



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

Report to:	<b>Executive</b>
Date:	<b>03 October 2023</b>
Subject:	<b>Final Report from the Town Centre Improvements Scrutiny Review</b>
Decision Reference:	<b>I030179</b>
Key decision?	<b>No</b>

**Summary:**

On 12 September 2023, the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee approved the attached scrutiny report on Town Centre Improvements for submission to the Executive. The report, prepared by Scrutiny Panel A on behalf of the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee, makes a total of six recommendations (four of which with subsections). The Executive is requested to receive the report and make arrangements for responding to the report by 03 December 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 Town Centre Improvements Scrutiny Review final report.
- 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:**

The report on Town Centre Improvements 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.

**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**

On 30 September 2021, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board approved a scrutiny review of Town Centre Improvements in the context of stimulating new business and employment opportunities, reviving retail, and supporting a broader demographic to use town centres, notably by younger people. Scrutiny Panel A was assigned the task of undertaking the review.

The terms of reference were agreed at the first meeting of Scrutiny Panel A in January 2022. The review would focus on current needs and opportunities emerging in Lincolnshire town centres (excluding Lincoln), high streets and market towns.

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

- (1) Understanding changes in behaviours, shopping, land use and the impact of technology on the future of high streets across Lincolnshire and how that changes the infrastructure and services needed in town centres.
- (2) Consider the delivery of existing Towns Fund deals; future project pipelines and the ways in which the Council could effectively support such changes and projects.
- (3) Examine how the Council can support the needs of businesses (including retail and hospitality sectors) in town centres, including hardships arising from the Covid-19 pandemic and the EU Transition.
- (4) Identify the best practice of supporting green recovery of the high street.

The Scrutiny Panel comprised Councillors Phil Dilks (Chairman), Tracey Carter (Vice Chairman), Stephen Bunney, Mrs Julie Killey, Noi Sear, Adam Stokes, and Mark Whittington. The Panel met twelve times between January 2022 and April 2023. A series of site visits and workshops were also conducted throughout the duration of this review. Previous scrutiny activity on this subject is set out in the relevant appendices to the report.

The attached report on Town Centre Improvements was approved by the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 12 September 2023. There are six recommendations (four of which 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 Town Centre Improvements 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 Town Centre Improvements. 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 significant financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report, i.e., for the Executive to review the report and make arrangements to respond to it. Financial implications may arise subject to the Executive Councillor subsequently accepting recommendations included in the report and the action plan that is developed. Any such implications will be dealt with, as required, through the normal budget setting process.

## **6. Consultation**

### **a) Has Local Member Been Consulted?**

Not Applicable

### **b) Has Executive Councillor Been Consulted?**

Yes

### **c) Scrutiny Comments**

At its meeting on 12 September 2023, the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee approved the final report on Town Centre Improvements, for submitting to the Executive.

The following points were highlighted:

Business Support:

- Consideration of business rates for business units should be a priority for rejuvenating town centres especially where businesses were not generating sufficient income, supports should be offered. It was agreed that any offer for business support should be in addition to advice given to businesses by District Councils, complementing thus an area of clear responsibility for the former, avoiding any duplication of efforts.
- Supporting businesses to “go green” through adopting sustainable and conscious practices was another priority identified and supported by Members.
- Promoting smaller locally based independent retailers rather than bigger firms and nationwide chains, was argued to be a factor that affected town centres’ aesthetics and enhanced individual character, creating thus vibrant environments appealing to residents and visitors.
- Emphasis was placed in the need for effective mediation and partnership building between the private and public sector related to Levelling Up projects in terms of reflecting on business’s needs whilst investing in future proofing Lincolnshire towns. Lincolnshire County Council had also a leading role in fostering and

overseeing the integration of local authority tiers (Town Councils, Parish Councils, District Councils) in all future plans.

- Members welcomed the suggestion of a designated pot of funding for all Members to bid for local projects and activities that aimed at increasing footfall and showcasing the unique selling point of Lincolnshire towns.

#### Public Transport:

- Reliable public transport was crucial for the increase of footfall of town centres. Connectivity between housing estates and local communities through transport, footpaths, cycling routes should be encouraged in line with goals for reducing carbon emissions.

#### Placemaking:

- Absent landlords remained an issue in many town centres which requires attention. Members cautioned that Local Planning Authorities must be included in the development of placemaking plans; this should be explicitly captured in recommendations (R3) and future action plans that emerged from this review. Assurances were given that Lincolnshire County Council was already undertaking a key role in the development of spatial planning, working with Local Planning Authorities and lobbying the government to ensure that the rural voice of Lincolnshire is heard (e.g., in relation to the Planning Reform Bill).
- The gradual reduction of number of banks across town centres was noted as an important factor that affected shopping behaviour of local residents. Members were content to see this reported in the review.
- Members were pleased to receive assurances on Transport Boards being the appropriate forum for discussion and addressing local town centre issues and opportunities.

#### Data Driven Decision-Making:

- Data management was a sensitive matter that required well defined responsibilities for those custodians of sources of data. Assurances were offered that data was stored and used appropriately and was already being used towards making crucial decisions that impacted the future of towns and the county as a whole (i.e., Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure, Energy Options etc.).

Members thanked Scrutiny Panel A for a comprehensive and tremendously thorough review and extended their support of the Recommendations made throughout.

#### **d) Risks and Impact Analysis**

Not Applicable

## 7. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Town Centre Improvements Report by Scrutiny Panel A on behalf of the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee (August 2023)
Appendix B	Appendices 1–7 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 by e-mail at [kiara.chatziioannou@lincolnshire.gov.uk](mailto:kiara.chatziioannou@lincolnshire.gov.uk).

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