

**ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
20 OCTOBER 2020**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR MRS W BOWKETT (CHAIRMAN)

Councillors C R Oxby (Vice-Chairman), Mrs A M Austin, G E Cullen, M A Griggs, A G Hagues, C Matthews, E J Sneath, H Spratt and Dr M E Thompson

Councillor C J Davie, attended the meeting as an observer

Officers in attendance:-

Judy Bell (LEADER LAG Manager, Infrastructure Investment), John Coates (Head of Waste), Thea Croxall (Principal Commissioning Officer (Learning)), Nick Harrison (Democratic Services Officer), David Hickman (Head of Environment), Nicole Hilton (Assistant Director - Communities), Neil McBride (Head of Planning), Matthew Michell (Waste Strategy Manager), Mandy Ramm (Funding and Investment Manager, Infrastructure Investment), Daniel Steel (Scrutiny Officer) and Vanessa Strange (Head of Infrastructure Investment)

21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

There were no apologies for absence.

22 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor H Spratt declared an interest in relation to the agenda item on *Adult Skills and family Learning Programme 2021 and the Impact of Covid-19* in that he was an occasional guest lecturer at Lincoln College.

23 DANIEL STEEL - SCRUTINY OFFICER

The Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, thanked Daniel Steel for his hard work and dedication to the work of the Committee and wished him well in his new position in the Registration Service.

24 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 8 SEPTEMBER 2020

RESOLVED

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**25 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLORS
AND LEAD OFFICERS**Economic update

Councillor C J Davie, Executive Councillor for Economy and Place, updated the Committee on a number of issues relevant to the Committee.

He reported that Autumn had seen a strong theme of Leadership across sectors, not least establishing the Tourism Commission, hosting the inaugural meeting on 28th September which would develop recommendations over the course of 6 meetings. The recommendations would be brought back to committee.

Supporting businesses and helping them to adapt to the future throughout the last six months had resulted in some striking statistics about the scale of need and activity. More than 600 businesses had enrolled onto LCC's Business Growth Hub Programme, more than 42,000 users had accessed the Growth Hub website since March and multiple well received on line events had taken place – including weekly events from Team Lincolnshire.

The Local Enterprise Partnership had approved the new Team Lincolnshire Business Plan for the next two years, it was focussed around: 1) The High Potential Opportunity in the Food Processing, Automation and Robotics Sector; 2) Investment and Development in the Commercial and Residential Sectors; 3) The Officer Relocation Sector – Enticing more businesses to our area. The new Team Lincolnshire Business Plan would be showcased to the Team Lincolnshire ambassadors on Thursday 22nd October at a webinar. Team Lincolnshire ambassadors would represent the region at the Midlands Forum for Growth Conference from 24-26 November talking about the South Lincolnshire Food Enterprise Zones, Enterprise Zones and our Future High Streets. As well as providing advice and access to grant funding a range of strong projects to support business and create opportunities continued to be delivered.

Work was progressing at pace on the South Lincolnshire Food Enterprise Zone in Holbeach. Following the award in August of £6.4m from the Government's Getting Building Fund, the Council was now able to proceed with the delivery of a Cluster Hub building on phase 1 of the scheme, which would provide a mix of employment space for small and start-up businesses, providing site infrastructure and taking steps to safeguard the future delivery of the second phase of the project. Architects had now been appointed for the design of the Cluster Hub building, which was due for completion by March 2022, and Agents had been appointed to promote the site. A soft launch of the new branding would take place in November followed by a full launch in early February.

The Pilgrim Fathers installation at Scotia Creek is due for completion in December, followed by the Huttoft Boat Shed café in January. The extension of the Skegness Countryside Business Park would be completed in March, and Agents had also been appointed to promote this scheme to local developers and small businesses, with some exciting expressions of interest having already been made.

In Market Deeping plans were currently being developed to spatially reconfigure the Eventus business centre, to adapt to small businesses' new ways of working, and this would provide a test bed for new forms of business accommodation, which could be developed elsewhere. Elsewhere in business centres small works were also planned over the winter at Wyvern House in Lincoln, the Carbon Neutral Business Zone (CaNeBuZo) in Long Sutton and Kirton Distribution Park, to improve the offer to small businesses.

