

# Value for Money Progress Report

Lincolnshire County Council – year  
ended 31 March 2021

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November 2021



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# VFM arrangements – Progress Report

## Approach to Value for Money arrangements work

We are required to consider whether the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. The NAO issues guidance to auditors that underpins the work we are required to carry out and sets out the reporting criteria that we are required to consider. The reporting criteria are:

- **Financial sustainability** - How the Council plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services.
- **Governance** - How the Council ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks.
- **Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness** - How the Council uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services.

At the planning stage of the audit, we undertake work so we can understand the arrangements that the Council has in place under each of the reporting criteria; as part of this work we may identify risks of significant weaknesses in those arrangements. Where we identify significant risks, we design a programme of work (risk-based procedures) to enable us to decide whether there is a significant weakness in arrangements. Although we describe this work as planning work, we keep our understanding of arrangements under review and update our risk assessment throughout the audit to reflect emerging issues that may suggest there are further risks of significant weaknesses.

Our assessment of what constitutes a significant weakness is a matter of professional judgement, based on our evaluation of the subject matter in question, including adequacy of the Trust's responses. The National Audit Office's guidance states that a weakness may though be said to be significant if it:

- Exposes (or could reasonably be expected to expose) the body to significant financial loss or risk;
- Leads to (or could reasonably be expected to lead to) significant impact on the quality or effectiveness of service or on the body's reputation;

- Leads to (or could reasonably be expected to lead to) unlawful actions; or
- Involves a failure to take action to address a previously identified significant weakness, such as failure to implement or achieve planned progress on action/improvement plans.

Where our risk-based procedures identify actual significant weaknesses in arrangements, we are required to report these and make recommendations for improvement. To arrive at our assessment, we performed a variety of work to obtain an understanding of the Trust's arrangements for each specified reporting criteria. This included performing a detailed risk assessment, drawing from a variety of sources, including, but not limited to:

- Meeting with management and reviewing management's self-assessment;
- Considering the views of the Audit and Risk Committee;
- Reviewing supporting guidance from the National Audit Office, including indicators of significant weaknesses;
- Considering our understanding of sector developments and any local issues;
- Reading and reviewing Board and Committee reports;
- Reviewing the Trust's Annual Governance Statement and Annual Report;
- Considering the outcomes from the work of internal audit;
- Reading risk registers and risk management reporting; and
- Considering the work of regulators and inspectorates.

# VFM Progress Report

Financial sustainability: How the Council plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services

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# Initial observations: financial sustainability

## Covid-19: Context & Financial Impact

We obtained Local authority Covid-19 financial impact monitoring information published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, which is summarised in the following tables. It shows £6.9billion in additional expenditure and £5.1billion in income losses.

The Council has described the financial impact of Covid-19 in Note 4 of the financial statements, which is summarised as:

- £75m expenditure included in the cost of services; and
- £88m in government grants and reimbursements

With the net amount carried forward into 2021/22 for ongoing costs. Our testing of the financial statements, including grant income did not identify any significant issues.

As set out in the 2021/22 budget, the Government has supported the additional costs and losses the Council has incurred in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Council's budget for 2021/22 assumes immediate costs and losses will continue to be supported via these government grants and the papers set out the types of pressures the Council expects to face.

There is no denying the financial impact of the pandemic, but as long as the Government remains committed to supporting public finances, there is no indication of a significant weakness in the Council's arrangements for financial sustainability as a result of Covid-19.

	2020-21 Additional expenditure due to Covid-19 by class of authority (£'m)	2020/21: Income losses due to Covid-19 by class of authority (£'m)
Shire District	330	1,308
Shire County	2,111	259
Unitary Authority	1,791	1,114
Metropolitan District	1,504	1,053
London Borough	1,127	1,343
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,863</b>	<b>5,077</b>

2020-21: Additional expenditure due to Covid-19 by class and service area (£'m)						
	Shire District	Shire County	Unitary Authority	Metropolitan District	London Borough	Total
Adult Social Care – total	-	1,255	849	663	414	<b>3,181</b>
Children's social care - total (excluding SEND)	-	95	131	90	63	<b>379</b>
Housing - total (including homelessness services) excluding HRA	63	5	75	42	113	<b>299</b>
Environmental and regulatory services - total	34	68	68	67	64	<b>299</b>
Finance & corporate services - total	48	53	84	77	78	<b>341</b>
All other service areas not listed in rows above	185	635	585	565	395	<b>2,364</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>2,111</b>	<b>1,791</b>	<b>1,504</b>	<b>1,127</b>	<b>6,863</b>

2020-21: Income losses due to Covid-19 by class and source of income (£'m)						
	Shire District	Shire County	Unitary Authority	Metropolitan District	London Borough	Total
Business rates	276	-	194	207	538	<b>1,216</b>
Council tax	399	-	218	191	233	<b>1,041</b>
Sales fees and charges	516	195	554	397	476	<b>2,138</b>
Commercial income	82	24	121	204	52	<b>484</b>
Other	33	40	27	54	45	<b>199</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,308</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>1,114</b>	<b>1,053</b>	<b>1,343</b>	<b>5,077</b>

# VFM Progress Report – initial observations on arrangements for financial sustainability

## Matters brought forward from 2019/20

As reported in our Audit Completion Report for 2019/20, we confirmed we had:

- reviewed the 2019/20 financial performance and forecasts during the year and considered the Council's financial outturn position as presented in the financial statements.
  - Reviewed the 2020/21:
    - Revenue and Capital budgets and Medium Term Financial Plan;
    - Treasury Management Strategy, incorporating the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy and Capital and Investment Strategies;
    - Considered the Council's latest financial monitoring information and its updated medium term outlook.
- Updated our risk assessment for any new or emerging issues through discussions with management and updating our review of committee reports.
- Reviewed the Council's Annual Governance Statement for any significant issues.
  - Considered the general findings from our audit work in other areas.

Our 2019/20 Conclusion was that "On the basis of our work, having regard to the guidance on the specified criterion issued by the Comptroller and Auditor General in April 2020, we are satisfied that, in all significant respects, Lincolnshire County Council has put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2020."

