

**ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE
16 JANUARY 2024**

PRESENT:

Councillors M A Griggs (Vice-Chairman), A J Baxter, M D Boles, I G Fleetwood, A G Hagues, H Spratt, G J Taylor and L Wootten

Councillor C J Davie attended the meeting remotely.

Officers in attendance:-

Justin Brown (Assistant Director Growth), Kiara Chatziioannou (Scrutiny Officer), Michelle Grady (Assistant Director – Finance), Nicole Hilton (Assistant Director - Communities), Marianne Marshall (Communications) (Strategic Communications Lead), Chris Miller (Head of Environment), Mandy Ramm (Funding and Investment Manager, Infrastructure Investment) and Vanessa Strange (Head of Infrastructure Investment) and Jess Wosser-Yates (Democratic Services Officer)

46 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councilor I D Carrington, Mrs. A Austin and K H Cooke.

47 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No interests were declared at this point in proceedings.

48 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 28 NOVEMBER 2023

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 28 November 2023 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record

49 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLORS AND LEAD OFFICERS

Councillor C Davie, Executive Councillor for Economic Development, Environment and Planning made the following announcements:

- He thanked all officers involved with the relief efforts following Storm Henk; the storm resulted in 128 properties in Lincolnshire experiencing internal flooding, and 170 reporting external flooding.

- It was noted that alongside the impact of Storm Babet, the combined number of properties reporting internal flooding was 842, with 56 having flooded during both storms.
- The Council had freed additional resources to enhance existing flood defenses.
- The Executive Councillor intended to write to the Prime Minister to request additional funding to ensure the County Council was sufficiently resourced to be resilient against flooding as the Lead Local Flood Authority.
- Following a successful programme in 2023, the Apprenticeship Champion Awards would be held at the Showroom in Lincoln on 16 May 2024. The event celebrated the valuable contributions of apprentices, employers and training providers and this year, the awards would be delivered in partnership with North and North East Lincolnshire Councils.
- Uptake of the adult education programme *Multiply* had increased across Lincolnshire; Boston Women's Aid had supported a service user to become financially stable and enrol back into college to complete a maths qualification which would eventually allow them to progress on an access to nursing course.

Members noted the announcements and raised the following matters in response to the Executive Councillors announcements regarding recent flooding:

- It was assured that additional funding would be utilised to ensure drains were maintained sufficiently to prevent blockages; the Executive Councillor was liaising with the Executive Councillor for Highways, Transport and I.T to promptly resolve this matter.
- The Executive Councillor noted that additional resources were required to ensure drain networks were operating sufficiently; Section 19 investigations carried out by the Flood and Water Team would help determine the issues causing flooding and identify the agencies responsibilities for maintenance.
- Members highlighted that communication between partners regarding road closures had been insufficient and noted that the decision for Nottinghamshire Council to close Trent Bridge went ahead without informing the Council or Lincolnshire residents. The Executive Councillor assured that work would be ongoing via the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) to improve communication and ensure residents were best informed.
- It was questioned whether any financial support would be available for residents impacted by Storm Henk; consequently, the Executive Councillor agreed to discuss with local members how best to support flooded homeowners.
- The Executive Councillor expressed that roads were closed to allow for maintenance and repairs, although he acknowledged the frustration of residents. He accepted that any road closure had a temporary adverse economic impact, however he assured he would work with local Members visit impacted divisions where possible.
- Members thanked the Local Resilience Forum, officers and colleagues responsible for flood alleviation across Lincolnshire.
- It was questioned whether any activities had been organised with partners to coordinate responses to flooding. The Committee was informed that the Working Group as part of the Flood and Water Management Committee would work closely

with the Environment Agency (EA) and Anglian Water (AW). Additionally, both the EA and AW would offer an update on their work at the Flood and Water Management Scrutiny Committee meeting on 19 February 2024.

- The letter to the Prime Minister from the Executive Councillor acknowledged that the Environment Agency, as well as the Council, was underfunded in their flood alleviation efforts.
- The impact of climate change was acknowledged by the Committee and the Executive Councillor; Storms Babet and Henk, given their close succession, highlighted the contemporary increased frequency of extreme weather events. The Executive Councillor noted the importance of increasing Lincolnshire's resilience, water protection for residents and water security for businesses, although accepted that the matter was underpinned by a lack of funding from government which impeded sufficient maintenance of watercourses.

50 REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET PROPOSALS 2024/25

Consideration was given to a report from the Assistant Director – Finance, which outlined the Council's budget proposals and implications for the fiscal year 2024-2025 for the Council's environment and economy services.

The budget was adjusted to acknowledge the challenging economic context with persistent impacts of inflation and subsequent increased service costs. Members were informed that the Executive had considered proposals for the Council's revenue and capital budgets on 9 January 2024 to form the basis for consultation. This also united the settlement for local government and the budget to cover the cost of heightened inflation.

The Council had responded to the National Living Wage uplift by proposing a 4.99% increase in Council Tax, and Members were subsequently directed to Table 1.2.2 in the report which set out revenue proposals amounting to £2.2 million savings; although it was noted that pay inflation had not been included – it was expected to increase by 4% and once agreed, would be included the budget.

