



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

ECONOMY SCRUTINY PANEL

12th January 2021

Present:

Councillor Furneaux (in the Chair)
Councillors Barfield, Cairns, Callison, Harness, Hasthorpe, Sheridan and Wilson

Officers in attendance:

- Marcus Asquith (Partnership Director - Engie)
- Dave Baker (Contract Business Manager - Engie)
- Anne Campbell (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)
- Pauline Cooke (Head of Development Management Team - Engie)
- Wendy Fisher (Estates and Business Development Manager, Assets)
- Jack Fox (Corporate Estates Manager)
- Luke Greaves (Head of Highways and Transport – Engie)
- Simon Jones (Assistant Director Law, Governance and Assets [Monitoring Officer])
- Phil McConnell (Deputy Partnership Director – Engie)
- Mark Nearney (Assistant Director Housing, Highways and Planning)
- Anthony Snell (Senior Transport Officer - Engie)
- Paul Thorpe (Head of Operations – Engie)
- Dave Tipple (Relationship Manager)
- Clive Tritton (Strategic Regeneration Advisor)
- Sharon Wroot (Executive Director, Environment, Economy & Resources [Section 151 Officer])

Also in attendance:

- Councillor Jackson (Leader of the Council)
- Councillor Beasant
- Councillor Hyldon-King
- Councillor Patrick
- Councillor Rudd
- Jay Beatty (petitioner)

SPE.59 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies from members of the panel for absence from this meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor S Swinburn, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport.

SPE.60 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest from members in respect of any items on the agenda for this meeting.

SPE.61 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meetings of Economy Scrutiny Panel held on 13th October, 3rd November and 1st December 2020 be agreed as a correct record.

SPE.62 QUESTION TIME

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

SPE.63 FORWARD PLAN

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

RESOLVED – That the forward plan be noted.

SPE.64 TRACKING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF SCRUTINY

The panel received a report from the Statutory Scrutiny Officer (Assistant Chief Executive) tracking the recommendations of the Economy Scrutiny Panel.

In response to a member's question regarding SPE.8, local plan, and specifically matters relating to a designated stopover site for Gypsy and Travellers, the Chair reassured the panel it would be receiving an update as soon as any further progress or information became available. Ms Fisher advised that the consultant's report was expected by 15th January, 2021. This report would update the needs assessment referred to in the local plan. An update would be presented to the panel at its meeting to be held on 9th March 2021.

RESOLVED – That items referenced SPE.32, SPE.34 and SPE.35 be removed from tracking.

SPE.65 EMERGENCY ACTIVE TRAVEL FUND GRANT

The panel received a report from the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport seeking formal Cabinet approval to accept a sum of £319,200 of grant funding from the Department for Transport to deliver active travel infrastructure projects during 2020/21 and 2021/22. The panel noted this report would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting to be held 13th January, 2021 and was submitted to the panel for pre-decision consideration and comment.

Mr Nearney stressed to the panel that accepting and delivering this grant was aimed at promoting physical activity, reducing carbon emissions, supporting accessibility and enabling safe access to employment, education and other sites across the borough. It was vital that any proposal was strengthened by extensive local engagement with key stakeholders, residents and user groups. Mr Snell went on to highlight the key elements of the proposal.

Members raised the following issues:

In response to a member's question regarding the illumination or lighting of cycleways, Mr Snell referred back to his presentation and the image of upright reflective bollards. These were a preferred method and would hopefully be used intermittently throughout the scheme. Mr Greaves added that all potential schemes and designs would be subject to an independent road safety audit which would take into account all matters of road safety including those of adequate illumination or lighting.

Regarding 90% grant award, Mr Greaves advised that the authority had learned a lot from the tranche one award and this demonstrated that the Department for Transport (DfT) recognised the council's ambitions with the 90% grant awarded. Some local authorities had not taken account of DfT feedback or criteria; and received 50% grant or less.

In response to member's questions about earmarked funding for Covid-19 measures and what would that entail, Mr Nearney advised that the authority, in collaboration with the Community Safety Partnership, was reviewing methods of segregation, encouraging social distancing and appropriate barriers. This task group would be reporting back in due course and this would be referred to scrutiny. Mr Greaves added that the temporary concrete barriers, installed as a result of tranche one funding, were never intended to be permanent. This tranche two funding was specifically for permanent measures.

