

<b>Present:</b>	Councillor Calum Watt ( <i>in the Chair</i> )
<b>Councillors:</b>	Chris Burke, Debbie Armiger, Biff Bean, James Brown, Laura Danese, Bill Mara, Clare Smalley and Emily Wood
<b>Also in Attendance:</b>	Councillor Donald Nannestad, Councillor Lucinda Preston, Emily Holmes (Assistant Director Strategic Development, City of Lincoln Council), Victoria Poulson (Democratic Services Officer, City of Lincoln Council), Martin Walmsley (Assistant Director Shared Revenues and Benefits, City of Lincoln Council) and Steve Welsby (Communications Manager, City of Lincoln Council)
<b>Apologies for Absence:</b>	Councillor(s) Rachel Storer, Dylan Stothard and Aiden Wells

**73. Welcome and Apologies**

Councillor Calum Watt, Chair of the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee, opened the meeting with a warm welcome to all attendees.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor(s) Rachel Storer, Dylan Stothard and Aiden Wells.

Councillor Clare Smalley was in attendance as a substitute.

Councillor Donald Nannestad and Councillor Lucinda Preston were in attendance as Panel Members to respond to Item 4 entitled 'Consultation to close Sixth Form Provision at Lincoln Castle Academy'.

**74. Confirmation of Minutes - 30 July 2024**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 July 2024 be confirmed and signed by the Chair as an accurate record.

**75. Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

**76. Consultation to close Sixth Form Provision at Lincoln Castle Academy**

Councillor Calum Watt, Chair of the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee, introduced the topic of discussion which was the Consultation to close Sixth Form Provision at Lincoln Castle Academy.

The Committee received a verbal report from Emily Holmes, Assistant Director, Strategic Development. During consideration of the presentation, the following points were noted:

- The consultation document had been sent to all Members for consideration and comment
- Representatives were unable to attend the meeting due to an open evening at Lincoln Castle Academy

- Carol Gill, Operations Manager, Lincoln Castle Academy had contacted officers and confirmed that she remained happy to respond to any questions, prior to the Consultation deadline on 14 October 2024. She had responded in writing to questions submitted ahead of the meeting
- Officers remained committed to collating comments received from Members. It was hoped that comments would help shape the consultation response.

The Chair offered his thanks to Emily Holmes and welcomed comments and questions from Members of the Committee. As a result of discussions between Members, questions submitted and answers received prior to the meeting, the following points were made: -

**Question:** What specific data or metrics were used to determine that the Sixth Form provision was financially unsustainable? Were there any alternative cost-saving measures considered before the decision on closure was taken?

**Response:** To be financially viable, the Department for Education (DfE) recommended that Sixth Forms required approximately 200 students within them. The DfE also stated that the average class size for Sixth Form teaching groups should be at least 15 (Department for Education 'Making significant changes to an open academy' January 2022). The school ran to a curriculum-led financial planning model predicated on an approximate teacher contact ratio of 0.79 and a curriculum bonus (a measure of class sizes) of under 8%. Recognising that the curriculum was both educationally unsound and financially unsustainable, school leaders took the decision in Summer 2021 to withdraw unviable courses prior to students who enrolled in September 2021. As a result, admission numbers fell from approximately 80 to just over 40. This had further fallen to 34 by June, and only 25 by September 2022. Whilst a Sixth form is routinely considered as a separate entity (and sometimes as a loss leader in terms of group sizes), class sizes of 1 in Maths and Chemistry and 4 students in History could not be financially sustained.

**Question:** How were student voices incorporated into the decision-making process? Were there any student surveys or focus groups conducted to gather student perspectives on the Sixth Form?

**Response:** The most important survey conducted was to publish credible offers to students in December 2021 and December 2022. On both occasions, zero students applied for Lincoln Castle Academy Sixth Form.

**Question:** Had Lincoln Castle Academy considered the potential long-term implications of closure of the Sixth Form on the overall school community? How might the decision affect future student enrolment and the school's reputation?

**Response:** Lincoln Castle Academy were clear that the decision to close the school's Sixth Form would have no impact on future enrolment and the school's reputation. Successful outcomes in Summer 2024 and indications from feeder schools that parents had taken a second look at Lincoln Castle Academy, pointed towards a strong future without a Sixth Form. These outcomes, and the improvements the school was making across the board, were only possible because the school had focused its efforts on raising standards within Key Stages 3 and 4. The diversion of resources (whether the best teaching, the cost of small class sizes or teaching space) to a Sixth Form would be to the detriment of the rest of the school.

**Question:** How would Lincoln Castle Academy ensure that students who were affected by the closure had access to adequate support and guidance in finding alternative post-16 education options? Would there be dedicated staff members or resources available to assist them?