We therefore have no risks of a significant weakness in the Council's arrangements brought forward from 2019/20 into the current year.

## 2020/21 Financial Statement Performance

We have carried out a high level analysis of the financial statements subject to our audit, including the Movement in Reserves Statement and the Balance Sheet, our work has not highlighted any risks of significant weakness in arrangements or indicators of a risk to the Council's financial sustainability.

The Council's useable reserves have increased from £337m to £366m in 2020/21, with:

- General Fund & Earmarked Reserves of £247m, up from £211m in the prior year
- School Reserves of £26m, up from £25m in 2019/20
- Capital Reserves of £93m, down from £102m in 2019/20 in line with funding of capital expenditure.

The Council's reserves position does not indicate a risk of significant weakness in VFM arrangements for financial sustainability.

# VFM Progress Report – initial observations on arrangements for financial sustainability

## 2020/21 Financial Statement Performance (continued)

The Council's balance sheet remains stable over the prior year, with large movements in cash and cash equivalents offset by the movement in short-term investments, such that net current assets (being current assets less current liabilities) have increased by 3% from £203m to £209m.

The most significant change in the balance sheet relates to movements in the Council's share of the pension fund net liability (being a deficit position) of £801m, up from £617m in the prior year as shown in Note 29 of the financial statements. The main movements being:

- an increase in the value of pension assets from £1,147m to £1,400m
- offset by a larger reduction in the value of pension liabilities from £1,763m to £2,200m.

The Fire-fighters Pension Fund net liability has increased from £240m to £311m.

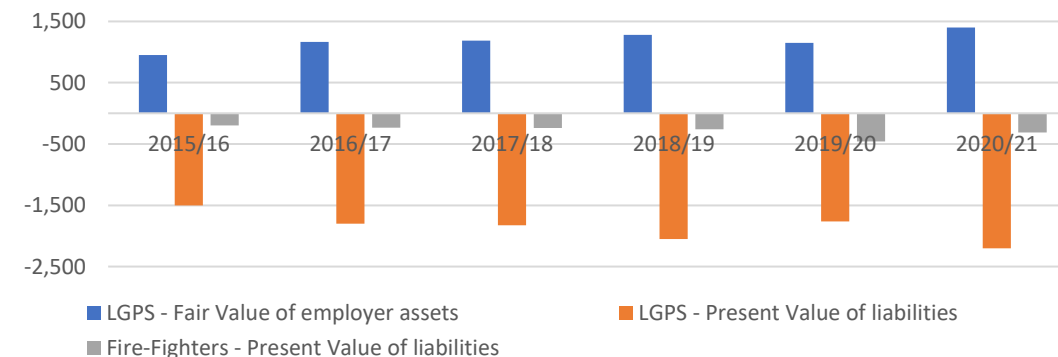
In the past few years, it is not unusual to see material movements in the net pension liability and this is consistent with our experience at other councils.

We have tracked the movement in the net pension liability over a five year period to illustrate the changes and summarised in the table below and the charts opposite.

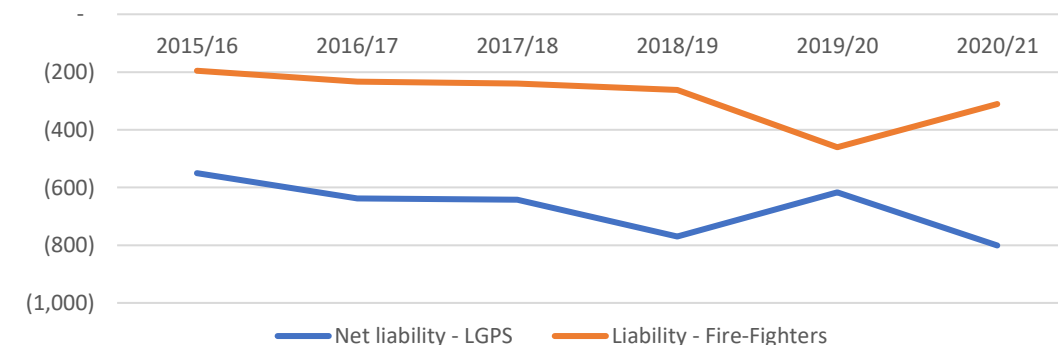
The deficit position is not unusual to Lincolnshire County Council and is a recognised area of financial challenge for local authorities.

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Increase since 2015/16
Net liability - LGPS	(550)	(638)	(643)	(770)	(617)	(801)	(251)
Liability - Fire-Fighters	(196)	(233)	(240)	(263)	(461)	(311)	(115)

Pension fund assets and liabilities over time (£'m)



Pension fund net liabilities over time (£'m)



# VFM Progress Report – initial observations on arrangements for financial sustainability

## 2020/21 Financial Performance: Net Revenue Expenditure

We have met regularly with Officers during the year and read the Quarterly Reports to Executive. Each report summarises the financial position of the Council and is supported by a set of appendices that adequately enable Members to assess revenue performance by service (such as Children’s Services, Place etc). We note the reports explain the variance to budget, which increased in size from Quarter 3 through to the year end: this is shown in the table below. The reports also include an adequate summary and explanations of the financial impact of Covid-19.

Reports to Executive include the monitoring of planned savings of £9.4m for 2020/21 and £12m for 2021/22. These savings are built into budgets and triangulate with the individual service level reports included in the supporting appendices to the Quarterly Revenue reports to Executive. There are no material unidentified saving or funding gaps for 2020/21 or 2021/22.

We also reviewed Note 14 of the financial statements, setting out earmarked reserves, and in particular the Financial Volatility Reserve that was established to help the Council deal with the future uncertainties around Local Government funding. The Council used £12.2m of this reserve in the year, leaving a balance of £40m as at 31 March 2021.

In July 2021, the Executive were informed that there had been:

- A £15m underspend on Services (3.5%) and £13m underspend on other budgets (16.5%), mainly being capital charges of £9m linked to underspending on the capital programme.
- £14m underspend via dedicated schools grant (169%).
- Paragraph 1.21 explains that these underspends are mainly the result of Covid-19.