A member expressed concern about the impact of the scheme on adjoining roads and streets. In Park Ward, for example, these streets were often narrow, full of parked cars and were used by fast moving motor vehicles. Assuming the scheme was successful in encouraging more cyclists, the authority could be causing dangerous situations in access areas. He wanted to be assured these matters would be taken into account. Mr Greaves thanked the member for this local knowledge

and assured the panel that these issues would be considered through the options appraisal and road safety audit. The Local Transport Plan would also be influenced and take account of such issues.

There was a query about the width of the highway on Weelsby Road but Mr Greaves was confident that the road was wide enough at the appropriate cross sections. Weelsby Road was not a constant width all the way along so there would be different design options considered to take account of road width, crossing points and on-street parking.

A member asked whether debris trapped by the bolt-on kerbs would result in costly on-going maintenance. Similarly, the raised reflective bollards looked as though they may be easily damaged, requiring regular repair or replacement. Mr Greaves was able to reassure the panel that improvements in design and materials over the years had made these options much more sustainable. He committed to extensive research and looking at case studies from other transport authorities with the aim to identify the most effective and sustainable methods.

In response to questions and referring to hazards caused by cars parked across the cycle lane on Great Coates Road, Mr Greaves assured the panel that these issues would be addressed through options appraisal and design. Physical measures in the design would prevent this and negate any demand for enforcement.

A member expressed disappointment that the principles in design, specifically the separation of cyclists from other users, had not been applied in the Moody Lane scheme, although similar issues had been highlighted at the appropriate time.

A member commented on the different types of cyclists that used this area and enquired whether officers were confident that the scheme would accommodate all cyclists, keep them safe and allow overtaking on the cycle lane. Mr Greaves acknowledged that confident and competent cyclists, travelling at speed, would probably not need this facility as they preferred to stay on the road, in the flow of traffic. All elements would be considered when designs were being appraised to make sure that the road width remaining would not cause a hazard to any cyclists using the highway. He added that other cyclists would enjoy and benefit from the new cycle way.

Members queried whether the active travel grant took into account badly needed repairs to the edges (gutters) and surfaces of the carriageway, as these were often a pitfall for cyclists. Mr Greaves explained that this was an important element of the road safety audit. He advised that Mr Snell, who was also a keen cyclist, would be out walking the route. He assured the panel that, between this scheme and the local transport plan, any works which needed to be undertaken to make the route safe would be done.

A member expressed concern about the end point of the scheme where it joined Bargate and Laceby Road and whether the scheme could be extended to take account of this busy and potentially hazardous route for cyclists. Mr Greaves referred back to the 'cycle super highway' and the council's strategy. He felt that the authority was in a strong position to bid for future additional funds to be able to keep improving the cycling infrastructure. Mr Greaves added that the identified schemes were in the authority's local transport plan, which would be presented to the panel at its March meeting, ahead of Cabinet consideration in the usual way. It was noted that all councillors were due to be consulted on the draft local transport plan.

A member commented that they hoped the scheme would take cyclists off the pavements or, at the very least, segregate pedestrians from cyclists. This was a very busy stretch of highway and walkway from Cleethorpes all the way to the college at Nuns' Corner and gave access to various schools. From personal experience, pedestrians could be at great risk from cyclists on the path. Pedestrians and cyclists both needed to be kept safe.

A member asked that consideration be given to what would happen when utility companies or services accessed the highway. Cyclists must not be put in harm's way negotiating around roadworks, which often seemed to be the case. Mr Greaves advised that utility companies were statutory consultees on any highway schemes and that whole life costs for the scheme would be part of the initial cost benefit consideration.

There was call for the impact of the scheme to be closely monitored to evaluate its impact. This would help the authority to replicate its success or avoid any problems in future schemes.

The panel welcomed and supported the scheme and proposals. Mr Greaves looked forward to presenting the final layout and design to the panel at a future meeting.

RESOLVED – That the report and panel's comments be noted.

SPE.66

REGENERATION PARTNERSHIP PERFORMANCE REPORT

The panel received a report from Engie containing a summary of performance against key performance indicators for the period June to September 2020.

