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NORTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON

29th September, 2022

Present:

Councillor Beasant (in the Chair)
Councillors Abel, Aisthorpe, Batson, Boyd, Brasted, Brookes, Callison, Cracknell, Croft, Dawkins, Farren, Freeston, Furneaux, Green, Harness, Hasthorpe, Holland, Hudson, Jackson, Lindley, McLean, Mickleburgh, Parkinson, Patrick, Pettigrew, Reynolds, Sandford, Shepherd, Shreeve, Shutt, Silvester, Smith, Westcott, Wheatley and Wilson.

Officers in Attendance:

- Rob Walsh (Chief Executive)
- Sharon Wroot (Executive Director Economy, Environment and Resources)
- Paul Windley (Democratic and Scrutiny Team Manager)

The proceedings were opened with prayers by Reverend Joy Osbourne.

NEL.30 HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

Members stood to observe a minute's silence in remembrance of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, who passed away on 8th September, 2022.

NEL.31 MR PETER RAMSDEN

Members stood to observe a minute's silence as a mark of respect for Mr Peter Marsden, former Member of North East Lincolnshire Council, who passed away on 17th August, 2022.

NEL.32 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor paid tribute to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and offered his best wishes to King Charles III.

The Mayor noted that his Mayoral bike ride was being re-arranged to take place in the next few weeks. His coffee morning in aid of Mayoral charities, would now take place on 12th October 2022. In addition, the Mayor noted that a charity race night would be taking place towards the end of October 2022. He hoped that Members would support these events.

NEL.31 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from this meeting were received from Councillors Astbury, Cairns, Goodwin, Robinson, K. Swinburn and S. Swinburn.

NEL.32 MINUTES

The minutes of the special meeting of North East Lincolnshire Council held on 14th July 2022 and the meeting of North East Lincolnshire Council held on 28th July 2022 were approved as correct records.

NEL.33 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest in relation to any items on the agenda for this meeting.

NEL.34 THE LEADER'S STATEMENT

The Council received a statement from the Leader of the Council.

The Leader reported that much had happened since his previous statement at the end of July, both nationally and locally. Events had been dominated by the sad loss of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, with communities united in mourning and paying tributes. Her Majesty passed away only two days after asking a new Prime Minister to form a Government. One of the first acts of the new Government was the Chancellor's budget statement and, as part of that, North East Lincolnshire Council was invited to be one of only 38 local authorities involved in early discussions on the creation of new "investment zones", designed to drive business growth, create jobs and increase wages. These zones would apply to specific land areas and would have more relaxed planning rules. They would enjoy reduced taxes for businesses for the first ten years and various other benefits. Along with our other bids into the Levelling Up Fund, the potential benefits for North East Lincolnshire were huge and would make our development sites even more attractive to investors. He stressed that our working relationship with Government remained strong and productive.

The Leader noted that a £749,500 pot of money from the Government had been secured to help make streets in the East Marsh area of Grimsby safer. Home Office Safer Streets 4 funding had been allocated to our area following a successful joint bid by North East Lincolnshire Council and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Humberside and was testament to our strong working relationship. The aim of the project is to reduce incidents of crime, drug offences and anti-social behaviour and to help residents be safe and feel safe. Community groups on the East Marsh had been invited to come forward and bid for the cash for appropriate schemes and initiatives.

The Leader reported that the council was distributing £4.5 million, in the form of business rate relief refunds, to eligible local businesses still feeling the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, as part of the Government's Additional Relief Fund.

Turning to Grimsby town centre, the Leader noted that the council officially took ownership of Freshney Place on 4 August 2022. This would now enable progress with the Future High Street Fund grant funded scheme to repurpose the western end of Freshney Place and diversify the town centre offer by the introduction of significant leisure use, including a multi-screen cinema. More good news for the town centre was that Lincolnshire Housing Partnership had agreed to lease the remaining empty space on the ground floor of Cartergate House early next year. This would not only boost town centre footfall but would make their offices more accessible to the public.

The Leader commented on the inaugural Grim Falfest, a celebration of the town's Viking heritage. He felt that this had been a fantastic weekend, including the arrival of Viking longships in the Alexandra Dock, a Viking themed market on Riverhead Square, and Viking battle re-enactments in People's Park, which all drew big crowds. The Leader thanked the Visitor Economy, Services and Retail group, who had organised the weekend along with their partners and private sector sponsors. He looked forward to this being repeated next year.

Work continued in the crucial area of Children's Services to progress our improvement plan. Like most authorities, the council struggled to recruit permanent social workers. A national shortage meant that there was a heavy reliance on agency workers. This was very expensive and resulted in greater instability in the working relationships with vulnerable children and their families. The Leader paid tribute to the fantastic work of all our social workers, but particularly our loyal permanent staff. They had now been bolstered by 33 permanent, qualified social workers recruited from South Africa and 14 newly qualified "home grown" permanent social workers starting this month. This would result in our social worker staffing improving from about two thirds agency to two thirds permanent, helping to provide improved services to children and their families. The council was also actively working to safely reduce the number of looked after children and to provide local facilities to bring more out-of-area children back into North East Lincolnshire.

The Leader welcomed the outcome of the inspection of youth justice services in North East Lincolnshire by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation which had resulted in a 'good' rating. The inspection report praised managers and staff for being "dedicated and motivated to achieve the best outcomes for children, families, and victims." The Leader commented that this outcome was testament to the hard work and commitment of Council staff and our partners.

The Leader noted that his administration had listened to growing concerns about irresponsible parking near school gates at pick-up and drop-off times and acted. A programme of installing CCTV cameras had commenced along with Traffic Regulation Orders to stop illegal parking or stopping around our schools. This had resulted in six drivers being caught parking illegally on Hardy's Road, near Signhills School in Cleethorpes, in just seven days. He reported that local residents and school staff were very positive about this initiative.