Overall, the Council’s arrangements for reviewing revenue financial performance are adequate, however there are areas for improvement and management are considering areas alongside our suggestions for:

- Incorporation of specific and agreed financial performance indicators in each report (such as cashflow headroom, debtor days, creditor payment days)
- More integrated reporting with the Council’s resources, such as workforce (such as staff sickness, agency costs, headcount), estates (such as asset utilisation), and key performance indicators (covering each service)

Source	Short Heading	Total including schools			Total excluding schools		
		Budget	Forecast	Variance	Budget	Forecast	Variance
Revenue Budget Monitoring Report 2020/21 - Quarter 1. Executive, September 2020, Appendix A	Q1 2020/21	489,894	491,974	(2,080)	492,570	496,125	(3,555)
Revenue Budget Monitoring Report 2020/21 - Quarter 2. Executive, December 2020, Table 1	Q2 2020/21	509,191	510,805	(1,614)	497,598	495,626	1,972
Revenue Budget Monitoring Report 2020/21 - Quarter 3. Executive, March 2021, Table 1	Q3 2020/21	510,256	498,951	11,305	496,663	481,285	15,378
Review of Financial Performance 2020/21, Table B. Executive, July 2021	Outturn 2020/21	525,218	482,920	42,298	516,966	488,644	28,322
Revenue Budget Monitoring Report 2021/22 - Quarter 1. Executive September 2021, Appendix A	Q1 2021/22	511,427	510,018	1,409	505,494	504,299	1,195

Excluding schools, there has not been more than 5% movement in reported figures, which we do not judge to be indicative of a significant weakness in arrangements



# VFM Progress Report – initial observations on arrangements for financial sustainability

## 2020/21 Financial Performance: Capital Programme

We have reviewed capital expenditure as presented in the financial statements and tested capital additions, with no material issues arising over the £132m additions to Property, Plant & Equipment set out in Note 15 of the financial statements.

We also reviewed the “Review of Financial Performance 2020/21” presented to Executive on 6 July 2021. Paragraph 1.12 explains the Council spent £168m on the County's major assets, in particular on road schemes and schools. We have reconciled this to the financial statements, noting a trivial variance of £0.6m between the figures reported to Executive and that in the financial statements.

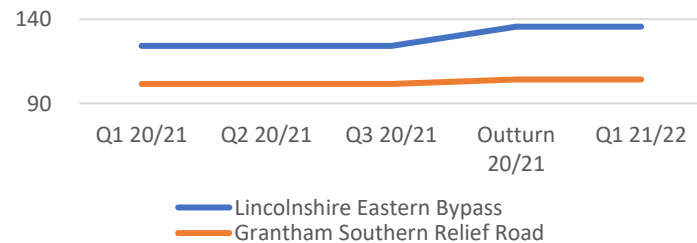
We reviewed the capital outturn report to the July meeting of the Executive, who informed that the capital outturn for 2020/21 was 53% less than planned (para 1.36), with Highways being underspent by £34m (para 1.47) mainly: the Lincoln Eastern Bypass, the Grantham Southern Relief Road, the A46 Welton Roundabout, the Holdingham roundabout and the A52 Skegness Roman Bank reconstruction; and the Highways Asset Protection block budget. Appendix A to the Report provides a status report on major schemes, which provides members a summary of capital project including:

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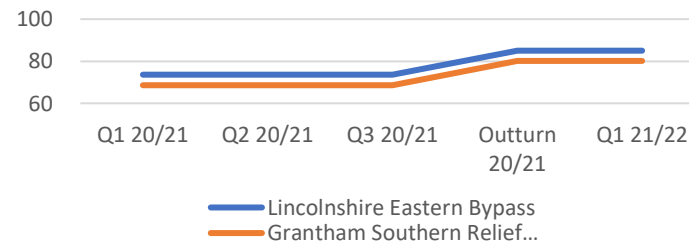
- Spending for the financial year
- Changes in the budget
- Whole life-time financial information
- Purpose and performance of the scheme

This demonstrates adequate arrangements for monitoring the capital programme, not just on a year to year basis, but over the life of the project.

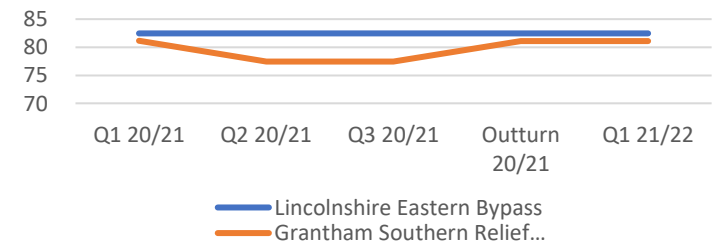
Gross Expenditure Budget (£'m)



Net expenditure budget (£'m)



Scheme total forecast (£'m)



## Capital Monitoring

We reviewed a sample of capital budget monitoring reports for 2020/21, starting with the “Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2021/22 - Quarter 1 to 30 June 2021” discussed at Executive on 7 September 2021 as well as the comments from the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board that supported the paper. This process demonstrates an appropriate level of scrutiny through Member oversight of the capital programme.

We also considered the consistency of capital programme monitoring, by reviewing a sample of reports to the Executive, reconciling inputs and considering the consistency of narrative. In our review of the capital programme, we considered the progress reports on three largest schemes: Lincolnshire Eastern Bypass, Grantham Southern Relief Road, which showed the Gross Expenditure Budget increased by £14m between Quarter 1 2020/21 and Quarter 1 2021/22, **this is shown in the charts below**. Separately, we noted Spalding Western Relief Road (Phase 5) also increased by £16m between Quarter 1 2020/21 and Quarter 1 2021/22.

The reports provide sufficient detail to understand the programme as a whole, as well as the current position and any significant matters arising. However, the reporting could be improved and management are considering options alongside our suggestions:

- Reporting could be improved by including the start and end date of projects in order to more clearly set out the uncertainty and risk in forecast whole life projects, including the impact of any re-profiling. For example, in July outturn report, members were informed that £18m of costs on the Grantham Southern Relief Road has been moved into 2021/22, but there is no explanation on whether this also pushes out the expected completion date of the project.
- Reporting would also be improved by Risk Rating the forecast and capital schemes. For example, in reporting the performance of the Lincoln Eastern Bypass scheme, there has been a consistent concern raised on forecasts risks and uncertainties, however there is no quantification of this in the report.

