

# Scrutiny

## Annual Report

### 2024-25



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## Introduction

During 2024-25, the City of Lincoln Council continued to operate executive arrangements with its Executive appointed in May 2024 comprising of the Leader of the Council and five other councillors as Portfolio Holders. Most of the Council's decisions are made by the Executive. To improve the quality of the Executive's decisions, 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 2024 until March 2025.

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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 2024/25?

The Council appointed the following scrutiny Committees for 2024/25:

Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Chair
Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee	Councillor Calum Watt
Performance Scrutiny Committee	Councillor Gary Hewson
Policy Scrutiny Committee	Councillor Chris Burke
Select Scrutiny Committee	Councillor Calum Watt
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, the work programmes for these scrutiny committees were formally approved by the respective Committees at their first meeting of the 2024/25 Municipal Year and regularly updated throughout the Council year after this time.

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.

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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 June 2024 and March 2025, the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee met on five occasions and focused on the following topics:

- Sheltering our Citizens
- Youth Engagement Update
- Consultation to close Sixth Form Provision at Lincoln Castle Academy
- Introduction to Anti-Poverty Strategy Proposals
- Education and the Cost of Living
- Poverty and Health Inequalities – Mental Health and Physical Health
- Lincoln Against Poverty Assembly Update

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

- Lynsey Collinson, Chief Executive – DevelopmentPlus
- Caylie Jago, Project Manager – DevelopmentPlus
- Toby Ealden, Artistic Director and CEO – Zest Theatre
- Adam Perkins, Participation Co-Ordinator – Zest Theatre
- Richard Hanson, Principle – Lincoln Castle Academy
- Matthew Clayton, Head of Education Support, Children's Services – Lincolnshire County Council
- Sian Wade, Active Faith Lead – Transform Lincoln
- Amy Colley, Relationships Manager – Acts Trust
- Dr Lucy Gavens, Consultant in Public Health – Lincolnshire County Council
- Charlotte Brooks, Director – Local Motion
- Simon Hawking, Chief Executive – Acts Trust

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 the consideration of the causes of poverty and the focus on mental health and wellbeing through support projects, the opening of 'The Zone' in June 2024; a facility which encouraged young people outside of their own communities, the development of 'Lincoln Against Poverty'; a refresh of the Anti-Poverty strategy proposals, linked in to Vision 2030 priorities and the Consultation to close Sixth Form Provision at Lincoln Castle Academy.

The Committee scrutinised Poverty and Health Inequalities and noted the progress that had been through the Lincoln Against Poverty Assembly.

Discussions also took place around the links between financial inclusion and mental health and noted the co-ordinated programme of activity through the Lincolnshire Financial Inclusion Partnership (LFIP).

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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 a list of each Portfolio Holders responsibilities to allow members to focus on the relevant performance information relating to the appropriate member's portfolio.

Performance Scrutiny Committee received the minutes of it's Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee meetings for information.

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 quarterly 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 2024.
- Revenues and Benefits performance updates providing members with an update on performance in the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service.
- Strategic Performance Measures and Targets 2025/26 - for review prior to being presented to Executive for consideration.

Members took part in the budget review process for the scrutiny of the proposed budget and Council Tax for the 2025/26 financial year and the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025-2030, 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 2025/26 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 2024/25 year in respect of:

#### Addressing the Challenge of Climate Change Vision 2025 Progress Report

A report was presented to Performance Scrutiny Committee on the strategic priority contained in Vision 2025 called 'addressing the challenge of climate change'.

This report provided an update on the progress of the group in addressing climate change and its live projects for this strategic priority, also looking towards Lincoln 2030 with new projects either in the pipeline or currently being set up.

#### Vision 2025 - Remarkable Place Progress Report

This report focused on progress made on the Let's enhance our remarkable place strategic priority, and covered those projects delivered/ being progressed as part of the delivery plan. It represented a high-level summary, designed to give Members a quick overview of the entire programme, together with an updated status on projects remaining within the programme as Vision 2025 drew to a close in March 2025.

#### Protecting Vulnerable People

Performance Scrutiny Committee were provided with a summary of the key issues, trends and statistical data associated with Protecting Vulnerable People in the city. This summary included an overview of the types of cases being reported or occurring within Lincoln, and performance information which demonstrated the Council's continued compliance with statutory safeguarding requirements.

#### Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement 2023/24

Members received an annual complaints report including details from the Annual Review of Local Authority Complaints issued by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the decisions of the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS).

The report provided an update on the overall number of complaints received by the Council on a Directorate basis for the full year 2023-2024, including performance against target response times and the percentage of complaints which were upheld.

#### Fire Safety

A report was presented to members on the current position regarding Fire Safety to the housing stock including high rise tower blocks, supported housing schemes and low risk flats.

The report focused on Fire Risk Assessments (FRA) that had been carried out on high-rise and low-rise tower blocks and their review frequencies. All three tower

blocks were registered with the building safety regulator prior to the deadline date for registering existing occupied higher-risk buildings which was 30 September 2023. The work to produce the building safety case report is in progress with the report for Trent View in the final stages, and the reports for the other two high rise blocks planned to be completed by the end of the year.