Members raised the following issues:

In response to a member's question regarding improving the performance on 'empty homes returned to use following intervention'. Ms Cooke advised the KPI target had been changed due to a loss in funding for this service. Current intervention was limited to liaising with property owners and communication, usually about developers, grants and

schemes available to support them. Mr Nearney confirmed that the panel would receive a detailed update on delivery of the housing action plan at its scheduled meeting in March. He added that this was very much an area of collaboration, the service worked very closely with colleagues in council tax, the home improvement team, the homelessness team and partners in the voluntary sector including the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and Women's Aid. This was because these organisations were much better placed to secure funding, procure, renovate and let to suitable tenants. The authority also worked hard to stop properties from becoming empty. He acknowledged that the revised target of 40 homes was an arbitrary figure, the service was committed to turn around as many properties as it possibly could irrespective of the target. He added that 32 homes had been returned to use this year so far. Members were a little disappointed at the reduced numbers this year, empty homes were a blight on neighbourhoods especially in the more disadvantaged wards in the borough. However, it was hoped that the trend would improve with the initiatives alluded to by Mr Nearney and the panel looked forward to the update in March 2021.

The Chair commented that he was pleased to see a considerable number of improved performance indicators within the report. However, in relation to the maintenance of highways and footways, Mr Greaves advised the indicators referred to the condition of the highway network rather than the maintenance regime. He was able to confirm that despite the pandemic there was 100% performance on inspections and defects. Mr Greaves speculated that the downward trend in condition could be due to a funding deficit; the DfT funding had been static for some five years. Annual inflation rises had meant that the fund effectively reduced year on year.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

SPE.67 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER

There were no members' questions to the Portfolio Holder.

SPE.68 PETITION – KENT STREET SKATEPARK

The panel received a petition (2073 signatures) calling for Cabinet to reverse its decision to dispose of Kent Street Skate Park. This would normally be classed as a petition for debate to be considered by full Council but, with the agreement of the lead petitioner and linked to the call-in received at SPE.69, it was referred to this panel meeting. The Chair called upon the lead petitioner Jake Beatty to speak in support of the petition which called for:

Mr Beatty felt that North East Lincolnshire Council had ignored the action sports community in Grimsby for years. He had grown up skateboarding in this area and all he had seen was more and more facilities taken away. The council had stopped taking responsibility for the skatepark

some years ago, and it hadn't had lights for over five years but the council claimed to be spending £3000 a year maintaining the site. Of the three skateparks in all of Grimsby and Cleethorpes, two were privately owned and the third, Kent Street, was the last remaining free to use skatepark for the whole area and was now set to be demolished.. In a year like 2020 full of so many negatives the one beaming light he had witnessed was the amount of youths picking up a skateboard and spending more time exercising. He felt that there wasn't a time when these facilities were more desperately needed than now.

Mr Beatty explained that there were sponsored skateboarders and BMX-riders representing North East Lincolnshire at national and international levels. This, together with many private events, bike trails and projects at the site demonstrated both the achievements and potential for the area and individuals involved. He acknowledged that the decision had given the group a platform to campaign for a well made, fully equipped, free to use skatepark that was well maintained and fully lit to enable evening use. This was something the area has needed for years. The area has fallen behind and decision makers appear to lack understanding of the sport's importance. Skateboarding and BMX sports are some of the fastest growing sports in the country. New facilities had recently been provided in Boston and Doncaster, while there were also well used skateparks in Immingham and Hull. Mr Beatty commented on the dangers for users of the site as a result of the floodlights no longer working, with incidents of people being threatened and attacked. He believed that crime and anti-social behaviour among young people was an issue in the town due to a lack of opportunities and facilities. He further noted that young people did not want to stay in the area as there was nothing for them to do and nothing to stay for. Mr Beatty stressed that there should not be one single day when the town would have to be without a free to use skatepark, especially at a time when mental health and being active was at the forefront of everyone's mind. He felt that the decision to close the skatepark also went against the national Government's priorities and it was unnecessary, avoidable and unjust. Closing, Mr Beatty stressed that users of the skatepark were not pointing fingers but were raising their hands to show you what you already had in front of you; a large and growing community of young people who have been lucky enough to have a productive and positive outlet for expressing who they were.

The panel commended Mr Beatty for his eloquent, informative and passionate presentation and it was noted that the matter would be debated as part of the next item.

RESOLVED – That the petition be received.