# VFM Progress Report

Governance: How the Council ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks

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# VFM Progress Report – initial observations on arrangements for governance

## 2021/22 Budget Setting and the Medium Term Financial Strategy

In 2019, the Council received an LGA Peer Assessment that we have reviewed. It includes the following comments that remain relevant to 2020/21:

- “There is financial stability in the organisation and the Council has a proven track record of delivering savings while maintaining front-line services
- The budget process for 2020/21 is strong with good engagement of Members and the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) carrying out deep dives”

We have read a variety of reports to Overview & Scrutiny Management Board, the Executive and Council covering budget setting for 2021/22 and the Medium Term Financial Strategy. We have also held a number of meetings with Officers throughout the year.

Each service directorate supports the development of the budget, identifying cost pressures and delivery needs within the Corporate Plan before presenting a combined report on the budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy for scrutiny by the corporate leadership team, Overview & Scrutiny Management Board, the Executive and full Council. The arrangements in place for budget setting and updating the Medium Term Financial Strategy are as expected for a County Council, with arrangements for: consultation, scrutiny, evaluation of financial risk, alignment to directorate/business plans and sources of funding.

There is no indication that the Council’s Medium Term Financial Strategy and budget setting process is not aligned to supporting plans given the Council has a track record of delivering against budget, albeit with some variation this year due to unpredictability arising from Covid-19.

A budget consultation presentation was made to Overview & Scrutiny in January 2021 adequately summarises the financial context of the authority, including the impact of Covid-19 cost pressures, which were c£94m in additional expenditure and income loss during 2020/21, mostly covered by government grant. Whilst the costs

are significant, there is recognition that there will be future support to councils to continue to tackle covid-19 impacts such as local lockdowns. Members are aware of the Council’s positive track record in financial delivery, which is consistent with our knowledge, including the ability to maintain financial balance with minimal use of reserves.

Budget reports presented to Executive and Overview & Scrutiny Management Board include management’s assertion, and Members’ agreement that “The budget proposals reflected the level of government funding expected to be available to the Council and a proposal to increase general Council Tax in 2021/22 by 1.99%. A thorough review of the Council’s services was carried out during the budget process which had identified unavoidable cost pressures, some savings with minimal or no impact on the level of service provided and the capital programme had been reviewed. The budget proposals therefore aimed to reflect the Council’s priorities whilst operating within the resources available to it.” We are satisfied that these reports adequately describe the risks and proposals for setting the 2021/22 Budget and the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

We read the assumptions underpinning the Medium Term Financial Strategy as included in reports to the January meeting of the Executive and the January 2021 meeting of Overview & Scrutiny Management Board. In our view, these include an adequate level of detail over the assumptions and cost pressures facing the council, which are consistent with our experience at similar sized authorities and therefore not unreasonable. In addition, there is sufficient narrative to explain the rationale and key financial risks.

With regard to the 2021/22 Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy, we have noted:

- it adequately sets out the context and approach to delivering the financial strategy
- It sets out an immaterial deficit over 2021/22 to 2023/24 of c£13m, which is sufficiently covered by reserves.

We have not identified a risk of significant weakness in arrangements.

# VFM Progress Report – initial observations on arrangements for governance

## CIPFA Financial Management Code

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) has published its Financial Management (FM) Code to provide guidance for good practice in financial management and to assist local authorities in demonstrating their financial sustainability. The first full year of compliance with the FM code is 2021/22.

In June 2021, the Audit Committee received management's assessment of compliance against the CIPFA Financial Management code. We have discussed the document with Officers to confirm the arrangements described in the document have been in place through 2020/21. The areas where the Council aims to improve are not, in our view, areas of significant weakness in arrangements, but are areas for the Council to focus on for 2021/22 and we expect the Audit Committee to receive an update on progress during 2021/22:

Longer term financial planning, with clear links to the corporate plan, service performance, asset management strategies and capital investment.

Clear methodology for options appraisal, to support decision making with full consideration of value for money.

- More transparency of our financial resilience assessment, including management of risks, and key areas of risk in our balance sheet (e.g. debtors).
- Continued improvement in our reporting particularly of our MTFP assumptions and LCC Companies.
- Improved stakeholder engagement.
- Continued development of financial literacy in the organisation, and skills in the finance team, supporting an enabling financial management style.

## Governance

The Authority has a full suite of governance arrangements in place. These are set out in the Annual Governance Statement, which is reviewed as part of our audit where we confirmed they were consistent with our understanding of the Council's arrangements in place for 2020/21.

We confirmed that the Council has an [approved constitution](#) that is regularly reviewed and updated. The Constitution explains how the Council operates and makes decisions. It ensures that the Council is efficient, transparent and accountable for what it does:

- The Council comprises of all 70 councillors, meeting together to make decisions about policies and to set the Councils' budget. All 70 councillors take part in the business of the Council.
- The Executive is currently made up of nine councillors, from the majority political group, and is chaired by the Leader of the Council. Each Executive Councillor is allocated a particular area of responsibility. The full terms of reference for the Executive are set out in Part 2 of the Council's Constitution.
- The Council's Chief Officer group form a corporate leadership team and each Executive Director is responsible for their specific area.

We consider the committee structure of the Authority is sufficient to provide assurance that decision making, risk and performance management is subject to appropriate levels of oversight and challenge.

We have reviewed Council and Committee Reports and minutes during the year as well as key documents in relation to how the Council ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks. Our review of Council and Committee papers confirms that a template covering report is used, ensuring the purpose, consultation, and recommendations are clear. We have confirmed with the Monitoring Officer that every decision-making report that comes before the County Council, the Executive or an individual Executive Councillor is required to contain a Legal Comment. As a result there is a process for identifying the legal issues raised by any proposed decision and ensuring that these are addressed in the Report.

Minutes are published and reviewed by each committee to evidence the matters discussed, challenge and decisions made.

# VFM Progress Report – initial observations on arrangements for governance

## Risk management

The Audit Committee is responsible for overseeing the effectiveness of the Council's risk management arrangements, challenging risk information and escalating issues to the Executive. A Quarterly report is prepared on behalf of the Executive Director – Resources for the Audit Committee.

