



Open Report on behalf of Andrew Crookham, Executive Director - Resources

Report to:	Executive
Date:	5 September 2023
Subject:	Final Report from the Lincolnshire Agriculture Sector Support Scrutiny Review
Decision Reference:	I029568
Key decision?	No

Summary:

On 30 May 2023, the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee approved the attached scrutiny report on Lincolnshire Agriculture Sector Support for submission to the Executive. The report, prepared by Scrutiny Panel B on behalf of the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee, makes a total of eight recommendations (with sub-sections). The Executive is requested to receive the report and make arrangements for responding to the report by 05 November 2023. This is to comply with the legal requirement contained in the Local Government Act 2000 section 9FE requiring the Executive to respond within two months.

Recommendation(s):

That the Executive:-

- (1) considers the Lincolnshire Agriculture Sector Support Scrutiny Review final report; and,
- (2) makes arrangements to respond to the report within two months. The Executive is requested to ask the relevant Executive Councillor(s):
 - (a) to indicate in the response which recommendations have been accepted; and
 - (b) where recommendations are accepted, to bring forward an action plan for their implementation.

Alternatives Considered:

1. The report on Lincolnshire Agriculture Sector Support is submitted to the Executive under section 10 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules in the

Constitution. The Executive is legally required to respond to the report within two months. The Executive has the option to accept or not accept each of the recommendations included in the report.
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Reasons for Recommendation:

There is a constitutional requirement for the Executive to consider scrutiny review reports, and a legal requirement on the Executive to respond within two months.

1. Background

In February 2021, the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee identified support to farmers as a potential topic for a scrutiny review. The Committee recognised the unprecedented change that the sector is experiencing and will continue to experience. Drivers for change include global forces such as international conflict, Covid-19 and climate change as well as national policy decisions such as leaving the Common Agriculture Policy and the intent of the Agriculture Policy to create churn and transition. On 30 September 2021, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board considered and approved the allocation of this review topic to Scrutiny Panel B.

The following key lines of enquiry for the scrutiny review were agreed by the Panel:

1. To examine ways of developing support to meet the unmet needs of the agricultural sector in Lincolnshire, including mental health and any hardships arising from the Covid-19 pandemic and the EU Transition.
2. To examine and review what skills and training provision is required for agricultural businesses, as well as to seek ways to disseminate best practice amongst these.
3. To consider ways of supporting/encouraging farms 'Going Green' (i.e., incentives for environmental improvements, reducing CO2 emissions etc.) in line with the Lincolnshire Green Masterplan.

Scrutiny Panel B comprised of Councillors Gary Taylor (Chairman), Mike Clarke (Vice Chairman), Nicola Clarke, Alex Hall, Colin Matthews, Mrs Marianne Overton, and Robert Parker. The Panel met 13 times between January 2022 and March 2023. A series of site visits and thematic sessions were also conducted throughout the duration of this review. Councillor T Dyer, Executive Support Councillor for Economic Development, Environment and Planning, attended some of the meetings as an advisor on behalf of the Executive.

The attached report on Lincolnshire Agriculture Sector Support was approved by the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 30 May 2023. There are eight recommendations (each with subsections) contained in the report for the Executive's consideration.

The Executive is invited to consider the report and assign responsibility to the relevant Executive Councillor(s) for responding to the report. As part of its response, the Executive is requested to indicate to the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee which recommendations in the report are accepted. Where recommendations are accepted, there is also a request for an action plan, showing what steps are being taken to implement the recommendations, with projected timescales, where possible. This will enable the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee to monitor the implementation of any actions arising from the report.

2. Legal Issues:

Equality Act 2010

Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The relevant protected characteristics are age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to:

- Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic.
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it.
- Encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

The steps involved in meeting the needs of disabled persons that are different from the needs of persons who are not disabled include, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities.

Having due regard to the need to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to tackle prejudice, and promote understanding.

Compliance with the duties in section 149 may involve treating some persons more favourably than others.

The duty cannot be delegated and must be discharged by the decision-maker. To discharge the statutory duty the decision-maker must analyse all the relevant material with the specific statutory obligations in mind. If a risk of adverse impact is identified consideration must be given to measures to avoid that impact as part of the decision-making process.

There are not considered to be any direct implications for the Equality Act 2010 of the matters referred to in the report.

Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JHWS)

The Council must have regard to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JHWS) in coming to a decision.

There are not considered to be any direct implications for the JSNA and the JHWS of the matters referred to in the report.

Crime and Disorder

Under section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the Council must exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area (including anti-social and other behaviour adversely affecting the local environment), the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances in its area and re-offending in its area.

There are not considered to be any direct implications for crime and disorder of the matters referred to in the report.

3. Conclusion

In accordance with section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000 this Report constitutes notice from the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee requiring the Executive to consider the Lincolnshire Agriculture Sector Support Scrutiny Review report and to provide and publish a response to the Committee indicating what, if any, action the Executive proposes to make.

4. Legal Comments:

The Report introduces the results of a scrutiny review on Lincolnshire Agriculture Sector Support. The Report is submitted under section 10 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules in the Constitution. The Report contains a notice from the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee under section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000 and the Executive is required by section 9FE(5) of that Act to comply with the requirements specified in the notice.

5. Resource Comments:

There are no immediate financial or other resource implications arising from the recommendations in this report, i.e., that the Executive consider the Scrutiny Review report and make arrangements to respond to it. Resource implications may subsequently arise subject to the Executive's acceptance of the Review recommendations and any action plan that is developed. Any such implications will be addressed, as required, through the normal budget setting process.

