



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on 29th September 2022

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL

7th July 2022 at 2.00 pm

Present:

Councillor Dawkins (in the Chair)

Councillors Beasant (substitute for Aisthorpe), Batson, Goodwin (substitute for Shutt), Pettigrew, Sandford, K Swinburn and Westcott

Officers in attendance:

- Helen Isaacs (Assistant Chief Executive)
- Eve Richardson Smith (Deputy Monitoring Officer and Legal Team Manager)
- Neil Clark (Strategic Lead for Regulation and Enforcement Services)
- Guy Lonsdale (Finance Group Manager)
- Zoe Campbell (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)

Also in attendance:

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

There were no members of the press or the public present.

SPC.1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN AND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN

It was noted that at the Annual General Meeting of the Council held on 26th May, 2022, Councillor Dawkins had been appointed the Chair and Councillor Sandford the Deputy Chair of the Communities Scrutiny Panel for the ensuing Municipal Year.

SPC.2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from this meeting were received from Councillors Aisthorpe and Shutt.

SPC.3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Beasant declared a prejudicial interest as a trustee of Harbour Place and left the meeting for items SPC.10 and SPC.15.

Councillor Shepherd declared a personal interest in items SPC.9, SPC.10 and SPC.15 as a trustee of Foresight.

SPC.4 MINUTES

Ms Isaacs confirmed that she would circulate a briefing note on the digital plan ahead of the meeting in November, 2022.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Panel held on 17th March 2022 be agreed as a correct record.

SPC.5 QUESTION TIME

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

SPC.6 FORWARD PLAN

The panel received the current 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.

SPC.7 TRACKING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF SCRUTINY

The panel received a report from the statutory scrutiny officer tracking the recommendations of the Communities Scrutiny Panel.

A member referred to the environmental street scene recommendations and requested that the recommendations be updated and that the panel received a briefing paper on the wildflower scheme.

RESOLVED –

(1) That the tracking report be noted.

(2) That this panel receive a briefing paper on the wildflower scheme.

SPC.8 PROVISIONAL OUTTURN REPORT

The panel received a report from the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets providing key information and analysis of the Council's position and performance against its Finance and Commissioning Plan at the end of the 2021/22 financial year

A member queried the overspend in the children's services budget. Mr Lonsdale explained that the budgets were estimates and in the budget process an extra £7m was invested in the service. He highlighted that demand levels remained high within the system compared to where we should be demographically, and he confirmed this would be reflected in the quarter one financial monitoring that the panel would receive at its next meeting in September 2022.

Clarification was sought by a member as to whether the revenue forecast of £18.7m should be an underspend rather than an overspend as stated in the report. Mr Lonsdale confirmed it was an error and should read as an underspend. The reason for the underspend was through staff cost savings and effective vacancy management arising from a staffing review and capitalisation of staff costs for those working directly on a range of capital investment schemes.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

SPC.9 HOMES FOR UKRAINE/ASYLUM DISPERSAL

The panel considered a report that provided the panel with an update on the government's Homes for Ukraine scheme and the National Full Asylum Dispersal scheme that would become mandatory for all councils.

Members were concerned about the trauma suffered by the young children and queried if there was any support in place across the borough. Ms Isaacs confirmed there was a variety of different wrap around support provided for refugee families and in particular support given, where required, from children's services. The council together with partners had taken a needs-based approach which was working. She explained that officers were working closely with other local councils who supported families and shared intelligence, information and support that was available that we could tap into. Ms Isaacs confirmed that it was too early to understand the full impact on our services locally.

A member queried the process of employment for asylum seekers from the Ukraine with key skills. Ms Isaacs explained that officers were working with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to understand the skills and the jobs vacancies and support them in this process. She confirmed that there was a period of transition when they arrived in terms of settling into their sponsors homes and the local schools.

Ms Isaacs asked the panel to feed back any suggestions on how the local communities could help and support new arrivals.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and the panel feed back any suggestions to Ms Isaacs on how the local communities could help and support new arrivals.

SPC.10 ROUGH SLEEPERS INITIATIVE 2022-2025

The panel considered a report on the rough sleeper initiative 2022-2025.

A member queried the current breakdown of rough sleepers between men and women. Ms Chadwick confirmed that approximately 80% were men and 20% women. She explained that there were transient groups of people and those on the cusp of rough sleeping who needed the intervention which the funding would provide to prevent them becoming rough sleepers in the first place.

The panel questioned whether there were any new people into the system. Ms Chadwick explained that they were seeing a trend in new rough sleepers as a result of debt and an increase because of visitors sleeping rough in tents. She confirmed that officers were analysing the trends, although they had to be careful when asking why people were rough sleeping.

The number of persistent rough sleepers was queried by a member. Ms Chadwick confirmed there were between 2-3 people they saw frequently, and the others fluctuated depending on circumstances. She reassured the panel that they worked with a local housing provider with good quality accommodation for rough sleepers and multi-agency support was put in place for the individuals to engage with. Regular welfare checks were carried out on the streets, however, one of the issues was when people were in the criminal justice system and were recalled to prison. There was an opportunity to work with probation service within Harbour Place to prevent homelessness.

Members felt that it was important to understand why people were dipping in and out of rough sleeping and that the services were in place to support them. Ms Chadwick agreed but highlighted that realistically it was difficult because people didn't always want to give out that information.

A member was concerned about the number of sofa surfers that appeared to be on the increase and queried what work was being done to support this cohort. Ms Chadwick explained it was hard to obtain these figures because they were often unknown in many cases unless they were referred to local services. She felt it was about working collaboratively with partner organisations to coordinate and think differently about how services could work together to share information to prevent the sofa surfing which would often lead to rough sleeping. She referred to Harbour Place where they created a hub of activities so if people who were sofa surfing went there in crisis, there were people to help them.

Anti-social behaviour as a result of people leaving Harbour Place in the morning concerned members of the panel but they were reassured that there were activities within the community that they could be involved in.

Councillor Jackson highlighted that a lot of lessons had been learnt from the pandemic and, after spot checks, the number of regular rough sleepers had come down from 22 to 5. He welcomed the funding that would ensure that the momentum would continue and make a difference to the residents of North East Lincolnshire.

The panel welcomed the three-year funding and supported the recommendations laid out in the report that was being submitted to Cabinet on 20th July 2022.

RESOLVED – That the the recommendations contained in the report to be submitted to Cabinet on 20th July 2022, be supported.

SPC.11 COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23

The panel received a report from the Statutory Scrutiny Officer (Assistant Chief Executive) outlining the forward work programme of the Communities Scrutiny Panel.

RESOLVED – That the Communities Scrutiny Panel work programme for 2022/23 be approved.

SPC.12 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER

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

SPC.13 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.14 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The press and public were asked to leave 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 (as amended).

SPC.15 ROUGH SLEEPERS' INITIATIVE 2022-2025

The panel received the closed appendix referred to at SPC.10.

RESOLVED – That appendix B to the report at SPC.10 be noted.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 3.12p.m.