

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2022-23



FOREWORD

Firstly, I would like to pay tribute to former county councillor Robert Parker, who as colleagues will know had to recently, sadly, stand down from his role. Rob was the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board from May 2017 to July 2023. He was named Scrutineer of the Year at the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) Councillor Achievement Awards in 2011 and has been instrumental in the development of scrutiny here at Lincolnshire County Council. It was a privilege to have served as his vice chairman for the last two years.

On behalf of all scrutiny councillors, I would like to thank Rob for all his support and commitment over the years and wish him well for the future.

Secondly, I am delighted to present the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2022-23. The report looks at the key activities and successes for Overview and Scrutiny over the past year. The key aims of scrutiny work in the council are to:

- provide healthy and constructive challenge
- support improvement in services
- give voice to public concerns
- provide an independent review

The last year has been another busy year for overview and scrutiny. During 2022/23, 63 formal scrutiny committee meetings were held, and 79% of all formal decisions were considered by a scrutiny committee prior to them being made, which is up slightly from 78% last year. I am pleased to see that 95% of non-executive councillors have been engaged in overview and scrutiny during 2022-23, up from 92% in 2021-22. Key achievements where overview and scrutiny has made a significant contribution include:-

- recommending a course of action on the Boundary Commission's proposals;
- supporting the cost-of-living increase in allowances for foster carers;
- advising on the Energy for Growth - Energy Options Analysis for Greater Lincolnshire;
- appraising GP provision in Lincolnshire to ensure the needs of patients are being met; and
- influencing the direction of the roll out of the Multiply Programme for adult numeracy.

Looking forward, in 2023/24 we will see the completion of the scrutiny reviews on Town Centre Improvements and Lincolnshire Agricultural Sector Support, with recommendations to the Executive on how these two important economic sectors can be supported further. This will be followed by the start of two new scrutiny reviews to examine other priority areas for the Council.

Should you want to know more about our overview and scrutiny work then please feel free to get in touch using the contact details at the end of the report.