We reviewed the Risk Management Progress Reports presented to Audit Committee during the year, including that reported in March 2021. The report provides an update on the activities being undertaken and the key strategic and operational issues facing the Council since the last update in September 2020. The report shows 22 high risks and 15 high issues, with most of the risks remaining static or improving. The main category of risk continues to be within the area of People, with the main issues being Technology and Economic. Appendix 1 to the Report sets out a breakdown of the risks, issues and status by directorate.

From our attendance at the meeting and review of the minutes, we note that, with regard to the limited assurance on market supply for adult care, it was advised that the Executive Director of Adult Care and Community Wellbeing, as the risk owner, would be asked to attend a future meeting on mitigating factors. Similarly, in relation to the assessment of safeguarding children, the Executive Director for Children's Services, as the risk owner, would be invited to attend a future meeting to discuss this topic.

In our view, there is sufficient evidence of Member oversight of risk management, including holding Officers to account.

We reviewed the Strategic Risk Register reported to the March 2021 Audit Committee and determined it is adequate for the Council's purposes, given it links the risk to the corporate strategy, includes a risk owner and current and target risk scores, assurance status and existing controls. In our view, however, there are aspects that would improve clarity and understanding of the risk and its impact on the Council, including:

- Tracking the risk score by quarter
- Separating controls from assurances and including gaps in controls and gaps in assurances

- Confirming the date of last review by the risk owner
- Setting risk appetite (eg treat, tolerate)
- Specifying actions required (and confirming when these have been implemented).

## Combined Assurance Report

The Audit Committee receive a 'Combined Assurance Report' to provide the Audit Committee with insight on the assurances across all the Council's critical services, key risks, partnerships and projects. We obtained and read the report to the February 2021 audit committee confirming that each Executive Director, with the Chief Executive's overview, is responsible for the annual Combined Assurance Status Report. Each Executive Director provides an overall assurance level, based on information across:

- critical service delivery activities;
- key risks;
- key projects;
- key partnerships.

The Combined Assurance report provides the Audit Committee with a good understanding about the level of assurances in place. It overlays the Strategic Risk Register, but in a more understandable format. The report and its content is demonstrative of adequate arrangements in place over risk management.

# VFM Progress Report – initial observations on arrangements for governance

## Audit Committee

The Trust has an established Audit Committee that comprises seven councillors, who represent the political balance of the Council, plus two independent persons who are not a councillor, or an officer of the Council. The Audit Committee is responsible for establishing and maintaining an effective system of governance in a way that supports the organisation's objectives. It achieves this by:

- Reviewing the work and findings of internal audit and external audit;
- Reviewing the Annual Governance Statement and the financial statements; and
- Reviewing reports on risk management and internal control.

We have reviewed supporting documents and confirmed the Audit Committee meets regularly and reviews its programme of work to maintain focus on key aspects of governance and internal control. In response to Covid-19, the Council moved Committee meetings on-line. Our attendance at Audit Committee has confirmed there is an appropriate level of effective challenge.

## Internal Audit

We have met with management and the Head of Internal Audit regularly during the year, reviewed Audit Committee reports and attended Audit Committee to observe the performance of Internal Audit and the Audit Committee. We have documented our understanding of the Internal Audit function, which is provided by an in-house team which operates as part of Assurance Lincolnshire - supported by additional resources procured via external support framework contracts. The Council's Financial Regulations set out Internal Audit requirements and the Head of Internal Audit has direct access to all levels of management, all employees and to all elected members and particularly to those charged with governance

We reviewed the Head of Internal Audit Annual Report that was presented to Audit Committee on 12 July 2021, where the overall opinion is split across four themes:

- Governance – “performing adequately” being a consistent rating as the prior year.

- Risk – “performing well”, showing improvement over the prior year.
- Internal control – “performing adequately” being a consistent rating as the prior year.
- Financial control – “performing adequately” being a consistent rating as the prior year.

In our view, the Head of Internal Audit Opinion is sufficiently detailed to explain how each rating was determined. We confirmed there are no “High Priority” recommendations overdue, with only one Internal Audit review cited as “low assurance” (being the lowest possible ranking) and relating to the Implementation of Mosaic Finance. The facility to hold officers to account therefore exists and we attended the June 2021 Audit committee where this report was presented, where the responsible officers for the project were in attendance to respond to questions on this issue, but none were raised.

We have confirmed that the Head of Internal Audit Opinion has been adequately reflected in the Annual Governance Statement to provide assurance that there is no significant weakness in arrangements for 2020/21.

## Whistleblowing & Counter-fraud

We reviewed the annual whistle-blowing report presented to the July meeting of Audit Committee. The report provides a summary and analysis of whistleblowing disclosures received by the Council during the period from April 2020 to March 2021. The number of whistleblowing concerns (29) raised around Lincolnshire County Council activity in 2020/21 represented the first decrease on the previous period's activity in several years.

We also reviewed the Annual Counter Fraud Report as presented to the July Audit Committee. The Counter Fraud Annual Report provides an overview of the investigation and proactive counter fraud work completed in 2020/21. The level of fraud referrals remained consistent with those recorded in the previous year and we identified an increase in the number of cases involving procurement fraud.

There are no systemic or material matters impacting our Value For Money considerations and the existence of the programme, its work and progress reporting to Audit Committee is evidence of adequate arrangements for counter-fraud.

We are unaware of any allegations or incidences of major fraud or corruption.

# VFM Progress Report – initial observations on arrangements for governance

## Monitoring officer and Conduct

The Monitoring Officer has three main roles:

1. To report on matters he/she believes are, or are likely to be, illegal or amount to maladministration;
2. To be responsible for matters relating to the conduct of Councillors and officers; and
3. To be responsible for the operation of the Constitution.

We have reviewed the Monitoring Officer's Annual Report presented to the Audit Committee in July 2021 and met with the Monitoring Officer throughout the year. Our observations being:

• The report confirms there were no occasions where the Monitoring Officer had to issue a formal report relating to the lawfulness of a decision.

