



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2020

## **COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL**

**4<sup>th</sup> June, 2020**

### **Present:**

Councillor Silvester (in the Chair)

Councillors Beasant, Nichol, Pettigrew, Sheridan, K Swinburn, Watson and Woodward.

### **Officers in attendance:**

- Rob Walsh (Chief Executive)
- Carolina Borgstrom (Head of Operations)
- Anne Campbell (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)
- Bev Compton (Director of Adult Services)
- Helen Isaacs (Director for Communities)
- Simon Jones (Chief Legal and Monitoring Officer)
- Clive Tritton (Interim Director of Economy and Growth)
- Sharon Wroot (Director of Resources and Governance and Section 151 Officer)

### **Also in attendance:**

- Councillor Philip Jackson (Leader of the Council)
- Councillor Ron Shepherd (Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities)
- Councillor Stewart Swinburn (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport)
- Councillor Rudd (East Marsh Ward Councillor)

### **SPC.1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence from this meeting.

### **SPC.2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received in respect of any item on the agenda for this meeting.

## **SPC.3 COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

The panel received a report from the Chief Executive providing an update on the council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In introduction, the Leader of the Council, reflected on the past 10 weeks which had been a challenge locally and nationally. He gave thanks to all officers and employees of the council for the way they had handled themselves and the council's business during the crisis. They had adapted to very different ways of working and in some cases doing very different jobs as well. It had been a huge team effort from everybody. He also took an opportunity to thank elected members across the council. Councillors had been out in all wards; volunteering, coordinating work and helping people in the communities they served. Compared to other local authorities, this council had done well in maintaining front line services. Grounds maintenance and waste collection had continued throughout the crisis; which was a huge credit to employees.

The local authority had taken on a number of new responsibilities from central Government, including the setting up and running of shielding hubs. These hubs ensured food and medicines reached the most vulnerable people during the lock-down. Also, central Government delegated the administration of monies for financial hardship and business support to local authorities. Fast, efficient and effective financial support was delivered to those in need in North East Lincolnshire (NEL) to help them through the pandemic. Most schools remained open for vulnerable children and the children of key workers. Measures were also put in place to ensure there were no homeless persons on the streets of NEL during the crisis. There had been a massive amount of engagement with the voluntary sector to be able to coordinate activity across the borough with the council's public health role having the highest profile due to the nature of the emergency. Emergency decision making measures were also put in place to enable a more streamlined and responsive decision making process. The Leader, with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources, in consultation with the Chair of the panel, had played the principal roles in making urgent decisions, and these were detailed in a report for consideration by the panel later this afternoon. It was inevitable that the changes and additions to responsibilities had led to pressures on the council's finances. These were also detailed within the report now submitted. Some additional funds had been allocated to the authority from central government, but it was not anywhere near enough to cover the additional costs and loss of income we had incurred during the pandemic. And this would be the same for all local councils up and down the country. Now we begin moving into the recovery mode, which means trying to get the local economy moving again, albeit safely. It was anticipated that local authorities would play a leading role in the track, trace and isolation regime now being put in place. In addition, the authority was required to have an outbreak control plan in place should there be an elevated local incidence of the virus.

The Chair, on behalf of the panel, echoed the recognition of the exemplary work and efforts of employees, the voluntary sector and councillors but especially the NHS. He invited the Chief Executive to speak to the report.

Mr Walsh would focus on the council's response to the crisis and touch on its approach to recovery; however, this would be the subject of a more detailed report to Cabinet which would be published next week. The council's initial response related to three areas of focus; making sure we were coordinating properly with the Humber local resilience forum (it was the forum's overall responsibility for the management of an emergency on a sub-regional basis); making sure our emergency decision making processes were in place, fit for purpose and transparent; and mobilising home working and safe working practises on the front line. The chief executive drew members attention to key elements of the report now submitted. He made special mention of the cross-sector partnership working which had been exceptional. Relationships developed over the last few years came to the fore over the last ten weeks. He reflected on the shielding initiative and the flexibility of local voluntary and community groups which had resulted in rapid mobilisation of support. Without this support and collaboration shielding would not have been as effective. He also mentioned the vulnerability hub supporting children and families across the borough. Staff were engaging with around 4000 households supporting children and families and receiving good feedback. Business grants were mentioned by the Leader, and the Chief Executive added his appreciation of the excellent work across council services in delivering this essential support. Lobbying continues by the Local Government Association and others to secure necessary funds to cover the costs as the financial challenge faced by the authority was significant. The paramount consideration was how to manage safe economic recovery and delivery of public services in NEL alongside the public health risk. Finally, he paid tribute to the council's workforce who have carried out their roles under immense pressure and strain over the past ten to twelve weeks and it's not over yet. The well-being message for our workforce was of huge importance as the capacity to deliver our services over the coming months would be just as challenging. Councillors' support and patience during these difficult times were much appreciated, as was their work in their wards in keeping in touch with our vulnerable people. We had a lot to be proud of. Members questions were invited.