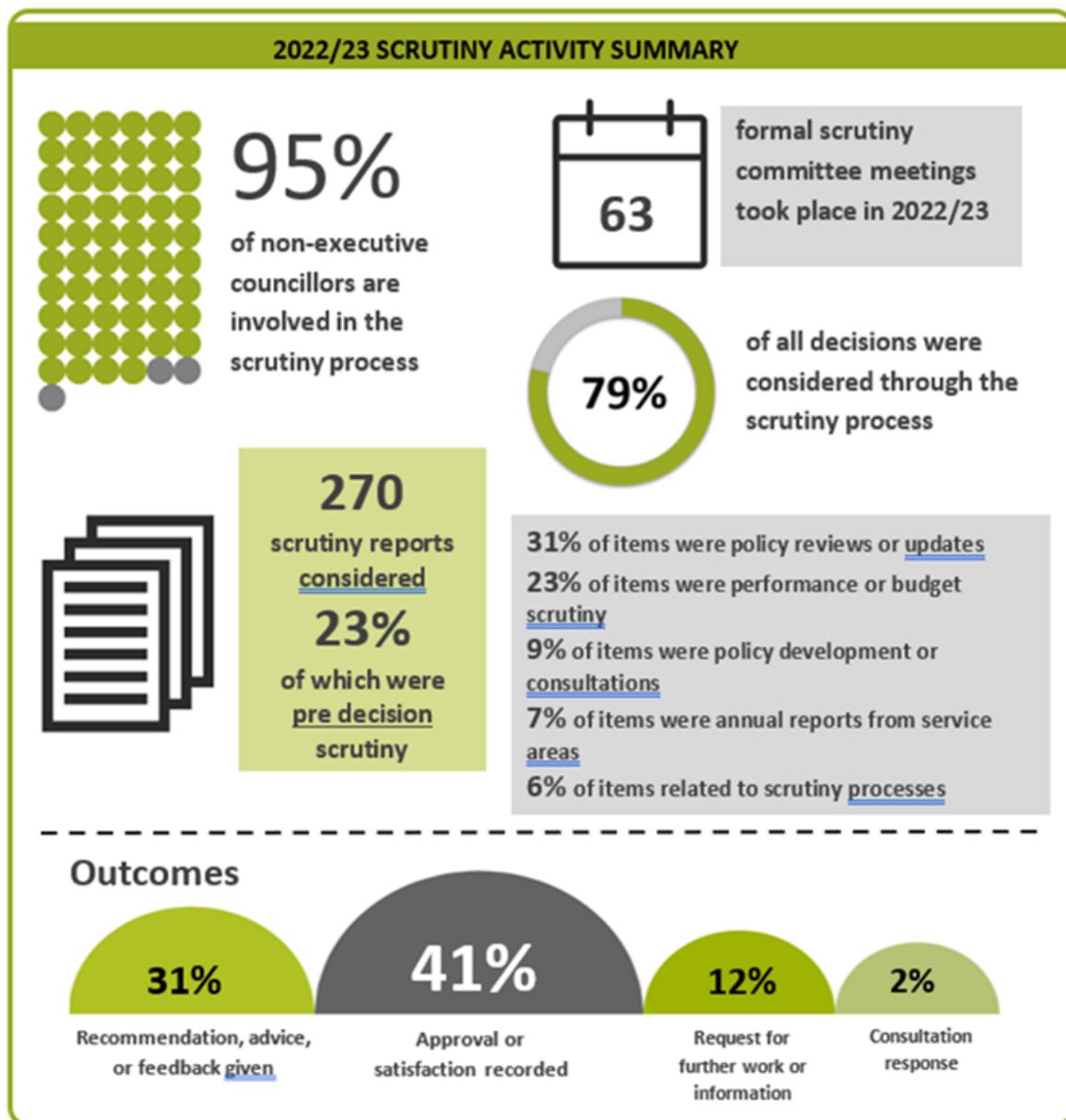
Thomas Smith

Councillor Tom Smith
Vice Chairman, Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

INTRODUCTION TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

Overview and scrutiny is the process whereby non-executive members of the council examine the authority's functions and services, plus those of partner organisations. 2020 marked the 20th anniversary of the legislative changes that led to the establishment of the overview and scrutiny function in English and Welsh councils, a function of local authorities in which all non-Executive councillors are eligible to participate in. Joining them to scrutinise particular issues are parent governors, church representatives, councillors from the district councils and representatives from other local organisations.

Lincolnshire County Council has eight overview and scrutiny committees that consider new policies and strategies, existing policies to see how well they are working and performance information to check that the council is meeting the standards that have been set.



SCRUTINY BY NUMBERS

- The total length of the 63 formal scrutiny committee meetings in 2022/23 was **154 hours and 45 minutes**.
- The agenda and report packs for these 63 meetings totalled **7,578 pages**.
- On average, a typical meeting of an overview and scrutiny committee lasted **two hours and 27 minutes** and considered between **four and five agenda items**.
- The **Adults and Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee** had the highest average for the time taken to consider each item of substantive business, averaging 48 minutes for each agenda item.
- Nine of the 63 pre-decision items contained exempt information due to commercial sensitivities, and seven of these were considered by the **Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**.
- The highest rate of attendance was at the **Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee** with 90%.
- The **Flood and Water Management Scrutiny Committee** is the largest scrutiny committee with 18 members.
- The **Health Scrutiny Committee for Lincolnshire** held the longest meeting at three hours and 46 minutes.
- The **Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee** had the highest average number of pages per agenda pack, averaging at 183 pages.
- The **Overview and Scrutiny Management Board** was the busiest committee for pre-decision scrutiny, considering 25 of the 63 pre-decision scrutiny items (40%) during 2022/23.
- The **Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee** sat as the Crime and Disorder Committee on six occasions.