SPE.69 CALL-IN – DISPOSAL OF PROPERTY AT LESS THAN BEST CONSIDERATION – LEASE DISPOSAL OF KENT STREET MULTI-USE GAMES AREA (MUGA)

The panel considered a formal request from Councillors Rudd and Beasant to call-in the decision of Cabinet taken at its meeting on 9th December, 2020 on the above.

The Chair invited Councillor Rudd to address the panel and outline her reasons for the call-in. Councillor Rudd referred to impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children and young people and confusion they had experienced through not being able to socialise with their friends and take part in everyday activities that they previously took for granted as part of their lives. She noted that mental health issues amongst the young had increased and it was vital that they were kept motivated. This would not be achieved by taking away their areas and facilities. She commented that mental health did not have a postcode and provision should be made for all young people and children.

Councillor Beasant was invited to address the panel and he thanked Mr Beatty for his earlier speech, which he commended as one of the best he had heard. Councillor Beasant acknowledged that when he first heard about Corinthians Football Club taking over the MUGA, he had welcomed it. However, it was not made clear in the Forward Plan that this would involve the removal or the demolition of this skatepark and ward councillors were not made aware until the week before the Cabinet meeting. He was alarmed that we were going to take something away from young people at this moment in time. While skateboarding was seen as a minority sport, particularly in relation to football, it was an Olympic sport and, as such, we were potentially letting down future Olympians. He felt that the facility needed to remain free for those youngsters in an area that was extremely deprived. The facility had been neglected by the council but was still very well used., Councillor Beasant referred to the new skatepark that had recently opened in Boston, at a cost of £234,000, and felt that the council should be setting an example and potentially looking for one of these facilities in our area. Retaining the facility in the East Marsh was crucial but he also felt that the council should be working with the skateboarding community across the whole of the borough to come up with ideas on other areas where skateparks could be placed.

Councillor Jackson thanked the ward councillors for bringing this back to the scrutiny panel and Mr Beatty for his earlier presentation. This was something that the Leader had recently inherited when taking on the portfolio and he welcomed the additional insight gained from the ward councillors and Mr Beatty on behalf of the community. The Leader acknowledged that the skatepark and the MUGA were both in poor condition and the authority had the Corinthians' Community Interest Company (CIC) who wanted to invest a significant amount of money, time and effort into a new facility for sports in the East Marsh for all age groups including children and young people. It would be a shame to turn our back on that opportunity by sending that back to Cabinet and by sending out the wrong message to the Corinthians. His preferred option, mindful that it was the panel's decision, would be for Cabinet's decision to be released and for the authority to then work with the skateboarding

community to help them form a community group, with a view to seek alternative grant funding and look to build a much better facility elsewhere in the East Marsh. He believed the borough would then get the best of both worlds. The item could be retained in the panel's tracking report to make sure that progress was monitored.

Members raised the following issues:

A member queried the community asset process and whether, upon receipt of an offer for an asset, current users were surveyed for interest or supported to form a community interest company. At no time were the skatepark users approached for their views or asked if they wanted to come together to take on the asset. It was suggested that, at some stage in the future, this panel looked at how property disposals and asset transfers were handled. Mrs Fisher advised that this particular matter had followed the community asset transfer process and the council's approach had been working very well. However, it had been in place for some time now and it was currently under review. It would seem an ideal opportunity to take the councillor's comments forward as part of the review and this could be brought back to scrutiny for consideration and potential recommendation to Cabinet. The Chair supported the comments and welcomed the review to take this matter forward.

Members expressed concern that should the decision be released as it stood, with no recommendation to Cabinet, the matter of the skatepark may be unnecessarily delayed. Removing the facility that brought the skateboarding and BMX communities together would dissipate the group and make it very difficult for them to then collaborate on future provision. This was especially worrying considering the financial situation local authorities currently found themselves in. Delayed too long, this council could find it was not in a position to facilitate or support a new skatepark. Urgency was needed and it was suggested that Cabinet be recommended to reconsider the matter.

A member questioned why the council would want to lose this provision without any firm plans to replace it, given the likely 'anti-social' implications and negative impact of skateboarders and BMX riders using the streets to practice their sport. It was stressed that any provision, once lost, was extremely hard to replace and especially so in the current economic climate.

