



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on 18th March 2021

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL

26th November 2020 at 2:00pm

Present:

Councillor Silvester (in the Chair)

Councillors Beasant, Nichols, Pettigrew, Goodwin (substitute for Sheridan), K Swinburn, Watson and Parkinson (substitute for Woodward)

Officers in attendance:

- Helen Isaacs (Director for Communities)
- Simon Jones (Chief Legal and Monitoring Officer)
- Guy Lonsdale (Deputy Section 151 Officer)
- Carolina Borgstrom (Assistant Director Operations)
- Spencer Hunt (Assistant Director of Safer NEL)
- Zoe Campbell (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)
- Levi Andersonjordan (Environmental Services Graduate)
- Chris Dunn (Deputy Head of Operations – Environment)
- Colin Lomas (Community Service Manager)
- Paul Caswell (Young and Safe Specialist Lead)

Also in attendance:

- Councillor Ron Shepherd (Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities)
- Councillor Stewart Swinburn (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport)

SPC.33 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from this meeting were received from Councillors Sheridan and Woodward.

SPC.34 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

SPC.35 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the special meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Panel held on 1st October 2020 be agreed as a correct record.

SPC.36 QUESTION TIME

There were no questions from members of the public for this meeting.

SPC.37 FORWARD PLAN

The panel received the published forward plan and members were invited to identify any items for examination by this panel via the pre-decision call-in procedure.

RESOLVED – That the forward plan be noted.

SPC.38 TRACKING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF SCRUTINY

The panel received a report from the Director for Communities tracking the recommendations of the Communities Scrutiny Panel.

RESOLVED – That the tracking report update be noted.

SPC.39 QUARTER 2 FINANCE MONITORING 2020/21

The panel received a report from the Director of Resources and Governance which provided key information and analysis of the Council's position and performance at the end of quarter two of the 2020/21 financial year.

Mr Lonsdale explained that it had been a challenging year and the council was reporting a £0.7m overspend. He confirmed that the financial forecasting was difficult in the current circumstances but the council was receiving additional funding from government at various points throughout the year.

One of the major impacts in quarter two was the additional £0.5m in income received through the governments fees and charges compensation scheme. He confirmed a further allocation would be reported in quarter three. The council were continuing with the capital programme and where there was slippage, this was mainly due to Covid implications.

Mr Lonsdale referred to the budget scrutiny rounds in December and for members to note that there had been a slowdown in the local economy that had an impact on the local taxation and collection through the collection fund. He explained that the council was likely to see delays in

some of the transformation programmes detailed in last year's budget. The comprehensive spending review was critical with a one-year deal that gave additional Covid funding for social care and the opportunities for the adult social precept and various infrastructure investment funds arounds roads.

Members were concerned about future government funding and the impact this would have on the local economy in future years and queried if the government had given a commitment to future years funding to local councils? Mr Lonsdale confirmed other than what was included in the one-year deal from the comprehensive spending review, government hadn't given any long term commitments. He confirmed that over 80% of the council's income was from local taxation and business rates and the uncertainty was around the growth in the economy and the survival of some businesses due to Covid-19. The small business relief rate grant and extra support for the retail, hospitality and the leisure industry had helped to mitigate risk for the council in terms of collection of these rates. Mr Lonsdale highlighted the long-term risk was the council not falling into a deficit position in terms of the collection in business rates. The council tax hardship fund and the furlough schemes supported people financially and enabled them to continue, in most cases, to pay their council tax. The risk for the council was that 50% of the income came from council tax payments and this had to be taken into account from a budgeting perspective.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

SPC.40 COVID-19: EMERGENCY DECISIONS

The panel received a report from the Chief Legal and Monitoring Officer on the emergency decisions taken for the Duchess Street test centre and funds from the community response to Local Taxation and Benefits, as required under the emergency framework.

RESOLVED – That the decisions taken within the emergency framework be noted.

SPC.41 WASTE AND RECYCLING STRATEGY

The panel received a presentation providing an update on the waste and recycling strategy that was approved by Cabinet in March 2020. This included changes to the kerbside collection and the latest financial position; performance against our strategic objectives; and future projects and initiatives.

Members queried if there was an increase in contamination with the new mixed recycling. Mr Dunn confirmed that there was very little contamination, however, officers were monitoring the bin collection rounds to see which areas of the borough needed to be targeted with more focused education on squashing plastic bottles and flattening cardboard to make more room in the bins, which members welcomed.

The income from recycling had dropped and members queried why that was. Mr Dunn explained that the income had reduced significantly, especially during lockdown. He confirmed that the cost saving element was less money spent on vehicles and staff. He added that there being less vehicles on the collection rounds contributed to the carbon footprint.

Members queried why there was a reduction in the size of the general waste bins. Mr Dunn explained that if recycling was promoted there would be less to go in the waste bins and therefore the 18L bins were sufficient.

Staff morale was a concern to members with all the new changes in place. Mr Dunn confirmed that staff were updated throughout the lead up to the new recycling collection and staff welcomed the changes because there was less bending down. He highlighted that the feedback from the street cleansing team was positive because they had noticed a reduction in litter on the streets that used to come from the recycling boxes.

Members referred to a previous presentation at a panel meeting where there was a focus on where houses with no garden would store their recycling bins and queried when this scheme would be rolled out. Mr Dunn clarified there were approximately 300 properties that were unable to have bins. A letter had been sent to each household to confirm they could have a box instead of a bin if they wished. He confirmed that officers were looking at alternative methods, for example, communal bins and they would continue to work on different options.