Hospital Discharge - Active Recovery Beds

Adults and Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

“Active recovery beds should be available on a permanent basis. Future developments could focus on the average length of stay and the effectiveness of the specialist services provided in support of patient reablement.” (Extract from statement from the committee to the Executive Councillor for Adult Care and Public Health - November 2022)

The safe and timely discharge of patients from hospitals is important both for the individuals themselves and for the health and care system as a whole. There are several schemes supported by the county council and NHS as part of the *Home First* approach, and most people move from hospital to home, with varying levels of support, such as a period of reablement. However, for some patients with complex needs, discharge directly to their home is not suitable and in November 2022, the **Adults and Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee** supported a proposal to commission sixty active recovery beds in residential homes across Lincolnshire, using NHS funding. These beds are aimed to minimise the future reliance on long term care, and ultimately enable people to live independently at home with reduced packages of care.

The primary benefit is for individuals themselves, but financial benefits include a reduction in the costs of care packages and a saving of over £300 per patient per night for the health and care system. The cost of a hospital bed averages £468 per night, and the cost of this service is approximately £127 per night. Outcomes indicate that 17.5% of people leaving the service subsequently returned home with no care needs and 35% receive a reablement or home care service package.

In November 2022, the committee was advised that funding would only support this initiative until 31 March 2023, in line with the national NHS funding allocation. The Committee expressed the view that active recovery beds should be available on a permanent basis. Subsequently, the service has been commissioned until 31 March 2024, again with NHS funding. This represents a key element of the Lincolnshire health and care system response to pressures on hospital beds. Active recovery beds result in positive outcomes for users, reduce the pressure on hospitals by supporting discharge and result in reduced future care costs for those adults leaving the service.



Cost-of-Living Increase for Foster Carers

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

“That the committee supports the recommendation to the Executive Councillor for Children’s Services, Community Safety, Procurement and Migration to approve the increase of all Lincolnshire’s foster carer rates by 12.4% from April 2023 in line with the Government’s increase to the National Minimum Allowances.” (March 2023)

In Autumn 2022, the Government announced a 12.4% uplift to the National Minimum Allowance paid to foster carers to help cover the cost of caring for a child in care. This was in recognition of the increased costs being faced by fostering households in caring for a child looked after by the local authority and reinforced that all households should be supported financially, professionally and emotionally in the volunteering role they undertake.

As of 1 December 2022, there were 756 children in care in Lincolnshire, of which 520 (68.8%) were placed with 310 fostering households. Fostering plays a significant role in the council’s ability to care for young people for whom it is responsible. However, it remains a consistent challenge to attract and retain foster carers in sufficient numbers to meet the council’s requirements. Lincolnshire has a strong core offer of support to foster carers and currently sits in the top quartile for payments made to foster carers across the region.

The **Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee** recognised the importance of the council’s foster carers and their value to the authority - that the significant numbers play a vital role in reducing the need for the council to have to rely on independent fostering agencies as much as some other local authorities might have to.

The committee unanimously supported the proposed 12.4% increase to fostering allowances, which would help to support foster carers with cost-of-living increases so that they could continue to foster. The committee was pleased that additional funding for the uplift was being provided through the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2023/24 and recognised that this recommendation would secure the stability of the council’s own foster carer provision and make for an attractive offer to prospective new foster carers.

Energy for Growth (Utilities Provision in Greater Lincolnshire)

Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee

"That the committee reviews and comments on the Interim Report on the Energy Options Analysis for Greater Lincolnshire; that the committee is satisfied with the contents of this interim report; [and] that the comments from the debate be passed on to Rider Levett Bucknall." (April 2023)

In October 2022, the committee received an Energy for Growth (Utilities Provision in Greater Lincolnshire) report. This was followed by a further information report in 2023, that provided an update on the progress made and delved deeper into one of the intelligence work streams in the work programme (Energy Options Analysis for Greater Lincolnshire study), along with an interim report prepared by the consultants.