Regular communications were being issued via Business Lincolnshire to remind employers that the current furlough scheme came to an end at the end of October and the new Job Support Scheme commenced from 1st November. Messages had gone out via all channels highlighting the support options available for businesses and employees who were facing redundancy situations. This included support from the DWP's Rapid Response Service as well as support from the Growth Hub Advisers for businesses wanting support for example, with diversification, finance or HR support. The Lincolnshire Chamber of Commerce was also providing up to 2 hours of free HR advice to all businesses (not just Chamber members). Business could also access mental health support tools. Employees considering starting a business could access one of 3 start-up schemes. 80% of clients undergoing diagnostics / reviews with the Growth Hub Advisers this week had highlighted an interest in the new DWP Kickstart scheme or internship programmes and Advisers were supporting SMEs to access these schemes.

Cumulative furlough data at Local Authority level to the 31st August showed that 95,600 people in Lincolnshire had been on furlough at some point since the scheme began (important to note this was cumulative). This was 29% of the eligible workforce and was slightly lower than the proportion nationally, which was at 30%. East Lindsey had the highest take up of any district in Lincolnshire, at 35%; whilst Boston had one of the lowest take up rates in the whole country at 21%. It was estimated that the total value of Job Retention Scheme claims in Lincolnshire was just over £300m.

Green Master Plan

The Head of Environment reported that the first draft of the Green Master Plan had been produced and would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

26 INTRODUCING A CHARGING POLICY FOR PRE-APPLICATION PLANNING ADVICE

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Planning, which sought Committee support for introducing a charging policy when providing pre-application advice to prospective applicants/developers.

The report outlined a suggested approach for different types of application and the proposed costs for each of the different levels of advice. Committee endorsement was sought for the development and setting up of a formal charging regime for giving pre-application planning advice for minerals, waste and the County Councils own

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applications, based on a proposed Charging Schedule and exemptions, as set out in the report, to take effect from April 2021. It was proposed that the Head of Planning review the Charging Schedule after a minimum of 12 months from its implementation.

There was no statutory requirement to provide a public consultation period prior to the introduction of any charges, nevertheless, it was recommended that a notice be placed on the Council's website at least four weeks prior to the start date. It was proposed that the fee charging take effect from April 2021.

Members considered the report, and during the discussion the following comments were noted:-

- Members acknowledged that the development of charges was in line with how other local authorities operated and was to be therefore supported and endorsed.
- It was unlikely that there would be charges between the County Council and District Councils.
- Several approaches for advice about the same application would likely result in multiple charges.

RESOLVED: That the Committee recommend the development of a charging policy for pre-application planning advice, as outlined in the report, to be considered by the relevant decision maker, and that the Head of Planning review the Charging Schedule after a minimum of 12 months from its implementation.

**27 ADULT SKILLS AND FAMILY LEARNING PROGRAMME 2020/21 AND
THE IMPACT OF COVID-19**

Consideration was given to a report from the Principal Commissioning Officer (Learning), which provided a summary of changes made to the delivery of the Adult Learning Programme, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and outlined its potential impact on future programme delivery.

The Council's Adult Skills & Family Learning Programme provided training for around 6,000 Lincolnshire residents each year. A large part of the programme was subcontracted to training providers across Lincolnshire ensuring residents had access to high quality, local provision. At the height of the pandemic all classroom learning provision had been cancelled.

It was noted that working in the current climate had increased the risk of under-delivering against the targets agreed for the 2020/21 academic year. The challenges included: increasing uncertainty as a result of the spread of the virus and unwillingness to attend classroom learning; reduced appetite for staff development from smaller businesses because they were focussing on survival; difficulties in delivering qualification programmes due to restrictions and lack of IT equipment; lack of suitable school teaching space to ensure the safety of those involved which had led to the postponement / cancellation of school based programmes; fragility of local providers, combined with restrictions, impacting on community engagement.

A risk analysis had been undertaken to mitigate against the risks identified and, as a result, a wider range of provision had been commissioned to encourage learner engagement, as well as planning for 30% of the provision to be delivered online to reduce reliance on classroom delivery. A flexible curriculum, combined with a blended delivery model, had helped to improve provider resilience. A promotional programme was in place to raise the awareness of the changing online offer.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the work being undertaken to deliver a flexible approach to accessing Adult Learning courses to meet the changing needs of learners as part of the post Covid-19 recovery be endorsed.

28 WASTE STRATEGY UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report from the Waste Strategy Manager, which invited comments from the Committee on the review of 10 strategic objectives set out in the Waste Strategy for Lincolnshire adopted by the Lincolnshire Waste Partnership (LWP) in January 2019 and outlined in the report.

In order to ensure the continued relevance of the Strategy, a review was being undertaken to consider the LWP's progress towards meeting those objectives and whether any of those objectives might need updating.

