

Present: Councillor Rosanne Kirk (*in the Chair*),
Councillor Debbie Armiger, Councillor Biff Bean,
Councillor Alan Briggs, Councillor Chris Burke,
Councillor Sue Burke, Councillor Bob Bushell,
Councillor David Clarkson, Councillor Thomas Dyer,
Councillor Matthew Fido, Councillor Gary Hewson,
Councillor Jackie Kirk, Councillor Rebecca Longbottom,
Councillor Bill Mara, Councillor Adrianna McNulty,
Councillor Ric Metcalfe, Councillor Neil Murray,
Councillor Donald Nannestad, Councillor
Lucinda Preston, Councillor Clare Smalley,
Councillor Hilton Spratt, Councillor Mark Storer,
Councillor Rachel Storer, Councillor Edmund Strengiel,
Councillor Pat Vaughan, Councillor Calum Watt,
Councillor Joshua Wells, Councillor Emily Wood and
Councillor Loraine Woolley

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Liz Bushell, Councillor Martin Christopher,
Councillor Jane Loffhagen and Councillor Naomi Tweddle

8. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

9. Confirmation of Minutes - 1 March 2022

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 1 March 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

10. Confirmation of Minutes - 25 March 2022

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

11. Confirmation of Minutes - 17 May 2022

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 May 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

12. Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor referred to her engagements since the last meeting of the Council, some of which had included:

- planting an oak tree for the Royal British Legion Women's Section, Lincolnshire County;
- Lincoln's Age UK's Platinum Jubilee celebrations of the Queen;
- lighting Beacons in Lincoln to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee at Lincoln Castle and Boultham Park, alongside the Lord Lieutenant of Lincolnshire, Mr Toby Dennis; and
- the birthday celebrations of a resident who was celebrating their 105th birthday.

The Mayor advised that her chosen charity for the year was to help the Urology Department at Lincoln County Hospital.

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

No questions had been submitted by members of the public.

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

Councillor David Clarkson to Councillor Bob Bushell, Portfolio Holder for Remarkable Place

Question

Now that the term of the loan to fund repairs to the Yarborough swimming pool ceiling and the total compensation paid to Active Nation for the period January 2022 to March 2022 was known, could the portfolio holder advise on the forecast for further compensation payments until the reopening of the swimming pool?

Reply

In terms of the prudential borrowing that would be undertaken to fund the cost of the repairs works, this would be through the Public Works Loan Board. Based on a borrowing of £615,000, over a twenty year period, the annual costs were estimated to be circa £49,000 per annum. The final costs would not be known until the actual borrowing was undertaken and would be based on the prevailing borrowing rate at that time. The rate of interest would be fixed and would not vary over the twenty year period.

In terms of compensation to Active Nation, this would need to be set in the context that the contract the Council had with Active Nation for both Yarborough and Birchwood was a nil value contract. Historically, due to the subsidy required to be provided for leisure services the management fee payable to Active Nation was circa £450,000 per annum. Through both the Council's investment in Birchwood of £1.546 million and the Council's negotiation with Active Nation, the Council had managed to reduce this on a sliding scale over a three year period, so that the Council could now effectively operate the contract as a concessionary contract and did not pay a fee. Whilst the Council would be liable for compensation until the pool reopened, it was currently discussing the level of this compensation with Active Nation, with a view of limiting losses as far as possible. These discussions were dependent on the final programme of works and timescales, which was yet to be finalised with the contractor.

This also needed to be set in the context of what was an extremely challenging environment for leisure services across the country, with many leisure providers, including swimming pools, no longer remaining financially viable and ceasing operations. The Council was committed to working with Active Nation to re-open the only publicly available, indoor pool, in the City.

Supplementary

Would it be sensible to have a ring-fenced budget for future maintenance or unexpected cost associated with the pool, rather than relying on borrowing?

Reply

Ideally the Council would have funding available to place in a ringfenced budget for such circumstances. However, the Council had been subject to extensive budget reductions by Government and therefore it was not possible to assign a proportion of its budget for this purpose.