The Leader highlighted the commencement of the review and update of the Local Plan, which provided the planning framework for development of the borough, and the basis for decisions on planning applications. Informal public engagement on the Local Plan review had now commenced, allowing individuals, groups and businesses around the borough the opportunity to provide their views and ideas on the Local Plan. Drop-in sessions would also be held, to give people the opportunity to speak with officers about the Local Plan and then post their feedback. The revised Local Plan would need to go through several rounds of engagement during its preparation and once all appropriate revisions were made, it would be submitted to the Government for formal examination. The Leader looked forward to extensive public engagement with the review process.

The Leader provided an update on the Ukrainian refugee situation in North East Lincolnshire. New arrivals continued to be welcomed and he explained the support being provided. He added that the Ukrainian flag continued to fly over the Town Hall and would do for the foreseeable future.

As a listening Council, last week the administration held another successful Cabinet listening event, this time in the Central Hall within the East Marsh ward. He felt it important to host these events around the borough and be accessible. Cabinet members had talked to many residents and community groups from the East Marsh area, and from across the wider borough, with good ideas and suggestions coming forward.

In concluding, the Leader commented that there had been no special urgency decisions taken since January 2022. The Council tracker had been tabled at the meeting and all items marked "completed" would be removed and those marked "in progress" were progressing as anticipated.

As a Point of Order, Councillor Wilson expressed concern that the Council tracker had been tabled at this meeting rather than being made fully available for the public to view progress.

Following advice from the Chief Executive, the Mayor ruled that the Leader's Statement was in order.

NEL.35 QUESTION TIME

There were two questions submitted by members of the public for this meeting, in accordance with the Council's procedures.

The first question was submitted by Mr Grimes to the Leader of the Council. Mr Grimes attended the meeting and put the question as set out below.

Does the Council have a policy on the use of residential property as short-term lets and, if not, why not? I raise the issue because of the rapid increase of such property use, for example, through Air B&B and the impact of this on the availability of residential accommodation for local families especially in the Cleethorpes area.

Councillor Jackson, the Leader of the Council, responded that council housing stock, including finance and funding models, generated from rental income, to acquire housing stock, as well as asset and housing management and tenancy services teams were transferred across to Shoreline Housing Partnership in 2005, now known as Lincolnshire Housing Partnership. This meant that the Council was not in a position to acquire and manage properties in any great volume but the Council had initiated a policy to acquire empty homes across the borough and was assisting local charitable housing providers to do the same. This action was meeting a need to home the most vulnerable in society, providing a clear pathway to independent living. Any individual or family under the threat of homelessness or who may need help/assistance/advice with their housing needs were urged to contact the Home Options Team at the council as soon as they can.

The second question was from Mr Henderson for the Leader of the Council. Mr Henderson attended the meeting and put the question as set out below.

In a recent open letter to Councillor Jackson, I suggested that the council was ill-equipped to take on ownership of Freshney Place. This was on the basis that:

- 1. the business was failing (and therefore was not a solid investment)*
- 2. and that the council had no track record of operating a retail venture on this scale.*

Councillor Jackson went on record as saying that the business was not failing. Equally, it was a matter of public record that Freshney Place was in administration. Can Councillor Jackson advise of the criteria he used to judge the business to be worthy of a significant investment from the tax-payer, and set out the steps he intended to take in order to turn a profit from Freshney Place?

Councillor Jackson responded that it was common knowledge that retail and town centres faced significant challenges borne out of changing consumer habits, and Covid exacerbated these. Local authorities up and down the country were, with government support from funds such as Future High Streets Fund, Towns Fund and Levelling Up Fund, taking action to try and mitigate against the risk of town centres becoming even more challenged. A main theme was the repurposing of such places. There were no guarantees but without action, it was almost certain the cycle and speed of decline would increase. That would result in a variety of social and economic issues that impact on not just town centres but whole places. Freshney Place, again in common with many retail-based assets, experienced reductions in value of tens of millions of pounds. It was on this basis that the centre was put into receivership as it was in substantial negative equity. Considerable revenue income was, however, still being received from leases.

Against this context and in common with an increasing number of local authorities, the council acquired Freshney Place for regeneration purposes to support the Grimsby Town Centre Masterplan. It must be seen in this wider context and as a major part of the town centre, both geographically and economically. The risk of not doing so was considered significant for reasons considered by Full Council at the time the decision was made to purchase. This risk included a number of new entrants to the shopping centre market who were deeming them to now be cheap but with a business model which minimised capital expenditure and sought only short-term revenue returns. This would have meant there would, highly likely, be no potential for any transformational projects and that would have undermined the ability to slow and reverse decline.

Whilst acquiring Freshney Place for regeneration purposes, there was obviously a strong focus on financial issues. At the time of the Full Council meeting, these could not be revealed in public due to commercial sensitivities. However, all elected members were furnished with all relevant financial information, and the decision to purchase was made taking that into account. We took ownership of the Freshney Place on 4 August, and the Leader was now able to publicly reveal more of the financial information. The centre was marketed with an asking price of £17.1m. The total cost of acquisition, including fees and stamp duty, was below that £17.1m price tag. This contrasted with the value of the centre back in the early 2000s when it changed hands for around £100m, and explained why the previous owners considered it a toxic asset on their balance sheet and placed it on the market. The current revenue income of £1.65m pa, before financing, represents an initial yield of 10% against the price we paid for the centre. The interest rate of 3% results in a return after interest of circa £1.15m pa and once capital payments are allowed for, a net cash position of just over £700k pa. This is the information, based on external advice, that was used to satisfy ourselves of the financial position of the centre before making any decision to purchase.