Mrs Fisher advised on the background to the proposal and noted that the approach from the Corinthians came through with a view to revitalise the MUGA and to introduce Futsal (a type of five-a-side football) to the East Marsh. She confirmed that the funding success, emergency access and insurance requirements of the Corinthian's project relied upon improved accessibility which could only be gained from the site of the skatepark. Mrs Fisher went on to explain that the Corinthian's funding stream could potentially be lost if accessibility requirements were not satisfied. Ms Fisher acknowledged the difficulties and the points raised by the petitioner. Referring to the remarks of the Leader she confirmed that

working with the group and supporting them to become constituted would allow them to explore grant funding in the same way that other groups were securing resources. There were also other ways the authority could support the group, for example looking at other council owned land to facilitate relocation. The Council had the details of the company that installed the skatepark and could explore how it may be relocated. She stressed the importance of collaboration and was keen to talk to the skateboarding and BMX communities about how a group might become sustainable and take on a management role for that facility. In closing, Mrs Fisher mentioned an approach from a private landowner who might be interested. This was, however, in another part of the borough.

Members were disappointed that this approach and the alternative options, now mooted, had not been explored before the transfer was put to Cabinet. These issues should be addressed before cabinet reconsidered the matter in order that a clear delivery path for a replacement skatepark could be realised.

Members were disappointed that the ward councillors had not been fully engaged or been aware of this matter before it was reported to Cabinet. They were not against community asset transfers and the social value these added to communities but perhaps this one had not been thought through. No alternative options had been considered and the decision potentially marginalised an active sector of the community. There was concern that deferring consideration of the skatepark would ultimately lead to it not being considered.

It was proposed by Councillor Barfield and seconded by Councillor Sheridan that the decision be referred back to Cabinet with a recommendation that there are firm plans moving towards a new skatepark facility before an asset transfer to Corinthians was released.

The Chair supported a referral back to Cabinet with a recommendation that a possible funding proposal for a skatepark be deliberated before any subsequent release of the decision. However, he was concerned that any delay should not jeopardise the funding that the Corinthians had in place.

Ms Wroot acknowledged that members were minded to refer the matter back to Cabinet for further review. She advised that Cabinet could be asked to note scrutiny's preference for a skatepark facility to be retained within the borough, which would allow council officers to explore the options around whether that was financially viable and/or deliverable. There were many aspects to consider, such as availability of land, provision, funding streams and whether a group could be constituted.

The Chair sought guidance from the Monitoring Officer and upon a vote (five for three against) it was:

RESOLVED – That the matter be referred back to Cabinet with a recommendation that it reconsiders its decision and gives some

assurance that any new provision would be in place before the skateboarding and BMX community were asked to relocate.

SPE.70 CALL-IN – GREATER LINCOLNSHIRE JOINT STRATEGIC OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

The panel considered a formal request from Councillors Patrick and Hyldon-King to call-in the decision of Cabinet taken at its meeting on 9th December, 2020 on the above.

The Chair invited Councillor Patrick to address the panel and outline his reasons for the call-in. Councillor Patrick commented on the importance of reaching out beyond our boundaries to have as positive a relationship as possible with other authorities. He felt that this administration was making more and more decisions that were clearly motivated out of political outcomes rather than what was best for the borough. He raised concerns that this proposal would exclude the district councils in the area and he shared the comments of one district council leader who felt that “some sort of positioning was going on in anticipation of future changes to the structure of local government in the area, which was not in the best social or economic interests of the people of the area”. Councillor Patrick reminded the panel that district councils were statutory, operational and very much alive and we should not be trying to bury them. He emphasised the importance of accountability and warned against any attempt to silence other local councils.

Councillor Hyldon-King addressed the panel and questioned why a new board was needed. She felt that the issue was about democracy, which she felt was low on this council's agenda. She referred to her time as a Cabinet member in the previous administration when they had worked closely with the district councils to obtain coastal communities funding. She was concerned about what had changed and questioned the motives for this decision.