Members raised the following issues:

Regarding shielding lists, Ms Isaacs advised that the shielding lists were owned by the NHS. At the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak the list held around 3200 names, this had risen throughout the crisis and now stood at approximately 6500 names. The national shielding list provided food parcels to vulnerable persons who could not, or should not, get out to get food. For other vulnerable people, not on that list but otherwise in need of emergency support, the Council was asked to provide food

parcels. At the peak this amounted to 350 people each week. This number had reduced significantly as other support and arrangements had been put in place to help people and was currently around 20-30 people each week. The authority had continued to work with vulnerable people, to signpost them to sources of help, further support and to keep in touch with people who would otherwise not have contact. At the start of the pandemic, a letter drop to all addresses in the borough reinforced the Government's advice, council response and key contacts in the borough. Posters were also placed in neighbourhoods. The council continued ongoing engagement. Pressed further, Ms Isaacs explained that the original shielding list was compiled by the NHS from medical records, the information was then sent to General Practitioners for verification. This process continued and the list was subject to ongoing review and change. The Government was now looking to contact everyone currently on the list with a view to stopping the shielding initiative.

Members took an opportunity to thank council staff that had responded so readily and compassionately to undertake these additional and extraordinary responsibilities ensuring the health and safety of local residents.

In response to questions about financial implications, Ms Wroot acknowledged that the impact of COVID-19 across the country and locally had resulted in a financial challenge that was both significant and wide reaching. In response to and in recognition of that, alongside the business support and council tax hardship funding, the council had received two packages of funding totalling £9.6m. The first tranche was for social care cost for adults and children. The second tranche was for relevant public health responses and in recognition that there were other services, within the remit of local authorities, including emergency measures that would be required to be put in place. In addition, there were risks to business rates and council tax collection. The financial modelling carried out by the council to gauge the financial impact, including assumptions around income indicates that the money so far received from Government was not enough to cover all related costs. As a result, the leadership team, in consultation with Cabinet, was revisiting the 2020/21 medium term financial plan. The plan was approved by Council in February but there was a need to understand the short, medium and long term impacts of responding to and recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. Ms Wroot was unable to give members absolute figures but she was able to advise members that there was significant risk and a need to look at a range of measures to mitigate the impact. She reminded the panel that the tax base (business rates plus council tax) made up 80% of the council's income. Whilst the capital programme benefitted from a number of supporting funding grants there was still some risk associated with a slow down in the local economy. Cabinet would consider a report next week describing a significant review of the council's financial position. The council would continue to work with Central Government and regional bodies to ensure that its voice was being heard and the local situation was clear and understood. Members

commented that the impact would be felt across the authority's 15 wards and all members should be involved in seeking solutions during this difficult time.

Regarding ongoing arrangements for shielding and rough sleepers. Ms Isaacs advised that the authority was awaiting Government advice on the next phase for the shielding group. Irrespective of that advice, the Council would continue to inform, advise, support, advocate and signpost any vulnerable people who contact us during the crisis. Throughout the network of organisations that the council was working with, she believed we had a good idea of where and who the vulnerable persons in the borough were. As the area moved from being totally locked down to a partial lock-down, one of the prime roles for local government would be to reinforce the public health messages around social distancing and limiting contacts especially for vulnerable persons; making sure our messages were very clear and understood by the communities. Whilst the infrastructure around this may change it was paramount that people knew where they could go to if they needed help. Plans continued to evolve and develop in response to Government guidance and local situations and these plans would continue to be brought before elected members, further ensuring a consistent message to local people.

Regarding short term and long term homelessness, Mr Tritton advised that, working with public health colleagues, the area had been successful in finding accommodation for all homeless persons. The next phase of this, by the 14<sup>th</sup> of June, was for the authority to look to longer term plans

Regarding care homes, Mr Walsh brought the panel up to date on joint work by the Clinical Commissioning Group and Local Authority to support the most vulnerable in our borough in care homes. This included a submission to Government outlining the support given so far and future plans to support providers. This was an area of considerable focus as the area moved towards recovery.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

## **SPC.4 COVID-19: EMERGENCY GOVERNANCE AND DECISIONS**

The panel received a report from the Monitoring Officer updating the panel as to the emergency governance framework put in place and the range of emergency decisions taken within that framework to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.

