



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on 14th December 2023

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL

7th September 2023 at 2.00 pm

Present:

Councillor Astbury (in the Chair)
Councillors Aisthorpe, Boyd (substitute for Sandford) Croft (substitute for Batson)
Farren, Shutt and K. Swinburn.

Officers in attendance:

- Helen Issacs (Assistant Chief Executive)
- Jo Robinson (Assistant Director Policy Strategy and Resources)
- Kath Jickells (Assistant Director Environment)
- Eve Richardson Smith (Service Manager Consultancy and Deputy Monitoring Officer)
- Guy Lonsdale (Assistant Director Finance)
- Paul Caswell (Head of Young and Safe)
- Paul Thorpe (Operations Director, Equans)
- Mark Watson (Strategic Procurement and Contract Management Lead)
- Jo Paterson (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)
- Sophie Pickerden (Scrutiny and Committee Support Officer)

Also in attendance:

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

There were no members of the press present.

SPC.20 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

It was noted that Councillor Astbury had been appointed the Chair of the Communities Scrutiny Panel for this meeting only.

SPC.21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Batson, Sandford and Westcott.

SPC.22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

SPC.23 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Communities Scrutiny Panel meeting held on the 6th July 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

SPC.24 QUESTION TIME

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

SPC.25 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.26 TRACKING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF SCRUTINY

The panel received a report from the Statutory Scrutiny Officer tracking the recommendations of the Communities Scrutiny Panel.

At SPC.22 Registered Housing Provider the panel agreed that this remains on tracking to monitor progress.

Mrs. Paterson noted that at SPC.48, (regarding the household support fund), SPC.9 (regarding reserves and council tax provision) and SPC.10 (regarding number of fly tips) SPC.11 (broadcasting of meetings) were now all complete and the panel agreed that these be removed from tracking.

At SPC.3 (Parish council Community Governance Review) Mrs. Paterson noted that the recommendations were being taken to Full Council this evening and an update would be provided to the panel for the next meeting.

At SPC.8 members asked for an update regarding management of Homestead Park in relation to the new PSPO's. Mrs. Richardson Smith agreed to speak with Ms Logan to take the request forward.

A member referred to SPC.9 (Financial Outturn Report 22/23) regarding further information that was provided on staffing costs. It was noted that an upcoming training session would assist members understanding of how these figures were calculated.

RESOLVED

1. That SPC.48, SPC.9, SPC.10 and SPC.11, be removed from the tracking report.

2. That SPC.22, SPC.3 and SPC.8 remain on the tracking report to monitor progress.

SPC.27 COUNCIL PLAN RESOURCES & FINANCE REPORT – QUARTER 1 2023/24

The panel received a report from the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Economy, Net Zero, Skills and Housing, and the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets providing key information and analysis of the Council's finance and resources position at the end of quarter one.

It was noted that this report was considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 23rd August 2023 and was referred to all scrutiny panels.

Ms Robinson introduced the report and explained the reasoning behind introducing a new combined report noting that a training session with members had taken place on scrutinising performance earlier in the week. The training had covered accessing the council's performance information through the council's dashboard. Members were encouraged to use the dashboard to navigate the various performance information.

The Chair considered the council's dashboard a really valuable resource stressing that this was live data.

A member queried the asset sales and departmental savings and what was needed to obtain a balanced budget post Quarter 1.

Ms. Robinson responded that assets formed part of the resources area within the report. In terms of the council's achievements in Quarter 1, members were referred to the council's Disposal Programme and Property Rationalisation Plan, noting that at the end of Quarter 1 the council had recovered just short of £2m sold or subject to contract.

In terms of the financial aspects Mr. Lonsdale highlighted the variance in the main body of report within the resource's revenue budget relating to the flexible use of capital receipts within the disposal programme.

A member was concerned with the council's financial position at the end of the first quarter and asked whether the situation had improved.

Mr. Lonsdale responded that formal monitoring was undertaken on a monthly basis, noting that the period four figure did show improvements. The report outlined the various mitigations that had taken place. It was confirmed that the next formal reporting was in Quarter 2 which was at the end of September.

A member asked for assurance that the financial position would be more positive in the next quarter. Mr Lonsdale advised that period four figures were an improvement on Quarter 1.

A member asked what was being done to retrieve the large amount of council tax owed by landlords with empty properties across the borough. Mr. Lonsdale responded that council tax was still applicable and recoverable even within empty properties. It was further noted that the government had now introduced flexibility to apply premiums for properties empty for more than 2 years. Furthermore, the council reported on overall collection of council tax via the council tax base report in December.

In response to queries around the council tax recovery process, Mr Lonsdale explained the three stages of enforcement action and how the teams operated within certain areas of the borough. He further noted that there was some information on council tax collection within the performance report and explained that an analysis on recovery data could be provided to members.

Members asked for a briefing paper on information on council tax collection specifically relating to empty properties and how it was impacted by the council tax premiums that were applied. Members also asked for specific information on the number of council tax arrears written off.

Members requested further training on the process that was followed with empty properties.