Councillor Thomas Dyer to Councillor Neil Murray, Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth

Question

Could a summary of how the Council's plans for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) would benefit the Lincoln economy be provided?

Reply

The Council was seeking to maximise the value and benefit of the UKSPF funding that was available to level up Lincoln, particularly in its communities where deprivation was among the worst in the country. Employment with a living wage was a key priority for addressing deprivation and improving life chances for residents across the City. Supporting the development and growth of businesses in the economy to provide jobs with incomes that take people out of poverty and enable potential to be fulfilled was clearly a goal.

The Council's Investment Plan for UKSPF was still being developed with partners. The Council was building upon the vast amount of data and local business intelligence, particularly from partner organisations, the services the Council delivered directly, the Covid-19 grant programmes and the current cost of living crisis on the economy. Collectively, a resilient, diverse and vibrant economy had been steadily built in recent years but these were exceptionally challenging times. The Council was currently reviewing the business support offer with the intention of strengthening and improving this for the City, which could include the Council's own directly employed business advisor; better business support to help start-up/small businesses win contracts; and collaboration with others and innovate for the future. The Council was also reviewing how it best supported residents into sustainable employment, including addressing barriers such as childcare cost/provision, transport accessibility, work flexibility, skills development and access to online jobs.

It was reiterated that the Council was looking to ensure that there was a balanced programme that benefited communities, residents, and the economy.

Supplementary

Were there any skills shortages in specific sectors that the bid would be targeting?

Reply

There were a lot of individuals with no, or very few, qualifications so it was hoped that the bid would help support those individuals by working alongside Lincoln College.

Councillor Hilton Spratt to Councillor Ric Metcalfe, Leader of the Council

Question

Could the Leader of the Council provide an update on progress with any devolution bid for Greater Lincolnshire?

Reply

Greater Lincolnshire was not among the nine areas selected by Government to submit a devolution bid earlier this year, but the Council was continuing to work with the Greater Lincolnshire partners to develop proposals for devolution in readiness for the time when further areas were invited to submit. The work undertaken to date related predominantly to skills, infrastructure powers and funding.

Over the last month a number of business engagement events had taken place, led by the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership, to ascertain the views of businesses across the county in relation to devolution. Businesses across greater Lincolnshire were energetically engaging with this process.

In addition, a *Vision for Greater Lincolnshire 2050* was currently being compiled, which sought to jointly imagine a desirable future for the people, economy and environment in a way that reflected the uniqueness and diversity of Greater Lincolnshire. This would inform any further devolved powers and funding requests.

Any devolution bid would be presented to a meeting of the Council for approval. However it was highlighted that as it stood, upper-tier authorities would lead on bids and these would not require formal sign-off by lower-tier authorities.

Supplementary

Does the Leader of the Council agree that powers were better placed with local authorities, as opposed to central government?

Reply

The current direction of travel had indicated that the Government preferred unitary counties. However, it could be strongly argued that district councils were closer to communities and therefore large unitary counties would become more remote from the people.

It was also highlighted that any current devolution deal would delegate specific decision making powers to a combined authority, with individual councils still being responsible for their current set of services and statutory responsibilities.

Councillor Rachel Storer to Councillor Sue Burke, Portfolio Holder for Reducing Inequality

Question

How many eligible council taxpayers had received the government funded energy rebate and how many were still awaiting payment?

Reply

There were 44,617 council tax band A-D properties in Lincoln, of the 24,268 paying council tax by direct debit 23,730 had been paid the rebate to date (i.e. 97.8%). The remainder of these were either not eligible for the payment or further information was being requested.

Of the remaining bands A-D, households not paying council tax by direct debit, system testing had only recently been completed on this once the software supplier had made the functionality available. A total of 78 had been paid so far, and over the next few weeks more households were being written to so they may provide their bank account details so the rebate payment could be made as soon as possible. All mandatory payments to band A-D taxpayers had to be paid by end of September 2022.

It was reiterated that payments had been made 23,808 households to date, which left 20,809 to be paid.

All discretionary scheme payments, which could include council tax bands E-H, had not yet commenced, owing to mandatory payments being prioritised. These had to be paid by end of November 2022.