So, as it stands, the centre already generates material returns but the aim is to both actively manage the centre to maintain and enhance the financial position alongside progressing the planned leisure scheme to really begin the diversification of Freshney Place and the town centre. As has been reported, the

Council has appointed professional asset managers with a brief to support the wider vibrancy of the town centre whilst ensuring there was a strong focus on financial performance.

As a Conservative, the Leader assured Mr Henderson that his initial instinct would be not to purchase a shopping centre. However, he became convinced, when presented with facts, that this was a sensible move and, indeed, the only way to prevent the continued deterioration of the town centre. This was also the view of most members of this Council. If we want to encourage local people to spend more of their money in Grimsby, instead of outside area, want to attract more visitors to the town and, very importantly, attract more inward investment to the area, an increasingly derelict and run-down town centre would scupper all those aims. The Leader commented that it was easy to sit on the side lines and snipe when you don't have all the information or choose to ignore it. In the meantime, we, as elected members, must take a leadership role and sometimes make controversial decisions which we believed to be in the best interest of North East Lincolnshire.

The Leader concluded by noting that Mr Henderson's open letter contained a number of material inaccuracies. This include the administration being attributed several actions which it had either not taken, or were not its responsibility. He commented that there was a legitimate debate to be had about the best way to move the area forward and he welcomed informed discussions with Mr Henderson and others. Indeed, this was a cornerstone of the democratic process. However, making unsubstantiated allegations and attributing actions and motivations to the administration which were clearly untrue was no way to progress the debate.

NEL.36 TREASURY OUTTURN REPORT 2021/22

The Council received a report from the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets containing details of treasury management arrangements, activity and performance during the 2021/22 financial year. This report was referred to Council by Cabinet at its meeting on 8th September 2022.

Following a debate, which focused on concerns about levels of borrowing, the recommendations in the report were put to the vote and it was:

RESOLVED – That the report now submitted be received and the treasury management activity during 2021/22 be noted.

NEL.37 STANDING ORDER AMENDMENT

The Council considered a report from the Monitoring Officer setting out a proposed amendment to the Council's Standing Orders. The recommendations in this report were referred to Council by the Standards and Adjudication Committee at its meeting on 21st September 2022.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Councillor Jackson and seconded by Councillor Shreeve.

At this point, Councillor Wilson raised a point of order arguing that the proposal breached the council's constitution in that it would restrict Members' rights to information and to hold Portfolio Holders and Chairs to account.

The Chief Executive advised Council that there was no statutory requirement to receive minutes of Cabinet and the Council's committees at full Council. The proposal had been referred to the Standards and Adjudication Committee as required within the council's constitution.

The Mayor ruled that the debate on this item should continue.

During the debate, Councillor Wilson proposed an amendment that each Elected Member be permitted the opportunity to ask two questions of an individual Chair on the minutes. This was seconded by Councillor Patrick.

Following a debate, the amendment was put to a vote and this was lost.

A vote was then taken on the motion moved by Councillor Jackson to agree the recommendations in the report. The motion was carried and it was:

RESOLVED – That the proposed amendment to Standing Order 10B, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report now submitted, be approved, effective from the next ordinary meeting of full Council in December 2022.

NEL.38 NOTICE OF MOTION

The Council considered a Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor Patrick and seconded by Councillor Green, submitted in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders as set out below:

North East Lincolnshire boasts some areas of amazing natural beauty, with wonderful waterways, including the much-loved coastal area, running the entire length of the northern boundary of the Borough, including the much-loved Cleethorpes beach.

Sadly, the UK has found the cleanliness of its water ways and coastline in decline, with hundreds of thousands of tons of sewage released every year, as the UK's water companies fail in their statutory duties, and the government fails to act decisively. Some of the dumping is illegal, with the Environment Agency calling for prosecutions.

Locally, we have seen the impact this has had, with, sadly, Cleethorpes beach losing its much-celebrated blue flag award, that Councillor Jackson proudly posed with in local media, shortly after assuming his new role as Leader of the Council.

Cleethorpes beach now no longer boasts an 'excellent' cleanliness of water, with fears it might decline further.

Although fines have been issued, it is clear that both the government and our two local MPs are not taking this issue as serious as they should, Council notes our disappointment that we have been let down as a community by our representatives in Westminster.

Council resolves to:

- declare a state of emergency over the cleanliness of our rivers and coastline, calling upon our Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport to report back his progress to scrutiny in lobbying for better protection.*
- Write to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to inform him of our motion and rally his support for our area on this matter.*
- Write to our two local MP's expressing our disappointment to date that they have not championed our area, stating they need to fight for the future of water cleanliness in North East Lincolnshire, and be seen to be doing so.*

The motion was debated, during which Councillor Dawkins moved the closure motion "that the vote be put". This was seconded by Councillor Silvester, and the Mayor put this closure motion to the vote. The closure motion was carried.

Councillor Patrick's motion was put to the vote. A recorded vote was held in accordance with the requirements of the Council's Standing Orders. The votes cast were recorded as follows:

For the motion

Councillors Farren, Green, Mickleburgh, Patrick, Shutt, Wheatley and Wilson (7 votes).

Against the motion

Councillors Abel, Batson, Boyd, Brasted, Brookes, Callison, Cracknell, Croft, Dawkins, Freeston, Furneaux, Harness, Hasthorpe, Hudson, Jackson, Lindley, Parkinson, Pettigrew, Reynolds, Sandford, Shepherd, Shreeve, Silvester, Smith and Westcott (25 votes).

Abstained

Councillors Aisthorpe, Beasant, Holland and McLean (4 votes).

The motion was declared lost.

NEL.39 SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

It was moved by Councillor Beasant, seconded by Councillor Lindley, that the Council's Standing Orders governing the length of meetings be suspended to permit this meeting to continue beyond 10.00 p.m. if required. Upon a show of hands, the motion was carried and it was

RESOLVED - That the Council's Standing Orders governing the length of meetings be suspended to permit this meeting to continue beyond 10.00 p.m.