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## **Policy Scrutiny Committee**

During 2024/25, the Committee met five times and provided 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:

### City of Lincoln Homelessness Strategy

A report introducing the Strategy was presented along with the supporting action plan for consideration prior to being referred to Executive for approval.

The Committee discussed the impact of homelessness on children's education and mental health and were assured that, as landlord, the Council took the highest care to support families in temporary accommodation in conjunction with Lincolnshire County Council.

Funding provision for homelessness services was considered by the Committee. Grants were provided on a three-year cycle which were predominantly used to pay for staffing.

The Strategy was flexible which would allow the Council to adapt and respond to challenges, however changes were needed to national policy to address increased homelessness due to the early release of prisoners.

### Parking Strategy Review

The Committee reviewed the Parking Strategy and delivery plan which followed an all-member workshop on the subject. The Strategy was recommended to Executive for approval.

The delivery plan set out the parking service priorities and policies to be delivered by the Council over the following five years. The Strategy focussed on off-street parking provided in Council car parks and covered the City Council's role with on-street resident parking, some of which was delegated from Lincolnshire County Council.

Questions from the Committee established that there were several aspirations over the next five years for car parking in Lincoln which would consider number plate recognition at Council car parks, and the ability to pre-book spaces. Also to be considered was the installation of electric vehicle charging points in disabled bays.

## Procurement Act 2023 and Contract Procedure Rules

A report summarising the new Procurement Act 2023 was considered (which came into effect on 24 February 2025) alongside revision to the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

A change brought in by the legislation was the introduction of a central government portal which would improve transparency within local government procurement and centralise the publication of statutory notices by authorities.

The Committee was assured that staff involved in procurement would be well informed of the changes, and the requirements of the Act would remain high on departmental teams' agendas.

The Council would identify social value within the procurement process through a monitoring matrix which was in development, and the opportunity for community legacy would be considered at all stages to continue reducing inequality.

Comments from the Committee were referred to Executive for its consideration.

## Renewal of Public Spaces Protection Order Allowing for the Gating of St Peter's Passage

Approval was being sought for renewal of the existing Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) for the gating of St Peter's Passage in the upper High Street area of Lincoln city centre. The Committee considered the proposal before recommending the renewal to Executive.

The upper High Street was a hotspot within the city's night-time economy, and the alleyway had previously attracted anti-social behaviour.

A public consultation asking if the PSPO should be renewed had received 180 responses, 87.8% of which were in favour of continuing with restricted public access.

The Committee heard that due to certain streams of the Safer Streets funding coming to an end at the close of the financial year, it was important to continue the gating of the passage to help keep the city centre safe.

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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 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 2024/25 on the Western Growth Corridor Scheme Delivery - Phase 1A & Phase 1B, which was considered on 28 August

2024. After consideration of all the evidence and submissions made, the Committee decided to refuse the call-in request.

The Committee sat as the Crime and Disorder Committee on 17 July 2024.

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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 Chair of Lincoln Tenants Panel provided a regular written report on the Panel's continued work on a variety of projects with officers in the Housing Service.

Over the last thirteen years the Council had been working with Lincoln Tenants Panel to improve external scrutiny and to meet standards implemented by the Tenant Services Authority.

From April 2010 all social landlords were required to have local offers in place alongside the national standards as set out in the new Regulatory Framework for Social Housing, which was amended with effect from April 2012 although the principles remained the same.

The Committee met six times during 2024/25 and considered many reports which included the following topics:

- Tenant Satisfaction Measures
- Income Management and Arrears Policy
- Pet Policy (Housing Tenants)
- Neighbourhood Management Policy (Housing Tenants and Land)
- Income Management and Arrears Policy (Housing Tenants)
- Tenancy Services Structure Update
- Directorate of Housing and Investment Building Compliance
- Voids Recharges
- Housing Management Structure Update
- Downsizing Policy Review/Updates
- Right to Buy and Section 106 Funds
- Reasons for performance downturn and targets being missed", "action plans and activity to redress- Customer Services Calls
- Anti-Social Behaviour Update
- Unacceptable Customer Actions Policy
- Remedies Policy
- Estate Inspections
- Estate Regeneration Investment Programme

- Acquisition, Disposal and Land Use Strategy Update
- Asset Disposal Policy Update
- Discretionary Housing Payments Update
- Tenancy Agreement Update
- Wider Estate Inspection Review
- Rent Increase Update
- Building Compliance 6 monthly update (3 of 6 Key Areas)
- Targets Setting 2025/26
- Report by Councillor Donald Cllr Nannestad, Portfolio Holder for Quality Housing

The Committee also effectively scrutinised Housing performance (including Anti-Social Behaviour) and finance on a quarterly basis and received regular updates on the progress of the Lincoln Tenants Panel.

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