation from the Council and would be guided by the Chair and relevant Portfolio Holder.

The Chair thanked Charlotte Brooks for her attendance, contributions to discussions and inspiring presentation.

13. Cost Of Living Crisis

The Committee received a presentation from Martin Walmsley (Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits), Kate Bell (Climate Change Manager) and Sara Boothright (Food Health and Safety Manager) regarding the Cost-of-Living Crisis and the support available to residents. During consideration of the presentation, the following points were noted: -

- It was confirmed that the information provided during the presentation was correct and accurate as of Friday 2 September 2022.
- New Prime Minister, Liz Truss was due to make an announcement on Thursday 8 September 2022 regarding the freezing of energy prices.
- The City of Lincoln Council had a cost-of-living support button on their website as a live and fluid area of knowledge to advise residents on the support available to them.
- As community lead, we had worked in partnership with a number of organisations in the delivery of national and local schemes. This included the private and voluntary sector, communications and the Portfolio Holder for reducing inequality.
- 19% of residents were 'just about managing' and classified as fuel poor.
- The Council Tax Energy rebate scheme of £150 had been a difficult scheme to deliver with work nearly concluded and due to cease at the end of September 2022 (mandatory scheme) and end of November 2022 (discretionary scheme).
- During the presentation, it was noted that customers on pre-payment meters were paying more than those paying by direct debit. As such, additional vouchers had been made available for the previous two winters for residents that struggled to top up their meter.
- A presentation on the Disabled Facilities Grant informed members that Lincoln received £750,000 per year for the scheme however previously, it was very restrictive.
- In 2018, the Regulatory Reform Order provided a more flexible approach to how we improved home facilities within the city.
- The applicant would need to demonstrate a physical health-related issue through the discretionary route. However, the new approach also considered chronic mental health issues.
- The City of Lincoln Council Private Housing Health Assistance Policy Grants included the Safe, Warm & Well and Gas Central Heating schemes worth up to £10,000 subject to eligibility criteria being met.
- Funding of £200,000 had been ring fenced to target and encourage more people to come forward for help.

- For residents who privately rented their home, it was confirmed that under the Housing Act, we had powers to enforce landlords to make changes to substandard accommodation.
- Funding of £72,000 had been secured to facilitate education of local landlords where their properties had an energy performance certificate (EPC) of below E to ensure that work was carried out to make homes more efficient.
- There had been a collaborative approach with West Lindsey and North Kesteven District Councils on the Home Energy Upgrade Scheme.
- The Home Energy Upgrade Scheme detailed a range of fully funded energy efficiency home improvement to eligible homeowners with an annual income below £30,000.
- The amount of individual home funding available could be up to £25,000, however most properties would receive upgrades to the value of £10,000.
- The scheme was available to properties with an EPC rating of D, E, F or G.
- The pilot scheme carried out in 2021 was for approximately 40 properties within the City and collaboration with the Safe, Warm and Well Scheme was implemented.
- Works would include internal and/or external wall insulation and solar panels for homeowners. For rented properties, the landlord would be asked for a financial contribution.
- It was highlighted that many companies offered support to low-income households such as Anglian Water who promoted specialist tariffs.
- Ex Chancellor, Rishi Sunak announced a Household Support Fund from October 2022 – March 2023 and work was to be undertaken to devise a scheme to implement and operate a third rounding of financial assistance.
- Officers explained the availability of help with food to residents and this included Trussell Trust Food Bank, Community Larder and Community Grocery which would help people to make affordable purchases in shops.
- It was noted that mental health issues often arose from financial struggles and as a community lead, we were working with this to offer support and advice.
- There was ongoing countywide work to support, communicate, co-ordinate, act and influence.
- The Local Government Association website had a cost-of-living hub to share best practice to help Council's support residents with the rising cost of living.
- Frontline staff would soon receive training on illegal money lending and 'loan sharks' and this was due to take place in the first week in October 2022.

The Chair gave thanks to Officers for an informative presentation and welcome comments and questions from Members of the Committee. During discussions, the following points were noted: -

- It was confirmed that the Cost-of-Living Support leaflet, supplemented to tonight's agenda, was a great step in communicating the support available to residents.
- There had been considerable exposure on the support available at present via Look North recently and the idea was to keep the leaflet live and updated as information changed.
- It was noted that there was an element of difficulty in navigating people to the individual support required and this was the beginning of a long future journey.
- There were initial plans for communications to be distributed and those plans would be developed in the months ahead.

- Thanks were given to Officers for the information that had been put forward regarding the support and help available to residents. It was noted that the Council was an excellent body to act as facilitator and thanks were given for a remarkable service.
- Consideration was given to intervention for the prevention of loan sharks.
- Comments were made regarding rising interest rates due to Government borrowing during Covid-19 and the possibility that interest rates could rise further.
- Regulatory Reform Orders (RRO's) could be brought in to ensure that landlords kept properties in good repair.
- Members queried how many RRO's had been issued by the Council and whether there was any evidence that landlords had ceased to rent privately due to instructions issued.