NEL.40 QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The Chair invited Councillor Mickleburgh to present the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

On behalf of the thousands using local Stagecoach buses, can I ask the portfolio holder to liaise with someone at the company as to when services will get back to normal?

For as things stand, services on all routes get cancelled each and everyday, leading people to be late for work, meetings and other appointments. We are told there is an ongoing problem with driver recruitment, yet this situation has been going on for months. What's more Stagecoach are saying that drivers will get £21.8K after six months, but assuming a 40 hour week this works out at less than £10.50 an hour, only £1 above the Government's Living Wage.

Given that Stagecoach is a large public company, we have to wonder if wage levels are an issue especially at a time when inflation is running at 10% and expected to go a lot higher.

Note – Councillor Hasthorpe gave his apologies and left the meeting at this point.

In the absence of the portfolio holder, the Leader of the Council responded that a quarterly enhanced partnership meeting was undertaken, involving representatives from Stagecoach, North East Lincolnshire Council and Equans (who manage the partnership on behalf of the council). The meetings provided an opportunity to discuss operational and commercial concerns from the council and Stagecoach. Equans had weekly operation discussions with Stagecoach regarding the operational delivery of the service and had formally raised the concerns on seven occasions in the last three months of the volume and frequency of short notice cancellations. Equans had been working with Stagecoach to monitor their action plan to mitigate the cancellations and to be in a position where the service was being delivered correctly.

On 22nd September 2022, the portfolio holder actually wrote to Stagecoach to express his concerns with the level of cancellations, and he received a response which acknowledged the concerns, provided a number of explanations of the

causes and described the mitigation measures that Stagecoach continued to undertake. The portfolio holder was currently working through the detail of this letter and would provide a response to Councillor Mickleburgh.

Officers had also received the feedback, which set out the number of drivers Stagecoach require to deliver a full service. Stagecoach had advised that they required 146 drivers to deliver their service and they currently had 135 drivers. Stagecoach had 15 drivers further progressing through to obtain their licence. To look to introduce further resilience, they had a further 9 new employees who were waiting to start with them, and 14 others who were progressing with gaining medicals or transferring to new roles. This would provide Stagecoach with 171 drivers, which they were aiming to achieve by the end of October. Driver turnover was inevitable but Stagecoach were closely monitoring this. Drivers had typical annualised earnings of £22,105 (39 hours per week) in year 1 rising to £24,944 in year 2. Typically, year 1 salaries were based at 3 months at £10.40 per hour, 3 months at £10.92 per hour and 6 months at £11.14 per hour. The year 2 salary was £12.30 per hour. Drivers were due to receive a 14% pay rise in 2023, which meant the £12.30 per hour would rise to £14 per hour.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Mickleburgh asked if this could be communicated to the media so that the public could be made aware.

Councillor Jackson responded that he was sure that the portfolio holder would be happy to do so.

The Chair invited Councillor Holland to present the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Social Care, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

“The Director of Public Health Report for 2021 states that there is a lack of coordinated working between mental health services and wellbeing support services provided by a range of organisations in North East Lincolnshire including those provided by the NHS, local authority, schools, primary care, substance misuse services and the voluntary sector. This is certainly supported by a lot of anecdotal evidence. Can the portfolio holder, on behalf of North East Lincolnshire Council, confirm that it will do everything within its control to implement the report recommendation that local mental health services be mapped by the Integrated Care Partnership in order to provide clear pathways of identified support for children, adults, and older people in order to ensure that people are not signed off from one service until they have been seen and evaluated by another service?”

Councillor Shreeve, Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Social Care, responded that since publication of the report, the council's Public Health service had been working in close collaboration with the Integrated Care Partnership to address the mental health issues identified in the report. Pathways were currently being mapped with the aim of improving services and ensuring that the right levels of support could be accessed. The Mental Health Sector Network

included providers from the statutory sector and the voluntary sector and was accountable to the Health and Care Partnership Board for delivery. Children's Mental Health Services were currently in the final planning stages of being re-commissioned and the new contract would provide a more joined up approach with strong connections to other mental health services in the Borough.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Holland asked if the portfolio holder would monitor carefully the outcomes he had mentioned.

Councillor Shreeve confirmed that he would. He added that he chaired the Health and Well Being Board and had challenged its members to report back on what they were doing in response to the issues raised in the report. He had attended a meeting of the Health and Care Partnership Shadow Board today and was pleased to see that this was being taken very seriously.

The Chair invited Councillor Holland to present the following question to the Leader of the Council, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

"At the last full council meeting, the Deputy Leader stated that 'the overall reduction in spending power was not necessarily a bad thing and the council had always achieved a balanced position'. Could the Leader explain how residents have benefitted from the huge reduction in spending power North East Lincolnshire Council has seen in recent years?"

Councillor Jackson felt that Councillor Holland was being a little mischievous in quoting the Deputy Leader's comments out of context. The Leader noted that the Deputy Leader had actually commented that the overall reduction in spending power was not necessarily a bad thing and the council had always achieved a balanced position so this could be seen as one of the indicators of overall efficiency. This council had seen increases to its overall funding, its collection rates were at a high level and it had been less reliant on government grants as local businesses and residents provided a higher proportion of overall funding. Local taxation provided 81% of the council's net funding during 2021/22.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Holland asked if the Leader would agree that it was time to face reality that in order to provide a sustainable level of services for residents, the clear solution was to increase central government funding for local government.

Councillor Jackson responded that he was sure that every local authority would like more funding to be able to spend on services.