In 2020/21 there were 48 referrals to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO), down from 55 in 2019/20. On 16 March 2021 the Ombudsman issued a public report finding maladministration in the way that the Council charged a flat rate for short term care which he found was not in accordance with Guidance. This is further considered in Table 2c row 2 – the financial impact being £0.5m and immaterial.

- Standards Complaints: From 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 there were 5 complaints of breach of the Code of Conduct. This is two less than in 2019/20
- No issues reported in relation to the Register of Councillors' disclosable pecuniary interests or the Register of Officers' Interests.

The annual report of the monitoring officer demonstrates arrangements are in place to monitor and support lawful and informed decision making, with no indications of a significant risk in arrangements.

## Scrutiny

In September 2021, Full Council received and approved the Annual Report for Overview and Scrutiny for 2020/21. We have read the report which highlights the scrutiny work that has taken place throughout the last year. The report focuses on the key successes and achievements of Overview and Scrutiny over the past year. The Annual Report is usually put before the annual meeting of the County Council for approval. In years when

elections are held, the Annual Report is considered at the first appropriate meeting after the annual meeting.

As set out in the first page of the report "Despite the impact of the pandemic, 67 scrutiny committee meetings were held, and 65% of all formal decisions were considered by a scrutiny committee in 2020/21 prior to them being made".

There is no evidence of inadequate arrangements in informed decision making in this report.

## Covid-19: Governance

We have reviewed the Annual Governance Statement, which includes a specific section on the Council's response to Covid-19. We are satisfied that the Annual Governance Statement is a reasonable reflection of the Council's arrangements.

The Government asked councils to develop local political leadership through setting up outbreak management boards with key local partners. If small outbreaks in communities, schools or even an individual street are identified, a Local Outbreak Engagement Board can take measures to isolate the problem. Instead of national lockdowns, individual isolation and local action will tackle an outbreak. We confirmed the Local Outbreak Engagement Board had approved a Local Outbreak Management Plan in July 2020, which was revised in March 2021 and submitted to the Department of Health and Social Care to comply with an assurance process with the regional Public Health England team.

We have reviewed Committee Reports of the Executive and the Health and Wellbeing Board, including the Director of Public Health Annual Report presented in March 2021. The Director of Public Health has a statutory duty to produce an independent report on the state of health of the people they serve on an annual basis, which must be published by the Council. We read the report, which is focused on Covid-19 and its impact on Lincolnshire. The report highlights:

- health inequalities that exist in Lincolnshire; and
- that there will be long-term impacts such as increased issues in mental health.

Whilst there are clear challenges arising from Covid-19 in governance and the management of risk, there is no evidence of a significant weakness in the Council's arrangements.

# VFM Progress Report – initial observations on arrangements for governance

## Regulators

We reviewed regulatory reports, including OFSTED and the Care Quality Commission, where inspections were paused as a result of Covid-19. The Council's rating's are carried forward from 2019:

- OFSTED rate Children Services as "Outstanding"
- The Care Quality Commission rate Lincolnshire County Council as a provider as "Good"

Her Majesty's Inspector for Fire & Rescue Services was due to inspect Lincolnshire Fire & Rescue Service in 2020/21, however this was postponed due to Covid, therefore its official rating for 2020/21 remains "Good"

## Local Government Ombudsman

On the 16 March 2021 the Local Government Ombudsman published a public report following an investigation into how Lincolnshire County Council charged individuals for respite care. It found that the policy of charging a "flat rate" did not accord with the Care Act 2014.

We reviewed the Monitoring's Officers Annual Report to Committee that was presented to Audit Committee before being considered by Executive in September 2021. The Council has calculated the financial effect to be £0.5m and has taken steps to address the root cause in April 2020, by removing the flat rate charge and requesting all individuals to complete a financial assessment. Overall, we do not believe this indicates a significant weakness in the Council's arrangements.



# VFM Progress Report

Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness: How the Council uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services

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# VFM Progress Report – initial observations on arrangements for improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness

## Local Government Association - Peer review

We revisited the 2019 LGA Peer Assessment, which includes the following comments that, based on discussions with management and our cumulative audit knowledge and experience, remain relevant to 2020/21:

- “Lincolnshire County Council is a stable, reliable and solid organisation delivering good quality services to its residents
- There is a transparent system of governance within the Council

There is financial stability in the organisation and the Council has a proven track record of delivering savings while maintaining front-line services

The Council has a wealth of knowledge, data and experience which needs to be utilised more effectively as part of its development

Lincolnshire County Council has sound knowledge of the local place and context generally and a deeper understanding of service needs within individual departments, albeit with a silo view of localities.

- The budget process for 2020/21 is strong with good engagement of Members and the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) carrying out deep dives
- Whilst the Council has clearly adapted to and survived austerity well, it is well behind in terms of having ongoing major transformation programmes”

In our view, the Peer review does not indicate a significant weaknesses in the Council’s arrangements for financial sustainability, governance or improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

## Corporate Plan

The Council’s arrangements are consistent with the prior year with the Council’s Corporate Plan setting out what it wants to achieve for local residents and communities and is published on its website.

The Corporate Plan underpins the ‘One Council’ approach, which aims to ensure all services are working towards shared goals and will help different areas of the Council work together more effectively. The Council’s overall financial objectives and strategy are documented in the Council’s budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy which is reviewed and updated annually. The Council’s budget endeavours to ensure the provision of the appropriate resources required to deliver the Council’s Plan, and the types of action necessary to enable them to be affordable, to allow balanced budgets to be delivered.

## Performance monitoring

The Executive and Overview and Scrutiny Management Board receive regular reporting on the measures contained within the Council Business Plan. The Council has chosen key performance measures and targets to demonstrate to elected members and the public that the directorate is achieving the priorities within each strategy area.

We reviewed reports to Executive as evidence of the Council’s approach to evaluating performance. Reports are presented to Committee by the Performance and Equalities Manager contain sufficient narrative, including the appendices, to demonstrate that there are adequate arrangements for scrutiny in assessing performance and identifying areas for improvement. We also reviewed the performance outturn for 2020/21 presented to Executive in July 2021, where performance against the Corporate Plan shows that Covid-19 was continuing to have an impact, with 66% of the 53 activities with milestones due to be reported in Quarter 4 either On plan or Ahead of plan.