Increased costs had been associated with waste disposal and rights of way, and proposed changes to the Planning Team were offset by additional income. The Capital Programme set out additions, most notably to waste and flooding, and Members were informed that the Executive had approved an additional £4 million from the development fund to help support the impact of flooding in Lincolnshire.

During consideration of the report, the following matters were noted:

- Members expressed some concern regarding the impact of market price changes, most notably the sale or disposal of waste materials, and questioned whether

officers were confident and prepared for the potential impact from the Environment Act especially with regards to flood incident response and prevention. The Assistant Director – Finance accepted the volatility of the national and local economic landscape and assured that ongoing work with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to prepare for the implementation of the Act.

- Officers assured that the £4 million approved by the Executive from the development fund would be used to support flood alleviation projects following the significant impact of Storm Babet and Storm Henk.
- Members raised some apprehension regarding the economic landscape, most notably the expected reduction in funding from government, the subsequent need to raise and optimize Council Tax, and the escalated cost of financing projects and services. Officers expressed that detailed contingency planning had occurred to mitigate the effects of inflation and to develop a medium-term financial plan to address uncertainties, particularly in relation to social care and transport.
- Members suggested that increase base rates as outlined on Table 1.3.2 of the report constituted a challenge and questioned whether there was any plans to mitigate medium-term risk; the treasury strategy had been scrutinised by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and the capital programme was based on contributions and grants where appropriate; the Council had used its own cash balance to supplement shortfalls which had prevented interest rates having to be paid repaid – cash management strategy attempted to primarily consider the medium/long term.

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee supports the proposed budget for the service areas within the Committee's remit.
2. That the Committee's comments be captured and shared with the Executive in support to their consideration of a decision on 6 February 2024.

51 TOWN CENTRES IMPROVEMENTS SCRUTINY REVIEW - EXECUTIVE RESPONSE ACTION PLAN

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Infrastructure Investment and the Funding and Investment Manager on the Executive's response action plan on the Town Centres Improvement's Scrutiny Review. The Executive had considered the Town Centre Improvements in Lincolnshire report and had agreed to respond by 3 December 2023. This response indicated the accepted recommendations and sought to introduce an action plan for their implementation.

The Committee was guided through the report and was informed that the proposed outline plan commenced in April 2024 primarily for market towns across Lincolnshire, and the proposed actions were proportionate in regards to officer availability, the statutory roles of

the Council, and enhanced activities. The plan was described as a whole system approach dedicated to improving town centres.

It was further noted that a cross-council virtual officer working group would support the strategic overview of the agreed action plan and report on the delivery of the recommendations to Members. Additionally, external collaboration and engagement would be facilitated through a series of Local Transport Board meetings as set out in the report. The action plan also proposed a single point of contact (SPOC) dedicated to expertly feed into the officer working group in order to maintain a real time oversight of requirements in town centres. The Committee was informed that officers were currently reviewing a number of pilots with the University of Lincoln, and continued to engage with other partners to ensure work was not duplicated.

During consideration of the report, the following matters were noted:

- Members expressed encouragement in the opportunities being offered to improve Lincolnshire's town centres and requested that updates on the implementation of the action plan be considered by the Committee when appropriate.
- The Committee welcomed the work alongside Local Transport Boards given the rurality and size of Lincolnshire.
- The introduction of a SPOC was supported by the Committee; the Head of Infrastructure Investment subsequently highlighted that the training due to be undertaken by the SPOC would be considered by the Committee at a later meeting.
- Members acknowledged the integral role of partnership working, notably with local police colleagues and the Police Crime Commissioner in the implementation of the action plan.
- It was suggested that events in town centres could be better supported and promoted by utilising County News magazine and social media.
- Details were requested specifically regarding the pilots in Mablethorpe and Holbeach. The Funding and Investment Manager clarified that the Council had created an augmented reality train, whereby residents and visitors of Mablethorpe could download apps on their phones which would enable them access to historical and contemporary stories to increase footfall. Additionally, an app would be introduced in Holbeach which would enable local businesses to share their personal stories, and advertise offers on the app. The Funding and Investment manager noted that multiple District Council's were interested in introducing similar apps and pilots in their communities.
- It was highlighted that a similar local app was introduced in South Kesteven; it was noted that officers had liaised with South Kesteven District Council and it was assured that activity would not duplicated.
- Members requested additional information regarding the recommendation in the report that each County Councillor would receive £3,000 to support local activities aimed at increasing town centre footfall in their divisions. The Committee was

subsequently informed that there would be a pot of money that Councillors could choose to apply for support a relevant project in their local town centres.

- The Head of Infrastructure Investment noted that there had been enthusiasm from local members in Lincoln city as well as more rural areas, although the detail was being investigated as to whether the action plan would be implemented in the city or solely smaller town centres, although the importance of flexibility within implementing the action plan was noted too.
- The Head of Infrastructure Investment encouraged Members to contact her if they wanted to be on the cross-council virtual officer working group.

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee endorses the report and action plan
2. That the Committee's satisfaction be recorded on the detailed account provided regarding actions that seek to discharge the recommendations
3. That a further update on the progression of the action plan be brought back to the Committee for its consideration in September 2024.

52 ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report from the Scrutiny Officer which enabled the Committee to comment on the contents of its work programme.

Members were informed that there had been no amendments to the published work programme.

RESOLVED

That the work programme be agreed.

The meeting closed at 11.04 am