The Chair invited Councillor Holland to present the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Education, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

“I appreciate that my question relates to the period prior to the portfolio holder’s tenure. For the financial year ending 2021, the third-party budget variance (overspend) for the Safeguarding and Early Help cost centre was £7.33m against a budget of £13.0m, a 56% overspend. Could the portfolio holder kindly explain why the overspend in this cost centre is so high compared with other cost centres within Children’s Services?”

Councillor Cracknell, Portfolio Holder for Children and Education, responded that third party payments were payments made to suppliers outside the council. During the financial years 2020-22 the number of children looked after increased from 576 at 31st March 2020 to 592 at 31st March 2021 to 612 at 31st March 2022. Within these numbers there were also children who moved placement and sometimes, due to circumstances, this was a more expensive placement. Within the area of North East Lincolnshire there was a shortfall of local provision necessitating the necessary use of more expensive agency or out of area provision. The main variances behind the overspend of £7.3m were agency placements (£1.705m), independent foster care (£3.473m), supported housing (£1.323m) and mainstream carers (£0.355m).

The Chair invited Councillor Holland to present the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council’s Standing Orders.

The Director of Public Health Report for 2021 states that the recent Natural Assets Plan adopted by the council provides a good opportunity to increase access to the natural environment for mental wellbeing promotion. Public health and wellbeing services should explore opportunities for developing therapeutic interventions based on access to natural resources.

The council is to be heartily congratulated on initiatives to help such interventions to date, but more does need to be done as spare income for paid leisure activities falls. Local Access Forums are intended to have a key role in promoting access to natural resources. Would the Portfolio Holder agree to a review of the Local Access Forum arrangement to ensure that it meets the DEFRA Guidance requirements?

To give just two examples of where current arrangements are inadequate as set against Government Guidance:

- There is no mention on the council’s website of a Local Access Forum, or meeting records*
- Forums are expected to improve liaison and understanding with, and between, local interests involved with access and open-air recreation by for example, producing a forum newsletter, publicity leaflet, or website to communicate and engage with the wider public, and particularly with socially excluded or disadvantaged groups. Publicity in North East Lincolnshire is, however, virtually non-existent at this time*

This question is not to detract from the positive actions taken in this area but to explore improvement.

In the absence of the portfolio holder, Councillor Shreeve, the Deputy Leader of the Council, responded that North East Lincolnshire Council was part of the Lincolnshire Joint Local Access Forum with Lincolnshire County Council and had been since 2019. Previously, the council was part of the Mid-Lincolnshire Access Forum since its formation in 2006. The current arrangements met DEFRA guidance and officers were currently working to provide information which would advise on the Local Access Forum and provide a link to the Lincolnshire County Council web page, in order to promote the activities of the forum. North East Lincolnshire Council remained committed to improving public access to the countryside and, in conjunction with Lincolnshire County Council, had established a Local (Countryside) Access Forum. The Forum comprised a wide range of people representing users of rights of way, farmers and landowners; and other interests such as tourism, health, nature conservation, transport, social exclusion and disability. Forum members act in a voluntary capacity and the Forum met approximately four times per year. The forum was always looking for new members to join, and the Leader encouraged any interested party to contact the forum if they wished to volunteer. The Leader noted that Councillor Cairns currently represented North East Lincolnshire Council on the forum.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Holland asked if a review of our local arrangements would be undertaken in the interest of further improvement.

Councillor Shreeve felt that the arrangements were as they should be, subject to information being updated on the council's website.

The Chair invited Councillor Holland to present the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

“The £2.2m budget for the new borough-wide CCTV system apparently sits within Children's Services and not within Safer and Stronger Communities. Could the Portfolio Holder explain why this is so?”

Councillor Harness responded that the £2.2m capital allocation to upgrade CCTV was a ringfenced budget that could only be spent on the CCTV project infrastructure. The Assistant Director for Safer and Partnerships was working in partnership with Equans to deliver the project to timescales. Safer and Partnerships sat within Children Services, hence why the budget sat within Children Services, but this was purely a technical/practical decision to enable sign off of funding.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Holland asked the portfolio holder whether he could shed any light on the reference to this issue within the minutes of the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel meeting in July 2022.

Councillor Harness agreed to provide a written response.

The Chair invited Councillor Farren to present the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

“A number of residents and stakeholders of Sidney Sussex have raised concerns in respect to the gates of the two recreational parks, Sidney Park and the Sussex recreation ground. It is our understanding that the agreed time to lock the gates of both parks is by dusk. It is being reported that this agreement is not being adhered to and the parks are being left unsecured well into the night. This is a major concern. Please can you provide an update and a solution to this situation?”

In the absence of the portfolio holder, the Leader of the Council responded that the locking of our parks in the evening was contracted out to Equans, similar to the safety and patrols of most of our other assets. The security officers employed by Equans manage a large number of sites, so could never commit to an exact time when they would be locking each location. They did aim to get to all parks by 10pm in summer and 8pm at this time a year. Security incidents at other Council building/assets may delay them attending other scheduled sites, but there were no reports to suggest that parks had not been locked at night as per the contract. Equans had provided an assurance that during the next month the parks would be locked no later than 8pm. From November onwards and throughout the winter, closing times for parks was rarely a problem as, with the clocks going back, dusk would be earlier and there was a much larger staff group available to manage this task before 6pm. Equans colleagues had committed to meet with the portfolio holder to discuss how park locking times could be monitored in the future and what action taken to make them as consistent as possible.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Farren sought clarification of how this would be monitored.

The Leader of the Council suggested that Councillor Farren make contact with Councillor S Swinburn, the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport, to enquire of the outcome of his meeting with Equans.

The Chair invited Councillor Farren to present the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

“Please can you explain the rationale that has been applied when deciding upon the positions that the CCTV cameras are going to be placed as part of the upcoming upgrade, including intelligence sources that have been used and applied?”