6. Consultation

a) Has Local Member Been Consulted?

n/a

b) Has Executive Councillor Been Consulted?

Yes

c) Scrutiny Comments

At its meeting on 30 May 2023, the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee unanimously approved the draft final report as the final report on Lincolnshire Agriculture Sector Support, for submitting to the Executive.

The following points were highlighted:

- Members commended Scrutiny Panel B for the completion of a comprehensive report and a detailed analysis of the contemporary issues facing the sector at a period of transition and developing recommendations designed to address challenges and promote opportunities.
- Members comments focussed on three main areas: Lincolnshire County Council Role as a convenor and advocate; Lincolnshire County Council championing innovation in the sector; and Lincolnshire County Council promoting employment opportunities.

Lincolnshire County Council as convenor and advocate:

- Members supported the reinstatement of the Greater Lincolnshire Forum for Agriculture and Horticulture. The Forum would aim to provide a space to address a number of issues highlighted by Members, including the prominent issues faced by small and medium size businesses who experienced restrictions on accessing funding due to lower cash flows in comparison to the bigger corporations. This was bound to hinder their technical evolution and ability to stand against competition.
- Members echoed the findings of the report in relation to mental health problems

experienced in the farming sector, noting that service provision should be promoted via any and all available avenues to ensure individuals do not fall through gaps and do not suffer in silos. Officers described the support that is currently available through organisations such as the Lincolnshire Rural Support Network, the National Farmers Union, Lincolnshire Partnership Foundation NHS Trust, and other community groups, to alleviate those pressures and noted that there were great efforts in reaching out to farming communities and informing them of services available.

- Members asked what the County was doing to prioritise food production – for example: the growing space beneath the solar panel fields, referenced -albeit not being thoroughly investigated- in this review. Officers gave assurance that dedicated land use planning framework discussions took place, in which the Executive Portfolio holder Cllr C Davie was being involved and in which he carried the County Council's voice on a national level arena. Members asked that concerns on the side effects of the energy industry (e.g., surplus heat generated from the operation of bio digestion) be raised on behalf of the County.
- Members were particularly interested in the Championing the Farmed Environment project as one example of balancing the needs of the environment while, still focussing on food production.
- Members concurred that Lincolnshire County Council should investigate further its role in facilitating the coordination of efforts of partner agencies, District Councils, relevant bodies, and community groups in supporting the sector.

Lincolnshire County Council championing innovation in the sector:

- Officers informed members, that according to the Panel's findings, Lincolnshire businesses are national leaders, providing innovation, intellect, expertise, which will propel the UK food and farming sector through the transition period. LCC will continue to promote the UK Food Valley and our pioneering value in food production and innovation for UK PLC.
- Advice is available to farmers from a range of sources including: the Growth Hub, land agents, agricultural consultants, agronomists, and other professionals who strived to link farmers with existing opportunities. Officers acknowledged the challenges to businesses and explained that Defra had contracted some initial support for the sector through local Land Agents to deliver free advice sessions on a wide variety of topics including the new farming policy, succession planning, changes in payments and other. There is also significant information online. However, the future funding environment is complex and ever emerging.
- Members emphasised that soils health and water supply, bore a very important message about the future of the environment and ecosystem, as evident in the report. Officers gave assurance that the environmental impact of agriculture was

linked to the Green Masterplan. Further action plans that would emerge from this review would reflect on skills agenda and changes in practice linked to these, and how these could be diffused in the farming communities (including County Farms).

- It was clarified for Members that County Farms albeit being undeniably a source of revenue that supported various services of Lincolnshire County Council, they were still viewed as a steppingstone for young career entrants and in the future as space for innovation and increased collaboration amongst farmers. Officers emphasised that there is a role for Lincolnshire County Council either directly or through land agents in helping farm tenants evolve and achieve the aspirations outlined through the new Agriculture Act.

Lincolnshire County Council promoting employment opportunities:

- In relation to labour shortages and pressures owed to current restrictions on immigration policy highlighted, Members queried whether gaps in labour could be filled by students or residents with an unemployment status; and considered access to employment in the sector. Shortages in labour carrying out fieldwork was highlighted as an example. It was indicated that low salaries paid, lack of transportation options for remote locations, in conjunction with the reality of manual labour being physically demanding were deterring factors. Officers explained that flexibilities around seasonal labour were sought on a national level through changes in policy, to help businesses plan their labour supply over a period. Furthermore, officers described the very significant opportunities for aspirational careers within the sector. Technology and automation, a new approach to the environment and food production were all highlighted. Members also highlighted the plethora of associated industries, such as agricultural engineering – recognising that Lincolnshire had a proud history of innovation in this space and continued to be an international leader. Members agreed that students should be encouraged to seek a career in agriculture rather than seeing in as a stopgap whilst studying and that Lincolnshire County Council continued being proactive in collaborating with education providers and promoting roles and careers in the sector that are directly linked to jobs within the county. Officers agreed that this was being picked up through action plans.

Point of clarification:

- Relevant to page 64 of the report [Table 1 Lincolnshire County Council Area Food Chain Employment (2021)], it was explained that the “10 employed in fishing and aquaculture” reflected on individuals who run fish farms where more individuals were being employed.

d) Risks and Impact Analysis

See main body of report.

7. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Lincolnshire Agriculture Sector Support Final Report
Appendix B	Agriculture Across Lincolnshire- Evidence Considered

8. Background Papers

The background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 used in the preparation of this report are the Background items described in the Scrutiny Review Report.

This report was written by Kiara Chatziioannou, Scrutiny Officer, who can be contacted on 07500 571868 or kiara.chatziioannou@lincolnshire.gov.uk.