**Response:** Expert Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) was already in place at Lincoln Castle Academy, supported by the Academy's own dedicated Progress Careers Adviser. Representatives from 9 local and regional providers would be brought in during the Academy's Post-16 Providers Fair on Thursday 19 September 2024, which gave students everything they needed to make decisions about Post-16 destinations.

**Question:** What were the potential impacts of the closure on the wider community? Would it affect local businesses, job opportunities, or the overall vibrancy of the area?

**Response:** As there were only 22 students in the Sixth Form by the time of their exams, any impact was likely to be minimal.

**Question:** How would the Academy ensure that the community was kept informed throughout the consultation process? Would there be opportunities for public meetings or open forums to discuss the proposal?

**Response:** The consultation had been published and members of the community had been invited to make representations.

**Question:** Would the Academy be transparent about the financial situation of the Sixth Form and the reasons for the proposed closure? Would detailed information be provided about the costs and benefits of each option?

**Response:** The Academy were committed to working in partnership with parents, members of the local community and other relevant stakeholders to ensure they were kept informed of any developments as they arose.

**Comment:** It was not right that Members had been denied the opportunity to question the officials about a decision of such great impact. It would be positive to meet with officials prior to the consultation deadline of 14 October 2024.

**Comment:** Public discussion of the topic was both important and necessary.

**Calum Watt, Chair of the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee:** The subject was too important to be left. Requested Officers sought an extension of the Consultation deadline for the item to be considered at the next meeting of the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee on 15 October 2024.

**Comment:** In contrary to the response received from Lincoln Castle Academy reference class sizes at A Level, it was possible to run class sizes smaller than 15. Music and Languages often ran much smaller classes. It appeared that there were costing savings involved. Issues with non-specialist teaching within Key Stages 3 & 4 had been experienced. For many parents in the area, Lincoln Castle Academy was the school of last resort. A great number of parents had been desperate to secure a place for their children at Lincoln Christ's Hospital School, Lincoln College, The Priory Academy LSST and Lincoln University Technical College. It may be the case that for some parents, in the absence of a Sixth Form, Lincoln Castle Academy became less desirable. It was advantageous for teachers to teach at A Level stage and therefore, closure of the Sixth Form removed a pool of teachers which could affect the retention of teachers. Lincoln Castle Academy had some very good teachers and pupils and was a great school in many ways.

**Comment:** Many parents wanted their children to start and finish at the same school. There were no other 11-16 age ranged schools within Lincoln which created the question of viability of schools in the future. It would be useful if the projections for the number of secondary school pupils within Lincoln over the next few years

could be understood; if the numbers were decreasing, the decision could have a significant effect. There was the issue of transport for children of Ermine West unless they chose Lincoln College which would be positive for some, but not others. There were a number of difficulties which included the condition of the building which was built as one with Yarborough Leisure Centre. Several Sixth Form staff had already left. The decision should be examined in public.

**Comment:** The Academy had previously had class sizes smaller than 15. If the Academy did not have children that wanted to stay, they had to go elsewhere, and that issue would continue.

**Comment:** The figure quoted of zero students for the previous two years seemed a real failure and public questioning would be positive.

**Comment:** The topic of decision was a perfect example of what the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee was established to hear. Lincoln Castle Academy had a duty to the Community to be accountable and it was disappointing that a representative was not in attendance. Professional views had been aired during the meeting and the Academy should have been in attendance before the public, via the Committee, to explain themselves.

**Comment:** The Council was a nexus point and worked with multiple agencies; therefore, should be part of the solution.

**Comment:** Members were in unanimous agreement to invite Lincoln Castle Academy to the next meeting of Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee, scheduled for 15 October 2024.

**Note:** Calum Watt, Chair of the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee wished it be noted that he was deeply disappointed that a representative of Lincoln Castle Academy was not in attendance to the meeting.

**Comment:** It would be positive to be given knowledge of the depth of the consultation, in terms of how the consultation had been publicised and where it went. It did not appear to have been excessively publicised, and many individuals were unaware of the proposed closure.

**Comment:** It would be positive if Members were informed of how many students were in the current Year 11 group so the ratio of how many people would be leaving, would be known.

**RESOLVED that:**

1. Officers be tasked with the submission of a request for an extension of the consultation deadline.
2. Officers be tasked with the extension of an invitation for an official from Lincoln Castle Academy to attend the next meeting of the Committee.
3. The content of all discussions be noted with thanks.

*(Note: Councillor Donald Nannestad left proceedings at this stage)*

## **77. Introduction to Anti-Poverty Strategy Proposals**

Councillor Calum Watt, Chair of the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee, introduced the topic of discussion which was an Introduction to Anti-Poverty Strategy Proposals.