Councillor Shepherd responded that he could not comment on ongoing operations by Humberside Police involving intelligence gathered by CCTV

cameras. However, Elected Members (as well as parish councils and Freshney Place) were engaged as part of the consultation on the upgrade in 2020. An uplift in the number of rapid deployment cameras was included in the project to allow a response across a wider number of areas. By the end of the project up to 40 such cameras would be utilised based on police reporting and wider intelligence. Councillor Shepherd reported the key headlines from the consultations that had taken place on the upgrade. A report on this matter had been taken to the Communities Scrutiny Panel, and the panel supported the draft CCTV strategy. There would be a further 10 rapid deployment cameras provided, bringing the total number to 50.

The Chair invited Councillor Patrick to present the following question to the Leader of the Council, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

“What offers of support were made to business within Freshney Place that have found themselves evicted as a consequence of the proposed leisure development?”

Councillor Jackson responded by firstly, noting that the council had only had control and an ability to engage directly with Freshney Place tenants since the centre was acquired on 4 August 2022. Prior to the centre being placed into receivership in January, Capreon, the previous Asset Managers, had been in dialogue with the tenants around them being relocated into Freshney Place. With regard to the leisure development, there were 15 units where possession was required. Upon acquisition, the council was very conscious that there was a need to engage these tenants as new owners. Five of the units were vacant so no action was required. Through our Development and Asset Managers, we have engaged with the occupiers of the other ten units to indicate our keenness to retain them within the centre. It was good news that eight tenants had confirmed they wished to remain. This was obviously positive and we were actively working with them to assist with relocations within Freshney Place. The council was actively engaged with the other two occupiers to assist them with a managed exit while doing our best to see if agreement could be reached to see them retained. As you would expect, that was a topic of ongoing commercial discussions.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Patrick enquired what direct involvement had the Leader of the Council had with the two businesses that did not wish to remain within Freshney Place.

Councillor Jackson responded that he had had no involvement because, as part of the governance arrangements introduced as part of the purchase of Freshney Place, he was not in a position to interact directly as an Elected Member. Engagement had taken place via proper management arrangements. He added that Members did have the ability to influence policy to ensure that Freshney Place fitted in to the wider aspirations for Grimsby town centre.

The Chair invited Councillor Patrick to present the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Education, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

"Ten months on, can the Portfolio holder give us some examples of clear signs of improvement in children's services since the unforgivable Ofsted report last November?"

Councillor Cracknell, Portfolio Holder for Children and Education, responded that by noting that there was no quick fix that could be applied and this was an improvement journey. She commented that there was now a more realistic account of areas requiring improvement and a better understanding of the data and the scale of the challenges. The council can now accept that there were now cases held at the right level and caseloads had reduced, allowing social workers more time for direct work with children. Auditing had become more accurate in terms of the level of practice and the number of audits rated as inadequate had fallen from 26% to 19%. The council had recruited 33 qualified social workers from South Africa and there had been success with providing home grown social workers through our academy. In terms of supervision, as of July they had increased to 66% from 39%. Therefore, she felt that there was some indication that things were moving in the right direction.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Patrick enquired whether there was any indication of meaningful outcomes for children and families that things were actually improving in their lives.

Councillor Cracknell responded that the focus was the child and Elected Members, as corporate parents, had a duty and responsibility to ensure our children were safe, secure and their well being prioritised. This was the focus of the service and as an example, recruitment of social workers would have much more direct work with children for longer periods of time. Similarly, supervision was directly concerned with the journey of the child and improvements to that child's life.

The Chair invited Councillor Patrick to present the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

"The recent cabinet decision around a temporary stopover site arrangement for the travelling community produced a list of sites of plausible use. Where, or when, might any member of the public find this list?"

Councillor Harness responded that no list was produced to or by Cabinet. Mention of a list was made at scrutiny by an officer. This was an internal assessment looking at all Council assets and applying the negotiated stop over site criteria to generally assess tiers 1 and 2. Wherever and whenever travellers arrived on public land the criteria would be applied, and matters dealt with appropriately. The site could be anything from a highway verge or a car park to a

school playing field. In the meantime, the portfolio holder referred Councillor Patrick to the published list of council assets on the council's website.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Patrick enquired why, given the sensitivities involved, a report was produced without knowing where any of the specific sites were.

Councillor Harness responded that within the report there were descriptions of the tier one and tier two sites. There was never any intention to name them. He reminded Council that a designated site was never found. Revealing a list could lead people to conclude that there were a number of designated sites and he felt that this could cause great harm within communities.

The Chair invited Councillor Patrick to present the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

"The current bus service in North East Lincolnshire is in a state of chaos, does the portfolio holder share my view that local councils like ours should have much stronger powers to regulate local services for the residents we represent?"

In the absence of the portfolio holder, the Leader of the Council responded that it was acknowledged that any cancellations to services was not acceptable but he disagreed that the bus service was in a state of chaos. He was reassured that Stagecoach were working hard to deliver more employed Stagecoach drivers, with driver recruitment and retention being a top priority for them. The challenges faced by Stagecoach with recruiting additional drivers was linked to the national recruitment crisis which impacted the majority of industries, rather than isolated, poor service and management by Stagecoach. As a result of the introduction of the National Bus Strategy and the Bus Services Act in 2017, a number of options were available to the council including continuing the Voluntary Bus Quality Partnership, creating an Enhanced Bus Quality Partnership Model or delivering franchising. North East Lincolnshire Council created an Enhanced Bus Quality Partnership which was a statutory partnership using existing powers in the Bus Services Act 2017. To implement Enhanced Bus Quality Partnerships, the Government required Local Transport Authorities to submit Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIP) which we did and secured nearly £4.7m of funding. The BSIP focused on improving the quality of the bus services and increasing passenger numbers. A franchise service was discounted based on independent specialist advice, which at the time believed the Authority did not have the capability and or resources to deliver this model. All Local Transport Authorities in the Yorkshire and Humber region discounted franchising and progressed with the Enhanced Bus Quality Partnerships. Through the Enhanced Bus Quality Partnership, the Council would continue to work in partnership with bus operators to monitor services and deliver service improvements. This dialogue ensured concerns and frustrations of residents and businesses were shared with Stagecoach so they were fully aware of the impact their services and performance had on the community. Officers ensured Stagecoach responded

quickly to mitigate poor service and expected Stagecoach to confirm they had introduced measures, including increasing driver numbers for added reassurance and resilience in their service.