Introduced by the Chair, Councillor Jackson responded to the call-in and stated that his response would necessarily include some political points as the proposer had raised these in his introduction. He explained that proposed Greater Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Oversight Committee sought to legitimise discussions that were already taking place between the three upper-tier authorities in Lincolnshire. This would ensure that any proposals that came forward would be debated in public and so increase transparency in that collaboration on strategic issues that were the responsibility of upper-tier authorities as opposed to the responsibilities of district councils. This would help us to collaborate and improve efficiency and the delivery of services in some of those more strategic areas. We were not turning our backs on the district councils because we still have the Lincolnshire Leaders' Board that meets on a regular basis and all the councils across Greater Lincolnshire are involved in that. He referred to allegations of having “turned our back on the Humber” because we are no longer going to be a member of the Humber Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). This had resulted from the Government informing us that we had to cease dual membership of two LEPs. While we would remain in the Lincolnshire LEP, he reminded the

panel that we still had the revitalised Humber Leadership Board which was now working very effectively around the Humber to make sure that we collaborate on issues that were important to the four local authorities around the Humber.

Councillor Harness was not convinced by the call-in. He did not feel that democracy was reduced and alluded to the various bodies operating across Lincolnshire and across the Humber authorities as raised by Councillor Jackson. Councillor Harness proposed that the call-in be rejected.

Councillor Barfield thought it was rather about a move by central Government to take away as much democracy as possible, by abolishing as many councils as possible. The gradual dismantling of the ability of local people to make their own decisions in the smallest area possible had been an ongoing project for both of the major political parties since the 1970s. He believed that what Councillor Patrick was partly trying to articulate was the fact that this was a process that would see the abolition of this council as well as all the district councils in Lincolnshire and that worried him because it would take away people's rights to be as involved as possible in their own decision making.

The Chair emphasised that the item and debate was about a call-in on the Greater Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Oversight Committee and not about the devolution of Greater Lincolnshire at this point in time.

Councillor Wilson believed this item was a stepping stone to devolution. It was a strategic committee looking at projects across Greater Lincolnshire. He acknowledged that devolution was probably 'on the back burner' and may not happen but he therefore questioned why such boards were being put in place. He did not feel the new board added any value to what happened now, informally. Rather, it was there to prelude any changes for the future, changes which would abolish this council. Given that, he felt the authority should consider what we really wanted for the residents. He felt this was the wrong time, the wrong place and the wrong political motivation. He suggested that the matter be sent back to Cabinet with the recommendation that we wait until we get further information from Government about devolution and a Greater Lincolnshire Council before setting up such a committee. Councillor Sheridan shared the concerns of Councillor Wilson.

Councillor Harness commented that, as an area, we had had central Government controlling us for many years and we had always been at their mercy. It did appear that once again changes would be made and there was every possibility we would join up with Greater Lincolnshire at some point. Likewise, we had to choose one LEP and the decision was made to remain with the Greater Lincolnshire LEP. He considered the direction of travel to be well-defined and he did not see any danger in this committee as it had been set up.

The Chair had his own concerns regarding the call-in. This decision, as stated within the Cabinet report was going to be considered by full Council in due course. All members of Council would have an opportunity to speak and vote on this matter. The membership of the Lincolnshire Leaders' Board included all the district councils. However, his main concern was that should the matter be referred back to Cabinet, North East Lincolnshire was only one of the bodies represented on the committee, there was no guarantee that we could influence the membership of this committee.

It was proposed by Councillor Harness and seconded by Councillor Hasthorpe that the call-in be rejected and the decision be released and be considered by full Council in accordance with the original Cabinet report. This was carried with four votes for and three against.

RESOLVED – That the Cabinet decision on the Greater Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Oversight Committee be released for implementation.

SPE.71 URGENT BUSINESS – HUMBER FREEPORT BID SUBMISSION

With the permission of the Chair, the panel considered a briefing report from the Humber Leadership Board (HLB) on the Humber Freeports Bid.

This item was considered urgent due to the need to keep the panel up to date on progress and the deadline for submission of bids being 5th February, 2021.

Mr Tritton had circulated the report of the HLB and this had been made public on the panel's webpage. Mr Tritton highlighted the main points of the report and, in summarising, advised that a successful bid could be transformational for the Humber region. The recommendations in the report had been agreed by the HLB at its meeting on 3rd December 2020.

In closing, Mr Tritton advised a successful bid would of course involve further formal decision making by this council and scrutiny would be part of that process.