The Committee received a collaborative presentation from Emily Holmes, Assistant Director, Strategic Development (City of Lincoln Council) and Martin Walmsley, Assistant Director Shared Revenues and Benefits (City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council). During consideration of the presentation, the following points were noted:

- In some way, the City of Lincoln Council (CoLC) dealt with every household and every business within the city. There were also opportunities to work with North Kesteven District Council (NKDC)
- Consideration had been given to what difference the CoLC could make, such as helping people into work and offering debt advice
- Revenues and Benefits had a key role in the delivery of anti-poverty support
- Covid-19 caused an increased demand to the Revenues and Benefits Service and work included:
  - The facilitation of Test & Trace Support Payments
  - An increase in Council Tax Support Claims
  - Universal Credit (UC) Documents; a significant amount of extra documents were processed for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
- The Cost-of-Living Crisis support included:
  - Council Tax Rebate Payments (£150)
  - Council Tax Support Fund
  - Energy Bill Support Scheme – Alternative Funding/Fuel Payment
  - Discretionary Housing Payments
  - Household Support Fund
- The title of 'Lincoln Against Poverty' (LAP) was important. It was agreed in 2014 by the CoLC and although partners were included, it was approved as a CoLC poverty strategy
- Covid-19 and the Cost-of-Living Crisis had resulted in closer working with the voluntary sector, even more than had occurred previously
- LAP was not led by CoLC and instead, led jointly with a group of partners such as Acts Trust, Bridge Church and LocalMotion
- LAP was a refresh of the Anti-Poverty Strategy further to significant changes experienced within the last four to five years and linked into potential CoLC Vision 2030 priorities
- Current emerging issues that had been identified included:
  - Winter Fuel Payments/Pension Credit
    - The CoLC Cost of Living Support Team had received calls prior to the Government's recent decision to remove Winter Fuel Payment. The CoLC had a Cost-of-Living Coordinator, as part of a team of 3. However, there was not extensive resource to ensure delivery. This was something that Officers wanted to achieve, not only for CoLC but for NKDC also
  - Household Support Fund
    - Phase 5 would be concluded at the end of the month and the Household Support Fund would be extended to the end of March 2025 for Phase 6. The extension was extremely welcomed as it was likely demand would be very high. Lessons had been learnt throughout the first five phases and the CoLC

had worked with many new partners (Age UK, Lincoln City Foundation, the Mosque) which ensured that as many cohorts as possible, had been reached. Delivery of Household Support Fund had received really positive outcomes for residents

- Universal Credit Managed Migration
  - Rollout of the UC managed migration had been slow however progression would be accelerated. The CoLC had a role within the migration and offered debt/money management advice. A letter would be sent to individuals within the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) cohort to advise that they were required to move over to UC
- Food, Fuel and Hygiene Poverty
- Data had been collected from sources such as the Lincoln City Profile 2023 – 2024 and research had been commissioned through Lincolnshire Open Research and Innovation Centre (LORIC) and Lincoln Embracing All Nations (LEAN). LEAN considered minority groups within the city to assess if there were any gaps in support
- Lincoln Against Poverty Funding
  - Household Support Fund
    - Further guidance was awaited before the amount awarded for the district was known for phase 6
  - UKSPF
    - The Council had been very supportive of CoLC initiatives. There was a scheme in place that offered new tenants a £20.00 voucher which provided new tenants with a one-year membership and 3 free shops for the Community Grocery
- It was hoped that support could be offered for Warm Spaces through the Winter Pressures Fund
- Staffing resources included pulling teams together which included wider partners within the city, and other organisations in order for greater capacity for the initiative to be realised
- Consideration had been given to an ‘assembly’ rather than a conference. It was hoped that if communities were brought together, consideration could be given to the emerging issues that arose from the data and a strategy could be created
- LocalMotion had created a group of community commissioners; people that had real life experiences and these individuals would be heavily involved with the work
- Families that had experienced issues with supplying school uniform for their children had been supported through the ‘Ready for School Fund’ ran by the Diocese of Lincoln. Contributions had been made through the Household Support Fund
- Through UKSPF Funding, some families had been supported with the 50p required for breakfast at a nursery
- The ‘Go Gro’ scheme had been supported through the Household Support Fund. The scheme showed individuals how to cook at low cost and provided slow cookers
- Consideration had been given to the effects of poverty on older residents, some of whom had to choose between heating or eating
- The future work programme would be focused on different topics that helped shape the anti-poverty strategy such as disabilities and digital inclusion

The Chair offered his thanks to Emily Holmes and Martin Walmsley and welcomed comments and questions from Members of the Committee. As a result of discussions, the following points were made: -

**Question:** How much did support from Lincoln City Foundation (LCF) play within the project?

**Response:** There were some real opportunities for a difference to be made and work from Martin Hickerton and LCF was fantastic. The foundation had been a deliverer of Household Support Fund for us and had helped people with food and energy. Working with LCF on the Cost-of-Living had been positive.