Our review of the minutes shows that the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board confirmed that the Board had recorded its support for the recommendations to the Executive. Minutes also record Member challenge, such as requesting further information in relation to the life expectancy for Lincolnshire residents, and evaluation, such as reflecting on the reduction in people Killed or Seriously Injured on Lincolnshire’s roads.

Overall, we believe this is sufficient evidence to demonstrate adequate arrangements for performance monitoring at the Council.

# VFM Progress Report – initial observations on arrangements for improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness

## Performance monitoring (continued)

We reviewed minutes and reports to Overview and Scrutiny Management Board during 2020/21 including the Quarter 3 HR Management Information and Workforce Plan Update from July 2021 as evidence of arrangements to consider workforce performance indicators. The report provides an overview of staff headcount, sickness absence, agency costs and the health and wellbeing of the workforce. Members were informed that a regular review and monitoring of HR Management data at both Directorate Leadership Team (DLT) level and by Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) was enabling oversight of the workforce and HR performance at both a local level and for the organisation and helping Officers identify priorities and solutions required to address current and future workforce challenges, in particular to attract, recruit and retain skills in high risk areas. The report adequately summarises key issues and, alongside Member scrutiny, is indicative of adequate arrangements in monitoring workforce indicators.

## Core Spending Power

We have also considered the Council's financial position in relation to spending power using publicly available information published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government in February 2021.

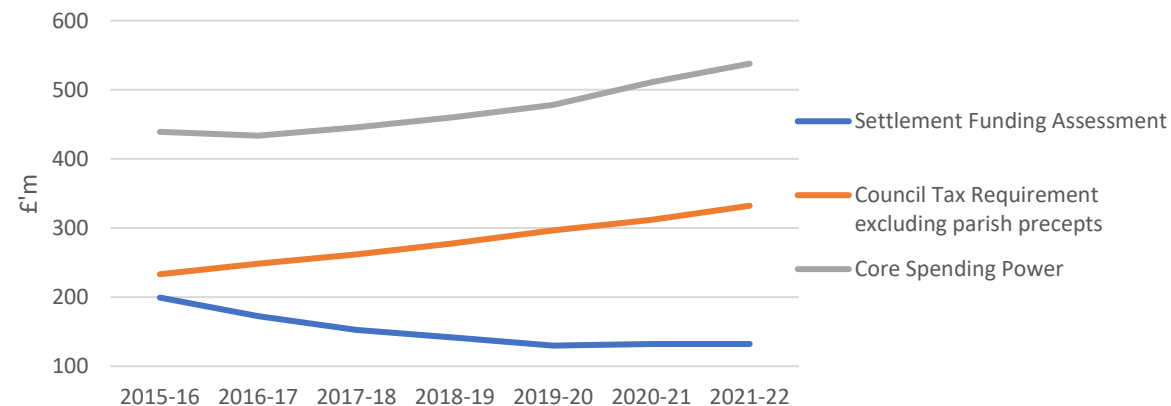
Overall spending power has increased year on year and in line with all English Councils. The increase in the council tax requirement compensates for the reduction in the settlement funding assessment, which is in line with Government Policy, which includes the ability to add a social care premium in the more recent years. For Lincolnshire, there has also been an additional Social Care Grant of £20m in 2020/21 and £26m in 2021/22.

There is no indication of a significant weakness in arrangements.

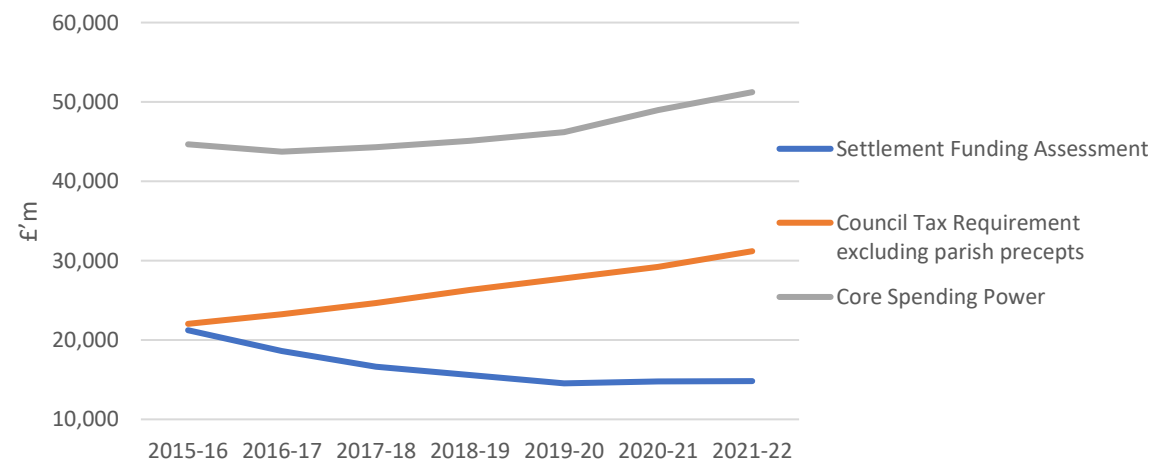
## Benchmarks

We reviewed a selection of benchmarking data available to us, including the CIPFA financial resilience index and the VFM profiles provided via the Local Government Association (called LG Inform Vfm available from the following link: <http://vfm.lginform.local.gov.uk/>). We did not identify any indicators of a significant weakness in arrangements for 2020/21.

## Lincolnshire County Council: Core Spending Power



## England: Core Spending Power



# VFM Progress Report – initial observations on arrangements for improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness

## Partnerships and Commissioning

### One Council Commissioning Framework 2021-2024

In 2020, the Council undertook a piece of work with external consultants, Impower, to review the current commissioning model and overall approach in use across the Council to consider how current commissioning practices could be more effective. This was partially in response to the Peer Review in December 2019, which we reviewed as part of our prior year audit.

We reviewed the report presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board on 17 March 2021, which considers the Draft One Council Commissioning Framework 2021-2024, subsequently to be presented to the Executive on 07 April 2021. The views of the Board were reported to the Executive as part of its consideration of this item.