Supplementary

Would the Council directly contact anyone who does not have a bank account?

Reply

The Portfolio Holder committed to providing Councillor Rachel Storer with the answer to this question.

Councillor Alan Briggs to Councillor Bob Bushell, Portfolio Holder for Remarkable Place

Question

As Yarborough Leisure Centre was now owned by the Council but operated by Active Nation, what return on its investment does the council receive from this arrangement?

Reply

As mentioned as part of a previous response, the contract with Active Nation for both Yarborough and Birchwood was a nil value contract. Historically, due to the subsidy needed to be provided for leisure services, the management fee payable to Active Nation was circa £450,000 per annum. Through the Council's investment in Birchwood of circa £1.5 million and through the Council's negotiation with Active Nation, the Council had managed to reduce this on a sliding scale over a three year period so that it now effectively operated the contract as a concessionary contract and did not pay a fee.

Subsequently when making further investment in the sites, for example the AGP's, the Council had been able to negotiate a profit share arrangement, which could generate between £25,000 - £50,000 per annum.

The Council has therefore been able to turn the contract from being a cost of £450,000 per annum to one that now provides some level of annual income.

Again, as per the previous response, this needed to be set in the context of what was an extremely challenging environment for leisure services across the country. The Council was in the fortunate position that its leisure provider had not sought to renegotiate the terms of the contract.

Supplementary

Does Active Nation make any contribution to the running costs through the income made?

Reply

This was a public / private partnership, and it was therefore believed that any funds were divided between the two.

Councillor Mark Storer to Councillor Donald Nannestad, Portfolio Holder for Quality Housing

Question

It was highlighted that the Council was still below target for gas safety certificates. Therefore, could the portfolio holder provide reassurance that the swiftest action was being taken to gain access to properties for the safety of tenants and their neighbours?

Reply

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the swiftest action was being taken to gain access to these properties.

Performance in the opening two months of the financial year 2022/23, was as follows:

- In April 2022 the Council had gained access to 209 properties and three properties were not accessed on time (98.58%). One address had been completed after the deadline date and the other two were in the legal process.
- In May 2022 the Council had gained access to 518 properties and six had not been accessed in time (98.85%). Three addresses had been completed after the deadline date and the other three were in the legal process.
- In addition, the Council had two failed access cases that were progressing through the legal system from the 2021/22 servicing programme.

The Council's target was to complete 99.96% of the gas services before the deadline date expired. Our outturn last year was 99.19%. First time access had been provided by 78.6% of tenants.

The process started ten weeks before the due deadline date for the gas service. Therefore the Council was able to work with its tenants and provide sufficient notice and flexibility to accommodate specific appointment dates where possible.

The Council was currently encountering a small number of failed access addresses beyond the deadline date each month, despite the contractor's extensive attempts to gain access supported by the gas team at Hamilton House.

There was a robust annual gas servicing procedure in place, in which three appointments were made, text reminders sent, cards were left at no access appointments. Tenants were able to rearrange appointment dates prior to the appointment date. The Council would also make additional phone calls to try to contact the tenant and negotiate an access date. The Council also checked with tenancy management colleagues for any information that could assist attempts to gain access.

After three failed access appointments, the address was then referred into the legal process to enable the Council to gain access. It was noted that the court process was currently slow, due to delays caused by the pandemic, which was beyond the Council's control. The final steps in the legal process would result in obtaining a court injunction to be served on the tenant to enable the Council to gain access and carry out the annual gas service for the lifetime of the tenancy.

The investment team and the contractor, Aaron Services, took the Council's landlord responsibility very seriously and worked closely together to maintain the gas servicing programme and progress failed access cases as swiftly as possible.

Supplementary

Are you on track with the properties that had previously exceeded their deadline dates in previous years?

Reply

Yes. If a court order had been granted in a previous year, it was valid for the lifetime of the tenancy, which assisted greatly in gaining access to these properties.

Councillor Gary Hewson to Ric Metcalfe, Leader of the Council

Question

Could the Leader of the Council provide information on what actions had been taken as a Council, or was looking at taking, to help the residents of Lincoln with regards to the burden they were having to deal with due to the cost-of-living crisis.