RESOLVED -

1. That a briefing paper be provided to the panel on council tax collection specifically relating to empty properties and how it was impacted by the council tax premiums that were applied.
2. That it be requested that further training be provided on the process that was to be followed with empty properties

SPC.28 CCTV UPDATE

The panel received a report from the Director of Children's Services that provided the panel with an update on progress with the Council's Public Space CCTV Capital Upgrade Project.

Mr. Thorpe introduced the report and stated that the project had received an investment of £2.25m. The report also provided further performance

information since the CCTV network had been in place. The report also included examples of CCTV initiatives in place and also a number of case studies showing the benefits and achievements that had been made.

A member asked whether there were any CCTV cameras specifically located within parks across the borough and how they operated.

Mr. Thorpe confirmed that there was CCTV in a number of parks across the borough and the system now included a 4G network. Members asked for the number of CCTV cameras located in parks across the borough. It was confirmed that officers could provide this information to the panel.

A member asked whether there was any way in which councillors could have a direct line into the control room in order to move the cameras in real time. Mr. Thorpe was not aware that this facility was available to members and highlighted the processes that needed to be followed for contact through to the control room.

Mr. Hunt explained that when the project was first developed officers had considered whether it was viable to incorporate cameras in all open spaces. Mr Hunt further explained what had been done in terms of the rapid deployment of cameras. He further advised that cameras could only be moved if in response to specific issues i.e. anti-social behaviour.

A member considered that the cameras were useful but felt these could be used better by councillors involved in preventing anti-social behaviour in their wards.

In response to members queries, Mr Caswell explained that Stock or RDC's had been located in the East and West Marsh areas. Mr Caswell explained that local policing teams would be the first point of contact to include additional intelligence to support ongoing police investigations. Other options included reporting through 101. He stressed that when deploying cameras due to cost implications there had to be legitimate reasons to move them.

Members referred to the council's monthly CCTV Operation Group meetings and wished to understand how these meetings were organised. Mr. Caswell detailed how these meetings were structured and highlighted some recent agenda items.

Mr. Caswell provided more detail on how cameras were located and how they determined which cameras needed repairing and which areas to locate cameras based on factors such as criminal activity and vulnerable adults. It was noted that some of the cameras deployed were using 5G technology.

A member made a specific request for a camera to be located in Oxford Street, Grimsby. It was agreed that this would be resolved outside of the meeting.

Another member asked whether cameras could be located in Barrats Tennis Courts which had recently received £250k investment to improve the facility. Mr. Caswell assured members that the council were aware of local hotspots and were working with partners to resolve this.

A members asked how many Penalty Charge Notices (PCN) had been issued outside schools since the new cameras had been introduced. Ms Issacs noted that a recent press release relating to this data had been published on the council's website on 21st August.

A member commented on the School CCTV Initiative, noting that where four schools that had benefited from the installation of these cameras however there was no evidence to support this to show its success.

Members asked for further comparison data in relation to School CCTV be provided to a future panel.

A member asked for more context to the Environmental ASB enforcement data that had been provided in particular, the number of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN) that had been issued. Ms Jickells responded that no FPN's had been issued in the first quarter and the reasoning for this.

The Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities wished to add that there was a strict policy for the rapid deployment of cameras. It was hoped that more cameras in future could be deployed to more schools given its recent success.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport added that £100k had been allocated in the Local Transport Plan for cameras outside schools.

RESOLVED -

1. That further information be provided to the panel on the number of CCTV cameras located in parks across the borough.
2. That further comparison data for School CCTV be provided to members.

SPC.29 PROCUREMENT STRATEGY AND SOCIAL VALUE POLICY

The panel received a report from the Executive Director Place and Resources that set out the refreshed Procurement Strategy and Social Value Policy.

Ms Robinson introduced the report advising the panel that this was a key strategy and policy that the council worked to and was before the panel as part of the engagement and consultation on the draft policy prior to it going before Cabinet for approval in October.

Ms Robinson noted that a refresh of the Council Procurement Strategy was now required as previously the service had been shared with North

Lincolnshire Council. In terms of the Social Value Policy the delay in its implementation had been due to the response to the pandemic. As such this was now an opportunity to review both the Procurement Strategy and Social Value Policy that were interlinked.

Ms Robinson introduced Mark Watson the Council's new Procurement Lead. Ms Robinson highlighted that there was strict legislation around how the council went out to procure and stressed the importance of being transparent. There was also a focus on engaging the business and health sector for the social value elements and considered the various community and environmental benefits as part of the tender process.

The Chair considered this an interesting report. Another member complimented the officers on a very comprehensive report. In addition, members asked for some context around how many local suppliers or businesses the council currently had.

Mr Watson confirmed he could provide members with an analysis of the current spend relating to local suppliers and businesses the Council currently had.

In terms of what the council had achieved, a member queried the 25% of the council total procurement budget spent. Ms Robinson confirmed that this figure did not specifically relate to the local area. It was confirmed that the figure on the percentage of the council total procurement budget spent within the local area could be provided to members.

RESOLVED

1. That further information be provided to the panel on an analysis of the current spend relating to local suppliers and businesses the council currently had.

2. That further information be provided to the panel on the percentage of the council total procurement budget spent within the local area.

SPC.30 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER

There were no questions for the Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities at this meeting.

SPC.31 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.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 3.01 p.m.