Having read the document, we are satisfied this is indicative of adequate arrangements for strategic commissioning.

### Better Care Fund (BCF)

Note 33 of the Council's Financial Statements explains the Council is the host for pooled budgets relating to: Proactive Care, Specialties including Learning Disabilities, Integrated Community Equipment Service, and Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services; and is responsible for their financial administration. Outside this Better Care Fund is a stand-alone Section 75 Agreement for Sexual Health. Our testing of the financial statements has not identified any material issues over these disclosure notes, which show each pooled budget remains in balance.

We also reviewed minutes and reports to Lincolnshire Health and Wellbeing Board, including the year end report on the Better Care Fund presented on 22 June 2021. An update regarding the Better Care Fund was received by the Board in March 2021, which clarified that although the financial elements of the 2021/22 plan had been agreed, there is no further information regarding the next planning cycle or the assurance model to be used. It has however been indicated that a further roll over year is expected pending the multi-year spending review expected in the autumn. The Better Care Fund has an annual assurance and reporting mechanism into NHS

England/Improvement. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic 2020/21 assurance has been more light touch; however an end of year finance report has been submitted and there has been quarterly performance and finance reports throughout the year, with notable highlights being:

- Plans covering all mandatory funding contributions have been agreed by Health and Wellbeing areas and minimum contributions are pooled in a section 75 agreement (an agreement made under section 75 of the NHS Act 2006).
- The contribution to social care from the Clinical Commissioning Group the Better Care Fund is agreed and meets or exceeds the minimum expectation.

We have not identified any significant weakness in arrangements.

### Serco contract

We reviewed a report from the Assistant Director, Commercial, and the Serco Contract Manager, on the Performance of the Corporate Support Services Contract presented to Overview and Scrutiny Management Board in March 2021. The report provided an update of Serco's performance against contractual Key Performance Indicators specified in the Corporate Support Services Contract covering the period October 2020 to February 2021. The last report to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board was on 29 October 2020.

The report highlighted that the majority of Key Performance Indicators were either at and above the Target Service Level and the number in mitigation as a result of Covid-19 had fallen to just one in January and February. The Customer Service Centre had continued to be under significant pressure, showing some sharp increases in abandoned call rates towards the end of 2020. However, the situation had been much improved in January and February, and Members were informed that Serco deployed additional resource in response to the continuing high call handling times in the Care and Wellbeing Hub and also no longer required Council support.

The role of the Overview and Scrutiny Management in reviewing performance of major contracts, and the report not identifying any significant issues, means there is no indication of a significant weakness in the Council's arrangements.

# VFM Progress Report – initial observations on arrangements for improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness

## Fire & Rescue Regulatory Compliance

Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) independently assesses the effectiveness and efficiency of police forces and fire & rescue services – in the public interest. Lincolnshire was due for inspection of the fire service for 2020/21, however this was postponed due to Covid.

HMICFRS did conduct a Covid-19 inspection and we reviewed the report it issued report in January 2021, which:

1. Highlights areas of good governance, such as business continuity planning, working effectively with the Lincolnshire Local Resilience Forum and that the service’s financial position hadn’t been significantly affected by the pandemic.

However, paragraph 6 of the of the Report states: “while Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service maintained its response and prevention functions, it didn’t offer the range of protection measures expected during the early stages of the pandemic. Between April and June 2020, it stopped the majority of its routine protection activity, thereby not auditing for compliance with fire safety regulations those buildings it had identified as being at the highest risk from fire. This approach was not in line with national expectations. While this work has since restarted, at the time of our inspection it had a considerable backlog of premises to work through.”

We have discussed this with Officers and obtained further information to put the findings into context:

- As set out in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement in the financial statements provided for audit, the net expenditure for Fire & Rescue and Community Safety was £26m for 2020/21. Officers have shown us that the budgeted cost of the ‘Protection’ service, which is that referred to in the second bullet point, is £0.9m.
- For the period where protection measures were paused, this was due to Covid-19 challenges and Officers have informed us that these were not statutory services.

- At the end of 2020/21, the official rating of the service remains “Good”.
- The delayed HMICFRS inspection was carried out during summer 2021, with a report due to be published in December 2021.

Because the report may contain information on the existence of arrangements that were in place for 2020/21 and it is due to arrive shortly, we have deemed it prudent to wait until the report is received, so that we can reflect on any findings before finalising our commentary.

# VFM Progress Report – initial observations on arrangements for improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness

## Lincolnshire Sustainability And Transformation Partnership (Covid-19: Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness)

Sustainability and transformation partnerships (STPs) were introduced in 2016. They bring together local NHS organisations and local authorities (county/ unitary councils) to develop proposals to improve health and the quality of care to provide better services for patients in the areas they serve.

The Council is part of the Lincolnshire Sustainability And Transformation Partnership, along with:

- NHS Lincolnshire CCG
- United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust
- Lincolnshire Community Health Services NHS Trust
- Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
- East Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Trust
- LinCA
- Lincolnshire VET.

During 2020/21, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) undertook a review of how providers have worked collaboratively during the response to Covid-19. The CQC have reviewed arrangements in 11 systems, of which Lincolnshire is one. This review focused on the Local Authority area of Lincolnshire, the geographical footprint of which, is consistent with the Lincolnshire sustainability and transformation partnership (STP).

We reviewed the feedback provided by the CQC, which noted the following:

- Joint working across the STP was led and coordinated through a local resilience forum (LRF) and comprehensive cell structure, which included representation from a broad range of stakeholders.

- There was good oversight of the needs of the population with recognition of health inequalities in those areas of deprivation across Lincolnshire STP. Partnership working across the health and social care footprint connected residents with local support networks and mechanisms.
- In the early phase there was a rapid development of command and control and strategic cell structure with the focus very much on finding solutions at pace.
- Outputs from this review suggest the STP has an effective platform to progress to Integrated Care System status from 2021.

We are therefore satisfied that there is no indication of a significant weakness in arrangements.

# Mark Surridge

## Mazars

2 Chamberlain Square

Birmingham

B3 3AX

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