Discussions around further powers to regulate local services would be welcomed and considered.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Patrick enquired whether the pursuit of a Greater Lincolnshire deal would provide an opportunity to seek more powers to regulate bus services.

Councillor Jackson responded that one of the asks of devolution deals had been more control over transport but he commented that there was a balance to be achieved. He felt that there was probably a need to have more influence over bus operators but it was important not to interfere to the point where services were affected. He added that he certainly was not in favour of re-municipalising bus services.

RESOLVED – That Councillor Harness provide a written response to Councillor Holland’s supplementary question regarding the budget for the new CCTV system.

NEL. 41 MINUTES OF THE CABINET AND COMMITTEES OF THE COUNCIL

The Council received the minutes of decisions taken under delegated powers at the following meetings:

- Cabinet – 20th July and 8th September
- Portfolio Holder Environment and Transport – 22nd August
- Scrutiny Panel Children and Lifelong Learning – 21st July
- Scrutiny Panel Communities - 7th July
- Scrutiny Panel Economy – 13th June and 12th July
- Scrutiny Panel Health and Adult Social Care – 3rd August
- Scrutiny Panel Tourism and Visitor Economy – 28th July
- Place Board (operating as the Health and Wellbeing Board – 11th July
- Audit and Governance Committee - 21st July
- Planning Committee – 13th July and 10th August
- Standards Referrals Panel – 8th September
- Appointments Committee – 27th June, 18th July and 2nd September

The Mayor advised that a number of questions on notice had been received on the above minutes. They would be dealt with in the order in which they had been received; each questioner would be permitted one supplementary question and there would be no debate on the questions asked or the answers given.

- (1) A question on notice was submitted by Councillor Patrick to the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets in accordance with the Council's Constitution as follows:

Cabinet – 20th July CB.22 (Gypsy and Traveller Negotiated Stopping Agreements)

How much consultation has there been with the public as to the sites considered as possible traveller stopover sites?

Councillor Harness, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets responded that no consultation with members of the public on the sites considered as possible stopover sites.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Patrick asked who would take responsibility for any social disorder arising from an occupation.

Councillor Harness responded that would be something to be considered if and when such an occurrence took place but he felt that would be the same issue if there was a designated stopover site.

- (2) A question on notice was submitted by Councillor Wilson to the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets in accordance with the Council's Constitution as follows:

Cabinet – 20th July CB.22 (Gypsy and Traveller Negotiated Stopping Agreements)

Why won't you publish the sites designated as tier 1 and tier 2?

Councillor Harness, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets responded that over many years the council had failed to secure a designated stopover site. He noted that tier 2 sites were not designated stopover sites.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Wilson requested to be provided with a list of all the sites within the Borough given his right of access to information as an Elected Member.

Councillor Harness responded that he had not seen and did not have such a list.

- (3) A question on notice was submitted by Councillor Wilson to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Education in accordance with the Council's Constitution as follows:

Cabinet – 8th September CB.37 (Children's Social Care and Complaints Annual Report 2021/22)

What lessons have been learnt from the children's social care statutory complaints and compliments annual report and how have services changed due to those lessons.

Councillor Cracknell, Portfolio Holder for Children and Education responded that the annual report was a very comprehensive document. The lessons learnt were set out on pages 26 to 29 of the report and were broken down into specific areas of work. A number of the complaints were very specific to an individual case but there had been improvements made, for example in relation to recording of incidents and the sharing of information.

- (4) A question on notice was submitted by Councillor Patrick to the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets in accordance with the Council's Constitution as follows:

Cabinet – 8th September CB.42 (Treasury Outturn Report)

Does the Portfolio Holder feel that we have a strong, or even acceptable rate of return in our investments?

Councillor Harness, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets responded that he was satisfied that the correct investment policy had been followed at a time when returns had been historically low. The report identified that the budget for investment income was £0.05m and the outcome was marginally below target. With increasing interest rates there would be a potential for better returns.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Patrick asked if the portfolio holder could provide examples of other local authorities he had looked at on this matter and what lessons he had learnt.

Councillor Harness responded that he had not look at other authorities as this was not part of his role but he would continue to work with officers to improve the council's strategy.

- (5) A question on notice was submitted by Councillor Wilson to the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets in accordance with the Council's Constitution as follows:

Cabinet – 8th September CB.42 (Treasury Outturn Report 2022/23)

With gathering speculation that interests rates will rise to 6%, what plans and or protection are in place to protect the Council from risks posed from these increases?

Councillor Harness, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets responded that it was not his position to speculate on interest rates. He felt that there was a robust treasury management strategy in place, with plenty of checks and balances built in, to ensure such risks were managed.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Wilson enquired what services would be cut to pay for the loans taken out by this council, should there be an increase to 6%.

Councillor Harness felt that this was the wrong time to be talking about cutting services. He anticipated that the Section 151 Officer would update the financial outturn and revise forecasts to enable a correct and sound assessment to be made.

- (6) A question on notice was submitted by Councillor Patrick to Chair of the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel in accordance with the Council's Constitution as follows:

Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel – 21st July 2022 SPCLL4. - Minutes

Can the Chair tell Council what insight did members find in this meeting with regards to the Children's Service improvement journey at this critical stage?