Reply

All councillors had long been aware of the hardship in Lincoln before the latest cost of living crises. The Council's own city profile for a number of years had provided an evidential source of data supporting the awful position, for example:

- Overall, in the 2019 IMD, Lincoln had been ranked the 68th most deprived local authority area out of a total of 317. This put it in the 25% most deprived local authorities in England. Lincoln had four Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) that fell within the 5% most deprived nationally,

reflecting the high level of deprivation in some of the City's neighbourhoods;

- There had been an increase of people living in fuel poverty in 2019;
- The percentage of children living in (relative) low-income families had risen;
- The number of claimants of Universal Credit (both male and female) over the years from August 2019 to August 2021 had increased significantly.
- The number of council tax support claimants had increased.

That is why as part of Vision 2020 and now Vision 2025 at least three of the Council's strategic priorities related to trying to tackle these issues: Inclusive Growth, Reducing Inequality, and Affordable Housing.

In relation to Inclusive Growth and Reducing Inequality, we know that more and better paid jobs was a route out of poverty. Therefore the Council was:

- Supporting the private sector in helping Lincoln to become digitally enabled therefore creating better skilled roles;
- Developing a strategy and programme for small business support to assist in sustaining and growing jobs;
- Supporting a City-wide culture of innovation to attract higher paying roles
- Attracting investment into the City;
- Running a successful skills and training project between the City of Lincoln Council, the Department of Work and Pensions and Lincoln College;
- Working as part of the network aiming to attain training/employment opportunities for young people.

As a Council, it invested significantly in the City, benefiting local supply chains and creating local jobs and was a significant employer within the City. Current capital investment programme in the City, over the period of Vision 2025 would be £44.7 million (this included external grant funded schemes) with further investment of £75.8 million in the council's housing stock and new build programme, over the same period.

Included within this capital investment was the externally grant funded Towns Deal programme. This significant investment into the City sought to try and tackle Inclusive Growth and Inequality. In addition, the Council was currently preparing an investment plan for Shared Prosperity Fund and a Levelling Up, bid both of which would seek to boost productivity, pay and living standards and spreading opportunity within the City.

In relation to affordable housing, the Council:

- continued to increase the supply and number of affordable homes in the City;
- planned to deliver a reduction in the number of properties with a category 1 hazard outstanding;
- would push landlords from the private sector to sign up to the trusted landlord scheme;
- had secured Sustainable Warmth / Affordable Warmth grant funding for the private sector to address issues of poor insulation and heating.

The City Council was the only local authority in Lincolnshire with a Council Tax Support Scheme that provided 100% eligibility criteria. This provided circa £1.27

million per annum to the most deprived council tax payers. The Council's Benefits Advice Team had put a significant amount of money into the pockets of the poorest households in Lincoln with their excellent advice and take up campaigns, for example in 2021/22:

- their advice had provided £22,752 weekly value of additional benefits;
- their advice had provided £299,193 lump sum award of additional benefits; and
- they had provided advice to 6,848 customers and 134 money advice referrals.

In addition, the Housing Benefits Team had been ensuring that the national funded schemes were targeted at the neediest in the City.

Councillor Clare Smalley to Councillor Sue Burke, Portfolio Holder for Reducing Inequality

Question

Could the portfolio holder provide an update on the Safer Streets Fund, what progress has been made, especially with the increased CCTV and how the app was working to keep women and girls safe at night?

Reply

The Safer Streets project had provided 29 new cameras, located in the Abbey, Carholme, Park and Castle wards. The focus was on these areas on the periphery of the city centre where people were more likely to walk, often alone, and late at night, to their home from town. Careful thought had been given to providing good coverage on main walking routes, whilst minimising the impact on privacy in these primarily residential areas. The cameras form part of the wider CCTV network, with footage sent back to the City Hall control room and managed in accordance with the existing network.

The month of May 2022 was the first fully operational month and produced the first complete set of incident statistics from the new cameras: 26 incidents had been monitored during the month. Seven of them had resulted in arrests being made. The main purpose of these cameras was the safety of lone people after dark, although of course they were part of the wider CCTV network which dealt with many different types of incidents.