**Comment:** It would be beneficial for LCF to be a part of future community events as the Foundation created networking opportunities for families.

**Comment:** The Community Foundation had been very good and worked with the Sincil Community Land Trust who gave people a place to meet and an officer to work with. It was also linked in with the Hermit Street Development which was an active example of how CoLC dealt with poverty from another angle.

**Question:** It may be the case that many individuals did not understand how to budget finances effectively and therefore, would likely benefit from support and guidance to understand how they could make best use of what they had. There were multiple different agencies that carried out various work. Had any work on what was already happening regarding the subject matter taken place to ensure there was no duplication in certain areas.

**Response:** Work with the Commission through LORIC had identified these issues. Sadly, there was more than enough work for all agencies and organisations. The importance was the understanding of other organisations so that signposting was effective. The CoLC took ownership where possible.

**Comment:** There was a leaflet that contained all of the information however it was appreciated that hard copy leaflets became outdated quickly. The Council was fortunate to have an in-house Welfare and Benefits team who were very busy. Citizens Advice was also within City Hall. Budgeting advice was also provided by Acts Trust through the Community Grocery. For vulnerable individuals that migrated onto UC and in direct receipt of large payments, budgeting advice would be very useful.

**Comment:** Mapping work had taken place, and the existing provision that was available had been considered. It was important to assess if individuals had accessed existing provision and what gaps there were. Consideration had been given to new support being taken into places where individuals already accessed support.

**Comment:** Citizens Advice had started to offer heating advice through a project with Cadent and COLC and individuals had gained a great deal from it.

**Question:** Did a UC application have to be made online and was there any support available to assist with completion of an application?

**Response:** DWP had offered reassurance that there was support available for people that struggled with an application for UC. There was a telephone number for individuals however there was no face-to-face service through the Citizens Advice Help to Claim arrangement. However, if needed, individuals would be assisted by DWP, or COLC where possible/appropriate. UC migration was immediately to be moved into the most vulnerable cohort. If a constituent struggled to apply, Officers welcomed contact whereby the Revenues and Benefits Team would aim to assist.

**Question:** How was the Household Support Fund applied for?

**Response:** The demand for Household Support Fund was high and at times, was unmanageable. Communication had taken place at the right time to the right groups in the right way. Prioritisation and a phased approach was required. There would be a period of time for an open application scheme however specific groups may be targeted, for example pensioners who were not in receipt of the Winter Fuel Payment and who had missed out marginally. Guidance from Central Government was awaited and access to fantastic referral organisations such as Age UK was positive.

**Question:** Had consideration been given to contacting other Churches and religious groups as part of the project?

**Response:** Siân Wade, Active Faith Lead from Transform Lincoln was a fantastic contact and her presence within the group was significant. Churches and religious groups were key to the project and would be invited to the assembly.

**Comment:** The CoLC were involved in many different groups and Members were delighted and welcomed an assembly. There was an assumption that many organisations that worked together within the same sector often knew of each other however that was not always the case. As an institution, we were better placed to secure most organisations within the same room for discussions to be facilitated. Scoping discussions would take place in relation to poverty focus points for future meetings.

**Note:** Members were invited to contact Councillor Calum Watt, Chair of the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee, with information of organisations that Members worked with.

**Comment:** The project was very exciting and a considerable amount of unanticipated good could come from it. Previous conversations had taken place regarding how organisations helped individuals. This was about how organisations helped and supported groups together.

RESOLVED that the content of discussions be noted with thanks.

## **78. Work Programme 2024/25**

Consideration was given to the Committee's Work Programme. Further to scoping discussions, the Democratic Services Officer confirmed that the focus of the Committee's upcoming work would include further attendance in relation to Education and the Cost of Living.

It was agreed that the Panel be comprised of Matthew Clayton, Head of Education, Children's Services (Lincolnshire County Council), Siân Wade, Active Faith Lead (Transform Lincoln) and Simon Hawking, Chief Executive (Acts Trust). The Democratic Services Officer confirmed that the item would be brought before the Committee in October 2024.

Calum Watt, Chair of the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee requested that the start time of the next meeting of the Committee be brought forward to 17:30 to provide sufficient time for items of business to be considered effectively.

The Democratic Services Officer confirmed that scoping discussions would take place further to the meeting in relation to the Anti-Poverty Strategy Proposals project.



RESOLVED that:

1. The start time of the next meeting of the Committee be amended to 17:30.
2. The content of discussions be noted with thanks.

**Date of Next Meeting:** Tuesday 15 October 2024 (17:30)