The report contained a thorough examination of existing and proposed developments within the Greater Lincolnshire area to forecast future electricity demands. By mapping these demands onto the electricity network, potential areas with limited infrastructure capacity in the future were identified. This strategic approach allowed for early engagement with relevant Local Distribution Network Operators, as well as exploring innovative local solutions to foster *clean* growth. Moreover, the Greater Lincolnshire Energy Options Analysis facilitated collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and joint efforts among the three tier-1 and seven tier-2 local authorities in the Greater Lincolnshire region.

The **Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee** were actively involved in the process and discussions surrounding the valuable findings of these reports. It was noted that the interim report did not address the role of solar energy; instead, it concentrated on examining the short and medium-term impact of growth. However, it was emphasised that the final report would provide comprehensive details about solar energy and consideration of offshore facilities.

Furthermore, committee members raised concerns about the capacity of the power grid and potential limitations to the existing infrastructure. In response, the Head of Economic Infrastructure provided reassurance, stating that detailed maps had been created to analyse the supply and demand dynamics of the grid. These maps were well received by members as well as assurances around the grid capacity being a significant aspect examined in-depth in the final report. Members also expressed concerns relating to the need for more co-ordinated provision to bring offshore generated electricity ashore and fed to the grid. This focus on grid capacity as a key outcome in the final report reflects the importance of addressing and understanding the grid's capabilities and limitations in the context of future energy options and growth plans. The final report is anticipated in Autumn/Winter 2023/24 and members look forward with interest to assessing the way in which the wording addresses their concerns.

Project Groundwater (Greater Lincolnshire)

Flood and Water Management Scrutiny Committee

"That the report and presentation be received and that satisfaction on the detailed progress of schemes reported be recorded." (May 2023)

The flooding mechanism of groundwater remains one of the least understood aspects in Greater Lincolnshire. To address this knowledge gap, a project has been initiated to better understand groundwater behaviour and its effective management in relation to flood risk, as well as its potential as a valuable resource.

This specific project was among the 25 selected schemes to receive funding from Defra as part of the £200 million Flood and Coastal Innovation Programme 2020, with the objective to gain deeper insights into the impact of groundwater in the Greater Lincolnshire area. The project involves active collaboration between Lincolnshire County Council, communities in Bourne, Barton-upon-Humber, Barrow-upon-Humber, Grimsby, Scopwick, and the University of Lincoln.

Over forthcoming years, the project's findings are expected to play a crucial role in shaping future approaches to dealing with groundwater challenges, not only within the county but also on a broader scale. The comprehensive understanding from this exercise will prove valuable in informing the strategies and actions of various organisations in effectively managing groundwater-related issues.

The **Flood and Water Management Scrutiny Committee** commended the continuous collaborative efforts with the University of Lincoln on several projects. Committee members raised concerns about the groundwater issues faced in Grimsby, and it was acknowledged by officials that this problem had been persisting for a long time, with climate change exacerbating the situation. As a follow-up action, the committee is planning a site visit to a location where a project is currently in progress, scheduled to take place in Autumn 2023.



General Practice Provision in Lincolnshire

Health Scrutiny Committee for Lincolnshire

"That the need for assurance be recorded that the ratio of appointments conducted by GPs, as opposed to other clinicians, such as clinical pharmacists, physiotherapists and occupational therapists, is meeting the needs of Lincolnshire patients." (November 2022)

There are 81 GP practices in Lincolnshire, with 814,000 patient registrations, and ninety per cent of patient contact with the NHS is via general practice. The **Health Scrutiny Committee for Lincolnshire** regularly reviews general practice, focusing on workforce developments, the ease of access to appointments and the number of appointments provided, including those conducted in-person.