The panel asked at a previous meeting about the clearance of waste left in alleyways. Ms Borgstrom explained that alleyways were not the responsibility of the council but the community impact was factored into the waste and recycling strategy. She confirmed there were three options with unadopted alleyways; option 1, do nothing, option 2 was to clear blocked alleyways regardless of ownership and option 3 was to promote and support voluntary alleyway clearance by residents or community groups. Officers felt that option three was most cost effective, which panel members supported.

Members queried if the council could charge the residents who backed onto the alleyways for the cost of the clearance which they felt might encourage joint responsibility and may be self-policing. Ms Borgstrom explained it was difficult to chase up the civil debt and would be unfair on the residents who were not responsible for the waste being left in the alleyways.

RESOLVED – That the presentation be noted.

SPC.42 ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

The panel considered a report that gave an overview of the North East Lincolnshire anti-social behaviour (ASB) strategy ahead of its submission to Cabinet.

Members queried the 44% reduction in anti-social behaviour statistics over the last five years. They asked where North East Lincolnshire sat within its comparator group and whether those areas had seen a similar reduction. Mr Lomas explained that he would come back to the panel with this information because it came from the police systems. Mr Lomas confirmed that there was a caveat that the crime recording processes had changed and certain offences were previously recorded as ASB were now recorded as public disorder offences or violent crime offences and as a result these two categories had increased. The change in crime recording has been consistent for the last two years so the reductions seen during 2018/19 of 8.9% and 11.9% in 2019/20 were accurate with a genuine reduction in recorded ASB. Part of the reduction was due to the approach taken to address youth ASB to divert young people away from crime. He predicted that the local communities would see a substantial improvement over the next ten years due to the practices that had been implemented.

Several warning letters had been issued by the ASB team and members were intrigued to understand how many interventions were made before warning letters were issued. Mr Lomas explained that every incident was different, and officers took a stepped approach to each case and often a warning was sufficient. If the warning was ignored it would be escalated; where adults were concerned an official community protection warning may be issued or a young person made subject to an acceptable behaviour contract. Out of 18 community protection warnings issued recently, 4 went to a community protection notice. Those individuals were fined, those fines were paid, and no further action was needed. He felt the right processes and approach were now in place.

Councillor Shepherd reassured the panel that anti-social behaviour was being dealt with and thanked the team for their hard work.

RESOLVED –

1. That the report be noted.
2. That this panel receive comparator ASB figures with other local authorities.

SPC.43 COVID-19 RECOVERY PLAN

The panel received a briefing paper on the Covid-19 recovery plan. Ms Isaacs explained that infection rates had started to come down. However, the legacy of the increase before we went into lockdown was still being experienced amongst the workforce and in particular in hospitals, schools and care homes.

Ms Isaacs confirmed the council had received notification that North East Lincolnshire would go into tier three at the end of the second national lockdown and this would impact particularly hard on local businesses. She confirmed the leadership team were working on communications to go out to residents and businesses, so they were aware of what help was available to them and to support the health sector in challenging times. The focus going forward was around the track and trace system and planning for the mass vaccination programme.

Members felt that they could be monitoring the plan for many years to come because of the legacy and the potential long term health and financial implications. Ms Isaacs said it had been a challenge to respond to the ever-changing circumstances and the uncertainty now around the length of time the roll out of the vaccination programme would take including the impact it would have on the infection rates. The impact on schools and examinations in the summer and the economic impact on businesses were currently being addressed. She reassured the panel that the emphasis was around public messages about infection control and keeping residents safe and, by doing that, limit the impact on the local health services.

RESOLVED – That the briefing paper be noted.

SPC.44 TRANSITION (EU EXIT)

The panel considered a report that went to Cabinet on the 4th November 2020 on preparedness for the end of the transition period.

Ms Isaacs explained the new multi-agency plans for illegal immigration were in place for the EU exit at the end of December 2020.

She highlighted there was a focus on communications with local businesses around the changes they would need to have place when exporting goods and with residents around the EU settlement scheme that ran until summer 2021. They would keep promoting the scheme to ensure that residents from EU countries who wished to remain living and working in the UK could do so.

There were implications around the green recovery for transition and there was an environment bill going through parliament that could mean additional burdens placed on the council in terms of the enforcement/ application of those new legislative requirements.

Ms Isaacs explained that the ports were a focus because of the massive volumes of trade. A grant was received from DEFRA to fund the additional resources to support the import process and put new systems in place. Ms Isaacs confirmed that as much work had been done as possible in readiness for the changes coming into place in January 2020 including support to ABP for a new border control post to open in summer 2021.

Ms Isaacs explained to the panel about the congestion and traffic management plans in place across the Humber. Officers were confident it would work effectively from January 2021 to ensure the flow of traffic going in and out of the ports with the additional checks in place not significantly impacting the road network.

Ms Borgstrom explained there would be a change to inspecting goods coming in and going out through the port. She confirmed that the additional resources that were being put in place would work with businesses to make the new burden as straight forward as possible, making sure computer systems were in place so local business were able to trade from day one.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

SPC.45 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER

There were no questions for the portfolio holder at this meeting.

SPC.46 CALLING IN OF DECISIONS

There were no formal requests from members of this panel to call in decisions of recent Cabinet and portfolio holder meetings.

SPC.47 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED – That the press and public be requested to leave on the grounds that discussion of the following business was likely to disclose exempt information within paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

SPC.48 TRANSITION (EU EXIT)

The panel received the appendix to the report from the Leader of the Council referred to at SPC.44.

RESOLVED – That the appendix be noted.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 3.58 p.m.