NOTE: - Sara Boothright (Food Health and Safety Manager) advised that the number of Regulatory Reform Order's issued by the Council would be submitted to the committee clerk after the meeting for distribution to members.

- Officers confirmed that RRO's enabled provision of housing assistance and gave more flexibility and a discretionary element to award grants.
- Where landlord did not manage a house in multiple occupancy (HMO) appropriately, a Civil Penalty Notice (CPN) could be issued which proved effective and successful as a route of sanction for the condition of a property.
- When a CPN was issued, the money gained would come back to the Council instead of prosecution.
- Officers confirmed that CPN's specifically related to the management of licensable HMO's.
- It was confirmed that part one of the Housing Act specified the general provisions for non-HMO properties.
- Powers were available to remove a landlord from renting property, however as an organisation, to date it had not been necessary to do this.
- Part of the enforcement policy was to advise landlords of potential enforcement action for non-compliance.
- There was the Rogue Landlord Register as another means of deterrent for deteriorated accommodation and non-compliance.
- It was confirmed that the Council had a dedicated officer to consider cases whereby landlords failed to comply with legislation consistently, a legacy from rogue landlord works in 2016.
- Consideration was given to the regular press release of cost-of-living support to ensure that information was received by residents that may be suffering from digital poverty. Officers confirmed that Lincoln featured on BBC News on Tuesday 6 September 2022 and discussion would be held with the Communications team.
- Members commented on the issues of living in poverty and that loan sharks were a product of a system geared against those already suffering hardship.
- The difficulties of digital poverty were considered and it was understood that during times of financial hardship, an internet subscription could be a monthly expenditure that a household would need to stop.
- It was important to ensure that support information reached residents that needed it so careful thought was essential to ensure residents were made aware.

- 95% of domestic properties within the City were in council tax bands A-D which facilitated contact to them all to implement the Council Tax Support Scheme.
- The Council Tax Support scheme highlighted that digital exclusion was a real issue but in addition, literacy difficulties provided corporate considerations for the future.
- Many residents would be accessing services for the first time and as such, staffing levels would be stretched with so many people needing support.
- The Corporate Management Team were aware of potential increase of demand on services and consideration would be given to resource utilisation for priority services.
- It was added that throughout Covid-19, there were more ad-hoc schemes to be implemented at short notice. Therefore, we received new burden payments from the Government to assist with these.
- Previously, some schemes had been implemented through the use of staff overtime to deal with pressure points, with staff wellbeing considered.
- The voluntary sector assisted with the delivery of schemes such as the Household Support Fund which enabled our resources to be used elsewhere.
- Members suggested the consideration of a free telephone number to access support available. It was confirmed that costs would be assessed and explored as a possibility and suggested through Executive.
- In addition to a free telephone number, suggestions were for a specified cost of living crisis option when switchboard were reached to prevent the need for residents to listen to all options.
- Further suggestions included the use of community notice boards and leaflets to be advertised in public spaces.
- Concerns were raised for the potential of Council Tax collection to decrease due to the rising cost of living and it was confirmed that the collection rate would be assessed in November. The Council offered a 'get in touch, not debt' policy to encourage communication to make flexible arrangements where people struggled to pay council tax.
- It was agreed that information presented to the Committee during the meeting would be circulated to members in the Councillor's brief.
- It was confirmed that non-committee members could attend and observe however consideration to governance regarding speaking would be needed.

The Chair gave thanks to Officers for the information provided and for the remarkable work carried out for residents within the City.

14. Work Programme 2022/23

Consideration was given to the Committee's work programme. The Chair advised that further to scoping discussions with officers, the focus of the Committee's work programme for the remaining municipal year would include Community Policing and Suicide Rates in Lincoln.

Discussion took place regarding the presentation of Community Policing and it was agreed that the item would be brought before the Committee in October 2022. The Chair requested that officers work with the communications team to arrange a press release for the meeting.

The Chair confirmed that the Committee's work would include a focus on suicide rates within Lincoln. It was agreed that this item would be brought before the

Committee in December. The Democratic Services Officer confirmed attendance had been received from Sarah Connery, CEO of Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust and Lucy Gavens, Consultant in Public Health, Lincolnshire County Council. The Chair requested that officers work with the communications team to arrange a press release for the meeting.

Discussion took place regarding an update on the Cost-of-Living Crisis and it was agreed that the update would be brought before the Committee in January 2023.

It was agreed that feedback from the Poverty Truth Commission would be brought before the Committee in March 2023. The Democratic Services Officer confirmed the work programme for the remainder of the municipal year.

NOTE: - Future meetings would include the use of name plates for all attendees.