Members raised the following issues:

Members expressed concern that only a North Lincolnshire councillor sat on behalf of the South Bank authorities on the Humber Freeports Group. He would want the Leader of this council to be a formal part of the Humber Freeports Group and urged that representations be made in this regard. The Leader added that he understood the member's concern and advised that this was largely a private sector led bid and membership of the group was limited. The Humber Freeports Group was a steering group and was overseen by the Humber Leadership Board (HLB), this was an example of where the HLB was working very effectively, with consensus, on important strategic messages and all local authorities were represented on this board. He was confident that

North East Lincolnshire had a strong representation on HLB and in the steering group with council officers.

In response to a question regarding the freeport zone and how the HLB would ensure an equitable distribution of the benefits of the freeport, Mr Tritton advised that bidding guidance suggested the limit of a freeport should be 45km, although this could be extended if there was a strong economic case. He added that in order for a freeport bid to include both Grimsby and Goole, it would have to be greater than 45km and there was a strong argument for this to be the case. He considered the strength of the bid would be that it was equitable. That was one of the great challenges of the bid; demonstrating that the freeport would transform economic growth across the whole area.

In response to questions about future decision making and constitutional process. Mr Tritton reiterated that the bid team was being led by a steering group or company, the Humber Freeport Group. The group had predominantly private sector membership but the Humber Leadership Board was represented by its Chair, Councillor Waltham and an officer of this Council sitting on behalf of all the four unitary authorities. The support and involvement of the local authorities was paramount to the success of the bid. He stressed that the local authorities were not submitting the bid, this was being done by the steering company. Should the bid be successful, the assumption was it would need to come back to each local authority for sign off. However, it was the case that the steering group would want to have covered off all the aspects reliant upon local authorities before submitting the bid. Any other approach would cause problems 'down the line'. The whole bid process covered 10 weeks including the Christmas period. The bidding document was lengthy, detailed and complex. It was unlikely that the bid document would be available for any kind of sign off until very late in the day prior to submission. Hence, it would not be possible to bring that through the democratic process and it remained that this was a private sector bid which the HLB was seeking to influence through its membership on the steering company. Ultimately, if successful, the details of the bid would need to be signed off by each affected council and at this point elected members would be involved formally.

RESOLVED – That the briefing note be received.

SPE.72 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED – That the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting on the grounds that discussion of the following business is likely to disclose exempt information within paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972

SPE.73 CALL-IN – FUTURE DELIVERY OF THE REGENERATION PARTNERSHIP SERVICES

The panel considered a formal request from Councillors Patrick and Wheatley to call-in the decision of Cabinet taken at its meeting on 9th December, 2020 on the above.

The Chair invited Councillor Patrick to address the panel. Councillor Patrick outlined his reasons for the call-in and asked that the matter be referred to full Council for a proper debate or be referred back to Cabinet to investigate further and bring the results back to scrutiny so that an informed decision could be made. He called for consultation with residents of the borough.

Members raised a number of issues including the relationship with Engie; organisational culture; the findings of the previous working group on the partnership; the improvement action plan, the length of time the contract/partnership had been under review and re-consideration; proper consideration of in-house and other options including costs; limited period (three years) of the contract extension; constitutional and governance arrangements; informed decision making; evidence based scrutiny; benefits of the contract extension; other options considered; evidenced improvements in services; and recognised best practice.

The Leader acknowledged that this was a three-year extension and would ultimately lead to a full re-tendering and procurement of the contract. He reminded the panel that the previous administration had also extended the contract for two years without any public consultation or formal decision making. He noted that services had improved via the partnership improvement action plan and some services had been brought back in house. He assured that panel that there had been hard negotiations with Engie to achieve savings and there had been changes to the working relationship. Both partnership performance and the delivery of the partnership improvement action plan were regularly scrutinised by this panel. In closing, he added that he was one of the few councillors who could remember what it was like pre-2010 when all services were delivered in house. He could not say the council did that very well. So, even if they were brought back in house, there was no guarantee that we could do them any better now.

Mr Tritton added that there was potential for substantial increases in costs should services be brought back in-house, notwithstanding the financial impacts of the pandemic on this authority.

It was proposed by Councillor Sheridan and seconded by Councillor Wilson that the matter be referred to full Council. This was lost upon a show of hands (three for five against).

RESOLVED – That the Cabinet decision on the future delivery of regeneration services be released for implementation.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 10.04 p.m.