Councillor Silvester, Chair of the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel responded that no insight had been gained as it was not an agenda item.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Patrick quoted from the Ofsted inspection report regarding senior leadership and enquired whether Councillor Silvester was allowing history to repeat itself.

Councillor Silvester responded that he was not and noted that he had asked for children's social care improvement to be included as a standing item on the agenda for future panel meetings.

- (7) A question on notice was submitted by Councillor Wilson to the Chair of the Communities Scrutiny Panel in accordance with the Council's Constitution as follows:

Communities Scrutiny Panel – 7th July 2022 SPC.10 – (Rough Sleepers Initiative 2022-2025)

How many people from the Ukraine have settled in North East Lincolnshire using the scheme outlined in the minute.

Councillor Wilson acknowledged that this matter had been covered in the Leader's Statement earlier in the meeting and he therefore asked to withdraw the question. This was agreed.

- (8) A question on notice was submitted by Councillor Wilson to the Chair of the Communities Scrutiny Panel in accordance with the Council's Constitution as follows:

Communities Scrutiny Panel – 7th July 2022 SPC.10 – (Rough Sleepers Initiative 2022-2025)

How many rough sleepers which have been identified, originate from outside of North East. Lincolnshire and have no ties to the area?

Councillor Dawkins, the Chair of the Communities Scrutiny Panel responded that four people had been identified as having no connection to the area as at the end of August 2022.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Wilson asked whether the panel scrutinised how these individuals would get by in this area given that they were not entitled to support from the council.

Councillor Dawkins agreed to provide a written response.

- (9) A question on notice was submitted by Councillor Holland to the Chair of the Economy Scrutiny Panel in accordance with the Council's Constitution as follows:

Economy Scrutiny Panel – 13th June 2022

At the start of the meeting, the Chair made a statement that no discussion of the purchase of Freshney Place would be permitted during the meeting and the Chair stopped the subject being raised by myself. There is no record in the minutes of these matters. Can the Chair explain why not?

Councillor Freeston, Chair of the Economy Scrutiny Panel, responded that he mentioned this as general housekeeping but was happy to discuss with Democratic Services how this would be minuted in the future

In a supplementary question, Councillor Holland asked whether the minutes could be updated to reflect these matters.

Councillor Freeston signalled that he was content to do so and this was agreed by Council.

- (10) A question on notice was submitted by Councillor Shutt to the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets in accordance with the Council's Constitution as follows:

Economy Scrutiny Panel – 12th July 2022 SPE.13 – (Gypsy and Traveller Negotiated Stopping Agreements)

Can the Chair/Portfolio Holder please update the 3 Heneage Members with the list of Tier 2 sites in Heneage Ward that comply with the Negotiated Stopping Agreements criteria to be used by the council for Gypsy and Travellers coming to the area.

Councillor Harness responded that he would not.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Shutt asked how Members could determine why a site had been chosen as part of a stopover agreement without access to such a list.

Councillor Harness responded that all areas of public land could potentially be the subject of an unauthorised encampment. Equans were tasked with identifying land to be established as tier one and tier two sites. It was never the intention to make these results public. As he had earlier commented, the council had failed to identify a designated stopover site and releasing a list would inevitably result in sites being incorrectly identified as designated stopover places. He felt that Members should give the agreed policy every opportunity to prove its worth as a solution to the gypsy and traveller encampment problems previously experienced.

- (11) A question on notice was submitted by Councillor Patrick to Chair of the Economy Scrutiny Panel in accordance with the Council's Constitution as follows:

Economy Scrutiny Panel – 12th July 2022 SPE.13 – (Gypsy and Traveller Negotiated Stopping Agreements)

Is the Chair aware of which specific individual geographical locations this proposal would affect?

Councillor Freeston, Chair of the Economy Scrutiny Panel responded that he wasn't as a list had not been published but he understood that it would affect all council-owned land.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Patrick asked if, in a hypothetical situation, there was a settlement in the Croft Baker ward which led to social tensions alluded to in the past actually transpiring and local residents were made aware that the Chair voted in favour of these proposals without knowing where the pieces of land were, how would the Chair respond?

Councillor Freeston responded that he would not comment on hypothetical situations.

On the minutes of Cabinet and the Committees of the Council being proposed and seconded for adoption en bloc, Councillor Wilson requested an amendment to minute SPE.4 of the Economy Scrutiny Panel to include a summary of the point

he had made regarding the electrification of buses potentially resulting in lower fares and contributing towards increased footfall in the town centre.

RESOLVED –

1. That the minutes of the following meetings of Cabinet and the Committees of the Council be approved and adopted, as submitted, subject to the amendment of the minute SPE.4 of the Economy Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 13th June 2022 to note the actions of the Chair in relation to discussions on the purchase of Freshney Place and to include a summary of the point made by Councillor Wilson regarding the electrification of buses:
 - Cabinet – 20th July and 8th September
 - Portfolio Holder Environment and Transport – 22nd August
 - Scrutiny Panel Children and Lifelong Learning – 21st July
 - Scrutiny Panel Communities - 7th July
 - Scrutiny Panel Economy – 13th June and 12th July
 - Scrutiny Panel Health and Adult Social Care – 3rd August
 - Scrutiny Panel Tourism and Visitor Economy – 28th July
 - Place Board (operating as the Health and Wellbeing Board – 11th July
 - Audit and Governance Committee - 21st July
 - Planning Committee – 13th July and 10th August
 - Standards Referrals Panel – 8th September
 - Appointments Committee – 27th June 18th July and 2nd September
2. That Councillor Dawkins provide a written response to Councillor Wilson's supplementary question on minute SPC.10 of the Communities Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 7th July 2022 regarding support that would be provided to rough sleepers with no connection to North East Lincolnshire.

There being no further business, the Mayor declared the meeting closed at 10.50 p.m.