Since 2019, there has been an expansion in the clinical roles in general practice, which includes nurse practitioners, clinical pharmacists, and physiotherapists. The committee recognises that these clinicians support the overall offer in general practice and can free GPs to treat the patients requiring their expertise. However, national 'experimental' data has indicated that Lincolnshire has a lower ratio of appointments undertaken by GPs, when compared to the regional and national averages. A further concern for the committee has been the re-instatement of in-person appointments following the pandemic.

For many people, phoning a GP practice - the usual means of contact - has been difficult, with long waits and sometimes calls going unanswered. NHS England has launched its *Delivery Plan for Recovering Access to Primary Care*, which aims to reduce the number of people struggling to contact their practice, as well as advising patients on the day they call how their request will be managed.

During the course of 2022-23, three specific GP practices were rated *inadequate* by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and placed in special measures. The committee reviewed the support given to these practices by the NHS Lincolnshire Integrated Care Board as the commissioner, such as advice on telephony, patient participation arrangements, and medicines management, with the aim to improve their rating. As a result, of the three practices, two are no longer rated *inadequate* and are no longer in special measures.

The committee will continue to monitor GP provision, both in terms of appointments provided by GPs, and the number of in-person appointments. It will also focus on the ease of access to GP services, including the local implementation of national initiatives, and continue to monitor support provided to practices, where the CQC has identified poor quality of care.



A16/Marsh Lane Roundabout Improvements Scheme & Active Travel Scheme, Boston

Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee

"That the Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee recorded its unanimous support to the recommendations to the Leader of the Council - Executive Councillor for Resources, Communications and Commissioning, and the Executive Councillor for Highways, Transport and IT as set out in the report." (December 2022)

The A16/Marsh Lane Boston Roundabout improvements scheme and the Boston Active Travel improvements scheme were two of the six schemes in the overall Levelling Up Fund programme for Lincolnshire. These improvements are aimed at implementing works that enhance key arterial routes serving South Holland, Boston, and the Port of Boston, providing an essential distribution route for the agricultural, food and logistical sectors and carrying significant commuter flows. Adoption and implementation of the Active Travel Scheme introduced various benefits to the local infrastructure and improved the user experience for local businesses and communities, whilst reducing the risk for pedestrians and cyclists. Examples include a new shared footway/cycleway facility along London Road, A16 and Marsh Lane, new toucan crossings on the latter two, and a new layout on Wyberton Low Road enabling cyclist crossing. The committee was consulted on the recommendations made, which supported the development of a contract for the construction of the scheme to be initiated.

The **Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee** recorded its unanimous support for the recommended actions to be implemented. Members emphasised the importance of minimising any disruption to business activity and received assurances, in close liaison with the Boston Transport Board, that businesses would be informed so that they understood the schemes and could plan for the future. Members applauded the pedestrian and cycling recommendations for lit crossings. Overall, the positive response from members and the anticipated positive reception from the public indicated that the proposed measures could potentially lead to significant improvements in the area's infrastructure and transportation options.

The Boundary Commission for England: 2023 Review of Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

“That the Board support the recommendations to the Leader of the Council to consider the proposals of the Boundary Commission with particular focus on the plans for Stamford and Rutland and make a decision as to whether Lincolnshire County Council should write to the Boundary Commission calling on it to return to the previous proposals for Stamford and Rutland.” (November 2022)

In 2021, the Boundary Commission for England initiated a review of the parliamentary constituency boundaries. The arrangements put forward in June 2021 would have seen the Stamford and Rutland constituency straddle two counties - Lincolnshire and Rutland, and one district – South Kesteven. However, the proposed changes put forward in the final consultation in 2022 were more complex and would have seen the Stamford and Rutland constituency cross three county boundaries and five local authorities, three of which were upper tiers. This would also have included crossing two Local Enterprise Partnerships which would create a more complex geography than any other Lincolnshire parliamentary constituency.