It was noted that Defra continued to aim for the 2023 introduction of policies including: consistency of waste collections – e.g. mandatory collection of food waste; enhanced Producer Responsibility (EPR) – a mechanism whereby packaging manufacturers would be financially responsible for the collection and recycling/disposal of their products, and; Deposit Return Schemes (DRS) - Charging a deposit for certain types of packaging which the public could reclaim upon returning the item for recycling.

Members considered the report, including a summary of the initial findings of the objectives review and during the discussion the following comments were noted:-

- The Lincolnshire Waste Partnership looked at best practice between both its partner members, other authorities and internationally. Joint statements were prepared in order to try and influence Government policy and partners endeavoured where possible to ensure a consistency of approach as well as operating to the latest best practices.
- The recent innovations in waste management were welcomed, however it was recognised that there was a need for greater public education in order for the benefits arising from these to be fully realised.
- It was noted that Government regulations for commercial waste were planned which were similar to those imposed on household waste collections.
- It was difficult to get good quality recycling from street litter bins. The Head of Waste undertook, following discussion, to look at the litter bin arrangements put in place at the Coastal Country Park with regard to collecting recyclable waste separately from general waste.

- Members commented on the possibility that the public may be demanding more packaging especially from market stall produce in view of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was noted with concern that deliveries from internet purchases often seemed to come with a lot of unnecessary packaging.
- 'Can Banks' were welcomed and it was hoped that more of these could be sited at the coast and the money raised from recycling the aluminium cans could continue to benefit local causes. More of these were likely to appear as part of the proposed Deposit Return Schemes.
- Innovative solutions were required for those members of the public who had small yards and gardens and who would find it difficult or impossible to accommodate their current recycling bins and any additional ones required in the future.
- The problems associated with the improper use of recycling bins in communal areas of flats was highlighted and recognised this was down to public behaviour.
- Consideration should be given as to whether there were any innovative solutions which could in the future connect litter with the culprit.

RESOLVED: The report be endorsed and the comments from members be considered by officers for inclusion in the report to be presented to the Lincolnshire Waste Partnership.

29 LINCOLNSHIRE LEADER PROGRAMMES

The Committee received a report from the Funding and Investment Manager and the Senior Project Officer, Infrastructure Investment, which set out the background and performance of the four Lincolnshire LEADER Programmes to date and provided case studies and an overview of emerging business needs based on the recently closed LEADER grant call which had been oversubscribed. The report invited the Committee to recommend the commissioning of a LEADER Evaluation, encompassing the programme and other areas of rural activity and a Rural Engagement Programme.

The LEADER 2014-2020 was a rural funding programme aimed at creating jobs, economic growth and community benefits. It was implemented under the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) and grant funding was available to local businesses, communities, farmers, foresters and land managers and was managed by a Local Action Group (LAG) comprising local public, private, third sector members with an appropriate sectoral balance. Each Programme focused the funding around 6 national LEADER priorities to boost rural economic growth through: supporting micro and small businesses and farm diversification; boosting rural tourism; increasing farm productivity; increasing forestry productivity (excludes Wash Fens Programme); providing rural services and providing cultural and heritage activities.

The report also made reference to the performance of the Lincolnshire specific LEADER Programmes; the LEADER Grant Call – Summer 2020 and the Rural Evaluation and Engagement Programme.

The take up of grants in the current call had demonstrated a demand for external funding support across several sectors. This particularly related to business needs in response to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The report indicated that it would be important to pull together a robust case for investment in the county's rural economy at a time when much of the government's levelling up agenda was focused on towns and cities. In evaluating the LEADER Programme and extending that scope to current rural needs and opportunities and engaging with further with rural businesses, stakeholders and communities, the County Council could draw together a prioritised approach to rural investment going forward. This in turn could be refined and tested with emerging data to produce critical insights and information to support the case for government investment in the county's rural economy and to add value and focus to the Council's advocacy and influencing role.

Members welcomed the informative report and especially the variety and diversity of the applications. It was noted that the scheme would not operate in its present form in the future as the UK would be leaving the EU. It was recognised that any new scheme would be able to build on the good publicity links the County Council had via District Council bulletins and other organisations newsletters.

RESOLVED: That the proposed evaluation and engagement approach of the LEADER programmes as recommended in the report be endorsed, to inform future policy and activity to support sustainable joined up rural growth in Lincolnshire.

30 ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received a report from the Scrutiny Officer, which enabled the Committee to comment on the content of its work programme for the coming year to ensure that scrutiny activity was focussed where it could be of greatest benefit.

In view of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Committee requested that a report on the performance and difficulties faced by the High Streets be included on a future agenda.

RESOLVED: That the work programme be approved and amended as outlined above.

The meeting closed at 11.57 am