Mr Jones highlighted the emergency measures put in place to allow urgent decisions to be made during the crisis. Emergency planning was within the terms of reference of this panel. Hence, all emergency decision would be fed into this panel at the earliest opportunity for review, scrutiny and members' inquiry. Mr Jones described the process for and publication of special urgency decisions. For the short term he believed that the emergency measures should remain in place. However, he could see a time; when the council returned to a more

'business as usual' approach with more regular meetings, when the emergency framework would diminish.

The panel had no questions on the emergency decisions made, as listed within appendix 2 of the report now submitted.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

## **SPC.5 ENFORCEMENT SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP**

The panel considered a report from the Chair of this panel presenting the findings and recommendations of the panel's Enforcement Scrutiny Working Group prior to referral to Cabinet.

In introducing the report, the Chair gave thanks to all officers who had contributed to the work of the review. Officers of the Council and its partners had been most welcoming, helpful, candid and understanding of the scrutiny working group and its investigations. The working group itself had comprised most of the members of the panel and had spent many hours in scrutiny of the council's street enforcement services. The nine recommendations to Cabinet from the working group included a rationale and director's response. It was the Chair's approach to take each recommendation in turn and invite questions from the panel.

Regarding recommendation one; there were no questions.

Regarding recommendation two, Ms Borgstrom responded to a member's question emphasising that the recommendation referred to how services would work together rather than the application of legislation. She committed to report back to the member on the specifics of the issue he raised.

Regarding recommendation three, there were no questions from the panel.

Regarding recommendation four, there were no questions from the panel.

Regarding recommendation five, there were no questions from the panel.

Regarding recommendation six, there were no questions from the panel.

Regarding recommendation seven, the Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities stressed that the use of more mobile enforcement was critical. Being more mobile would ensure that all areas of the borough were covered. Ms Borgstrom did not have a specific timeframe for this area of work, it being linked to two other recommendations; one around improved software and sharing intelligence, and another relating to the development of CCTV network. The Leader of the Council further advised that Government was considering giving local authorities the powers to start enforcing minor traffic offences. Ms Borgstrom confirmed

that the review of CCTV cameras would include looking at moving traffic contraventions that may be given to local authorities.

Regarding recommendation eight, there were no questions from the panel.

Regarding recommendation nine. In response to a question from a member, Ms Borgstrom committed to regularly reporting back to panel at mutually agreed frequency. Ms Campbell would ensure this was discussed as part of the panel's future consideration around its work programme 2020/21.

In response to questions regarding possible elected member access to enforcement case management software, Ms Borgstrom responded that further advice would need to be sought on sharing information in this way. She committed to advise members on this point.

The working group's recommendations were proposed by Councillor Silvester, seconded by Councillor Woodward and carried unanimously.

#### RECOMMENDED TO CABINET

1. That commercial regulatory enforcement teams, currently situated at Estuary House and building control (planning condition enforcement) currently located at New Oxford House should remain separate and grouped by the legislation they enforce.
2. That future integration/generic working of street scene based enforcement activities be considered. Future integration of environmental crime and housing enforcement be explored.
3. That administration and back office support be developed in line with the amount of enforcement activity.
4. That a single point of access for reporting to enforcement teams be developed, combined with a triage approach and referral to appropriate teams. Longer term there should be a move to improved software allowing more joined up working between disciplines.
5. That elected member training be developed relating to the reporting of complaints, referrals and requests for service. This to be implemented following the findings of the customer portal review,
6. That during the municipal year 2020/21 the Communities Scrutiny Panel receive a report on the work of the NELC Officers' enforcement working group.
7. That investment in moving vehicle number plate recognition (NPR) technology and utilising road rule enforcement cameras to increase the positive impact of civil enforcement around highways and parking enforcement should be actively explored.

8. That future procurement of enforcement technology hardware and software, CCTV systems / rapid deployment cameras /. Number plate recognition software / IT systems / case management system / data sharing networks etc. should allow fluency between teams, partners and systems.
9. That, subject to Cabinet approval of a proposed CCTV strategy, the CCTV Strategic Group to provide an annual report (or more frequent if required) to the Communities Scrutiny Panel to inform of progress and performance around the effectiveness and outcomes of the CCTV Strategy and multi-agency working.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 3.02 p.m.