The **Overview and Scrutiny Management Board** recommended that the Boundary Commission’s latest proposal for a parliamentary constituency to cover Stamford, Rutland and Harborough should not be supported, and should be reverted to the initial proposal for a parliamentary constituency to cover Stamford and Rutland. The Board raised concerns over the proposal to have one MP covering three county council areas, which was considered too much for them to effectively support their constituents.

The Board supported the remaining proposals for Lincolnshire’s parliamentary constituencies, in particular the revised proposals for the Boston and Skegness parliamentary constituency. Concerns were raised however, that the revised Boston and Skegness proposals would need to be altered if the proposals for Stamford and Rutland were amended. This was to ensure a balanced representation of electors, and the Board therefore requested that options were explored to minimise this impact as much as possible.

On 2 December 2022, the Leader of the Council decided that Lincolnshire County Council should write to the Boundary Commission calling on it to return to the previous proposals for Stamford and Rutland.

Multiply Adult Numeracy Programme in Lincolnshire

Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee

" That unanimous support be given to the recommendations in the Executive Councillor report [and that] comments from the Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee be forwarded on to the Executive Councillor for Economic Development, Environment and Planning in relation to this item." (May 2022)

Lincolnshire County Council has been appointed as the lead body for the Multiply Adult Numeracy Programme. This appointment required the submission of an Investment Plan to the Department for Education on 30 June 2022, outlining how funding of up to £4 million was being allocated within the county to provide new numeracy provisions for residents aged 19 years and older who do not have a grade C/level 4 or above in GCSE maths. The plan aimed to address skills gaps in key sectors and cater to the needs of hard-to-reach groups and individuals in the county.

The **Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee** considered the business and individual benefits of this investment, the proposed interventions and the consultation and engagement efforts which aimed at developing an inclusive, compliant, and achievable three-year plan. Unanimous support was given to the Executive Councillor for Economic Development, Environment and Planning, to submit an Investment Plan for a Lincolnshire-wide Multiply Programme to aid Levelling Up in the county.

Members expressed satisfaction in learning that the plans encompassed strategies to engage individuals furthest from the labour market, as well as those who might hesitate to step forward due to negative social perceptions related to their numeracy skills. Collaboration with employers was highlighted as a means to address numeracy and literacy skills among employees through work-related activities such as money management, stock control, weighing and measuring, and cookery, all within safe workplace environments and using the external support of community organisations.

Furthermore, pilot activities funded through the council's UK Community Renewal Funding award would inform approaches to delivering the programme. One such example is Abbey Access Training, which leads a consortium of eight charities that work with hard-to-reach groups and individuals to give them access to learning support.

The committee recommended exploring collaboration with trade unions that already offer union-funded learning opportunities and courses, as well as working with union representatives to promote the Programme. Officers responded positively, expressing their eagerness to explore these opportunities.

OTHER SUCCESSES



Performance of the Fostering Service

Corporate Parenting Panel

"That the report be received, and satisfaction be given to the performance achieved by Fostering Service and the assurances provided around areas that require attention and improvement."
(March 2023)

A key area of focus for the **Corporate Parenting Panel** is the Fostering Service, to ensure that the council recruits and retains sufficient foster carers, and that they are well supported in looking after Lincolnshire's children in care. The Panel welcomed the proposed 12.43% increase in allowances for foster carers, approved in March 2023, and extended their appreciation for the dedicated efforts of these carers. The primary focus of this funding was to ensure that foster carers received the necessary support and felt genuinely valued.

The breakdown of foster placements was of particular interest and concern to Panel members. However, it was acknowledged that several factors contributed to these breakdowns, particularly issues concerning attachment. In response to data and information highlighting placement breakdowns and unplanned moves, additional courses have been carefully designed and scheduled to support foster carers. Among these planned courses is the therapeutic crisis intervention programme. Assurance was provided that every possible effort was being made to prevent such breakdowns in the future.