The project also allowed the Council to upgrade the servers in the Control Room, to create more capacity and make some operating processes more efficient.

An app had been developed. This had been re-designed during the project's delivery phase when it became apparent that the revolutionary app the Council had hoped for was not achievable at this time, for technical reasons. The app would be a first step towards that original aspiration. It would allow members of the public to report issues they noticed whilst out and about, specifically in relation to things that made them feel less safe, and to tell us how safe they felt on their journey, whilst submitting their walking route to us. This route and 'feeling of safety' information would help the Council and the Lincolnshire Police when making strategic decisions about resourcing and planning. The Council would be announcing the formal launch of the app in the coming weeks.

The Portfolio Holder was pleased to report that the Safer Streets project was already making a difference, as evidenced by the CCTV data, and on the whole had been welcomed by people in those areas.

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

(a) Councillor Donald Nannestad, Portfolio Holder for Quality Housing

Councillor Donald Nannestad, Portfolio Holder for Quality Housing, presented his report to the Council, which was set out on pages 29 – 34 of the agenda. It was noted that the report covered a wide range of areas which reflected the Council's commitment to quality housing.

Councillor Nannestad wished his thanks be recorded to all staff for their hard work during the pandemic, along with the challenges experienced in the supply of materials and a shortage in the labour market. Councillor Nannestad was pleased to highlight excellent areas of performance, such as rent collection and the completion of De Wint Court extra care housing, which was a flagship development for the Council. Tracey Footsoy, Housing Strategy Officer, was congratulated for her work on the De Wint Court extra care housing development.

The Council was provided with an opportunity to make comments and ask questions, where the following points were confirmed:

- The total council housing stock was discussed and it was confirmed that the Council had circa 7,800 properties. Comparisons were made to the number of properties in 1982 and 1991.
- Specific concerns were raised regarding antisocial behaviour towards elderly residents in a particular ward and whether the tenancy agreement had sufficient powers to deal with the issue. It was explained that gathering evidence was key to ensure a positive outcome in court.
- Daryl Wright, Maintenance Team Leader, had been commended by two constituents, for his work to address issues they had raised.
- The De Wint Court extra care housing development was cited as an excellent project, which had involved ward councillors throughout its whole development.
- It was pleasing to see an additional 42 new homes in Moorland.
- The work of the housing team to reduce its carbon footprint was also commended.
- Councillor Nannestad was pleased to confirm that the new builds at Rookery Lane were progressing well and that there had recently been a naming ceremony for the development. It was confirmed that there would be two four-bedroom properties; ten three-bedroom properties; 23 two-bedroom properties; four bungalows; and a small number of flats.
- Although there was a direct link between housing conditions and health, household income and levels of air pollution were also key factors which affected the health of the population. Suicide rates in Lincoln were also discussed and key partners were currently trying to find an explanation, and this work was ongoing.
- It was confirmed that right to buy receipts had been spent on time and the Council would continue to do so.
- The Personal Assistant to the Director of Housing and Investment was congratulated for her hard work supporting councillors with housing matters.

- It was confirmed that a decarbonisation policy had been approved at a recent meeting of the Executive. In response to a question, it was advised that it was not always possible to use solar panels, particularly on flats as any privately owned occupants would also have to give consent to them being erected. Therefore, the Council was focusing on improving insulation in homes.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

16. Appointments to Outside Bodies

It was moved by Councillor Ric Metcalfe and seconded by Councillor Donald Nannestad that the schedule of appointments to Outside Bodies 2022/23, as detailed at Appendix A to the report, be approved.

Councillor Hilton Spratt highlighted that the opposition group had not been appointed to any of the outside bodies to which the Council made appointments, whereas other councils offered some of these appointments to opposition groups. In response, Councillor Ric Metcalfe reminded Council that it was within the gift of the majority group as to who was nominated and that it would be difficult for any opposition councillor to represent the view of the majority group at such meetings.

RESOLVED

That the schedule of appointments to Outside Bodies 2022/23, as detailed within Appendix A to the report, be approved.