

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 14 December 2012

Statement from: Councillor M J Hill OBE– Leader and Executive Councillor for Policy, Strategy and Communications.

HMP Lincoln

In mid-October the Council became aware of a review of the role of Lincoln Prison, which is currently a Category B Local (Remand) Prison. Options that were under active consideration included downgrading to a Category C (non-remand) prison, conversion to an Immigration Removal Centre under the auspices of the UK Border Agency, or closure. This review was part of a national effort to reduce the number of prison places. Lincoln Prison found itself under specific consideration due to some analysis of potential cost saving and performance improvement which was carried out on the basis of some very narrow criteria.

Over the following six weeks, considerable efforts were made by myself and the Council's officers to analyse the issues facing the prison and to quantify the effects that any of these changes would precipitate upon other agencies and the community as a whole. We engaged extensively with the prison authorities and the wider criminal justice community in doing so, and quickly established that any of these proposals would be highly detrimental to the economy of the county, the viability of the criminal justice system, and the opportunities available for rehabilitating offenders. Whilst the formal position was that the decision would be an internal matter for the prison service, I was determined that no such change should take place until the community and the various interests that would be effected had a chance to be consulted upon any such change and to make its views known. I worked with the MP for Lincoln, Karl McCartney, key local private suppliers of services, solicitors and the media to make my concerns known to the community and to the Ministry of Justice, and was pleased to be able to lead these local interests to a meeting organised by Karl McCartney with the Minister for Prisons and Rehabilitation, Jeremy Wright MP, and his key officials, at the House of Commons on 27th November.

At that meeting we were able to put a comprehensive and robust case for making no change to the role of the Prison on the present basis, or in the current circumstances, and were able to put to the Minister a vision of an enhanced future for the prison based upon close working with the new and imaginative prison regime that has been put in place. At that meeting the Minister explained that although the option of converting the prison into an Immigration Removal Centre was proving problematic, he was still considering downgrading or closure in the light of the information before him.

I left London convinced that we had put our case well, a view shared by all in the deputation group, and was therefore delighted with the Minister's announcement, just two days later, to the effect that there would be no change in the role of the prison at the present time.

This is a significant success in securing the prison for the foreseeable future, and safeguarding the wider criminal justice system in Lincolnshire. I am determined to build upon this by putting in place arrangements to better bring the prison into the joint

working arrangements of the public services in the county, both strategically and in terms of its day-to-day work, in order that the problem should not arise again. Measures to effect this are currently being drawn up, and I am confident that we will be bringing forward proposals to improve our collaboration with the prison in the near future.

Corporate Property Rationalisation Programme

Area reviews and rationalisation are continuing around the county.

In Boston the County Hall is now vacated with only the library remaining. Staff and the Registrars Service have been co-located with Boston Borough Council and this has seen a reduction in office space of 3,339 square metres. Proactive marketing of the site will commence in January.

Other rationalisation projects are commencing in Sleaford, Skegness and Horncastle, with a potential reduction in office space of 4,500 square metres. Revenue savings in the region of £300k will be achieved.

In the Lincoln area medium and long term options are being explored and, since November 4th, further leases have been surrendered reducing office space by over 1,000 square metres and achieving savings of £200k.

This rationalisation programme will deliver the Core Offer property saving of £1million required by the Council.

Registration Celebratory and Coroners Service

The implementation of two Coronial Jurisdictions for Lincolnshire has seen the appointment of Professor Robert Forrest to the South Lincolnshire area, with the full support of Registration Celebratory and Coroners Service staff. Professor Forrest brings a new dimension to this independent role, as an eminent toxicologist with strong links to the County.

During a period of change for the Registration Celebratory and Coroners Service, it is significant that Lincolnshire has gained the Customer Service Excellence award with 100% compliance for the third year in a row. The award is the result of a rigorous, independent inspection of the Service, which noted the very high levels of customer satisfaction, staff dedication and active consultation to develop the way Service is provided. An increase in on-line bookings, Citizenship Ceremonies and the development of the Tell-us-once scheme were all recognised – maintaining this level of service at a time of significant financial pressures is a fantastic achievement.

Work is on-going to ensure efficiencies are achieved whilst the quality of service is maintained – new legislation will change the way that services are provided, but Lincolnshire continues to support local people and visitors who use this service during significant events in their life.