Furthermore, the Panel recognised and understood the challenges that foster carers faced at the end of or during a breakdown of placements, especially due to the changes in family dynamics. The Foster Carer representatives on the Panel stressed that at such challenging times, it was vital to have the support from the Fostering Service and the entire fostering community.

SCRUTINY REVIEW PANELS

The council has two scrutiny panels to undertake reviews that focus on a particular issue and consider it in greater detail than is possible at committee. These reviews will typically last around six months and will include a mixture of interviews with relevant council officers, research of best practice elsewhere, meetings with service users and community groups, and consultation with wider parts of the community. These reviews culminate in a final report with recommendations which are then presented to a meeting of the council's Executive.

In 2021 the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board requested each scrutiny committee propose topics for in-depth reviews to be carried out in the new council term. The scrutiny committees put their individual proposals forward and following detailed examination of the priority level of each, it was agreed that the initial reviews allocated to Scrutiny Panels A and B were Town Centre Improvements and Lincolnshire Agricultural Sector Support.



Town Centre Improvements

Scrutiny Panel A

“High streets can be lively, dynamic, exciting and social places that give a sense of belonging and trust to a community” (The Portas Review, 2011)

The purpose of this review has been to consider how Lincolnshire County Council uses its leadership role to support Lincolnshire's town centres and high streets, so as to achieve economic sustainability, and to help stimulate a visitor economy as well as to support job creation.

Scrutiny Panel A has completed its evidence gathering and has been finalising its report, including recommendations for the consideration of the Executive on initiatives that the county council might take forward. Although the Panel has commissioned case studies on four town centres, its conclusions focus on actions that could support all town centres. The Panel has gathered a range of evidence, which includes the following:

- the role of the County Council in supporting town centres, including:
 - its existing policies and initiatives;
 - the differences between its role and the roles of district councils and the extent to which they complement each other;
- placemaking and identifying community assets - barriers and opportunities for high streets;
- heritage and the visitor economy;
- case studies on four towns: Caistor, Holbeach, Mablethorpe and Market Rasen;
- innovative uses of information technology and digital services;
- practical changes for specific town centres, such as the use of traffic regulation orders; and
- national policy initiatives, and their impact locally.

The review report is being finalised for consideration by the Executive in October 2023.



Lincolnshire Agricultural Sector Support

Scrutiny Panel B

“Despite the evolving landscape, the agricultural sector is poised to remain a vital component of Lincolnshire’s economy, playing a crucial role in both sustaining the nation’s food supply and contributing to international exports.” (Cllr Gary Taylor, Chairman of Scrutiny Panel B, May 2023)

“Our landmark Agriculture Act will transform the way we support farmers.” (George Eustice, Environment Secretary, 2020)

Despite the evolving landscape, the agricultural sector is poised to remain a vital component of the Lincolnshire economy, playing a crucial role in both sustaining the nation's food supply and contributing to international exports.

Additionally, the Panel set out to identify potential opportunities for Lincolnshire County Council to support meeting the unmet needs of farmers and agricultural workers. Their intention was to propose appropriate interventions to address these needs effectively.

Throughout their investigation, the Panel gathered recommendations, which were validated by industry experts, organisations, and businesses.

As part of their mandate, the Panel identified and analysed various challenges encountered by the agricultural sector. These challenges included shifts in government policies, labour shortages, adequacy of training provision, increased automation, spikes in Avian Influenza outbreaks and the pressing issue of poor mental health among farmers and agricultural workers.

The recommendations of this review are being considered by the Executive on 5 September 2023. Following consideration of these, the Executive Councillor for Economic Development, Environment and Planning will determine which recommendations to accept and work closely with lead officers to devise an action plan.

CONTACT US

If you have any questions regarding the overview and scrutiny process, or any of the work we have undertaken then please get in touch with one of the officers listed below.

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- Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee
- Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee
- Corporate Parenting Panel

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