

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber - The Guildhall on 5 July 2022 commencing at 6.30 pm.

Present: Councillor Mrs Diana Rodgers (Chairman)
Councillor Roger Patterson (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Mrs Tracey Coulson
Councillor Christopher Darcel
Councillor Timothy Davies
Councillor Mrs Caralyne Grimble
Councillor Cherie Hill
Councillor Mrs Cordelia McCartney
Councillor Peter Morris
Councillor Robert Waller

Also Present: Councillor Michael Devine
Councillor David Dobbie
Councillor Mrs Lesley Rollings
Councillor Trevor Young

In Attendance:
Jenny Barnett CEO, CA Lindsey
Paul Burrows Operations Manager, CA Lindsey
Nova Roberts Director of Change Management, ICT & Regulatory Services
Ele Snow Senior Democratic and Civic Officer

Apologies: Councillor Mrs Jackie Brockway
Councillor Paul Howitt-Cowan
Councillor John McNeill

7 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 17 May 2022 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

8 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at this point in the meeting.

9 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE

The matters arising schedule, setting out the position of previously agreed actions, as at 27 June 2022, was **NOTED**.

10 PRESENTATION ITEM - CITIZENS ADVICE LINDSEY

The Chairman welcomed Jenny Barnett, CEO, and Paul Burrows, Operations Manager, from Citizens Advice Lindsey. It was explained that they covered both East and West Lindsey but for the purpose of the presentation, information was focussed on West Lindsey only.

The Committee heard that CA Lindsey provided free, impartial advice and support on a range of issues including but not limited to help with:

- Debt
- Benefits
- Housing
- Employment
- Consumer
- Relationships
- Discrimination

They also supported people who were facing poverty. Last year in West Lindsey, 1,576 clients were helped with more than 7,300 issues, with a further 1800 clients helped on Advice Line, as well as those provided with assistance through webchat, email, referrals and one-off advice queries. Appointments were delivered in a way that best suited the client, whether that be face to face, telephone or online. There was also specialist support available, for example with complex debt issues or specific welfare benefits.

Members heard that the services provided by CA Lindsey continued to play a significant role in the community, with 86% of clients saying the service had helped them find a way forward and 87% saying they would recommend the service. In addition, it was explained that demand had risen by 50% between January and March 2022, with concerns such as the loss of the £20 per week Universal Credit uplift, the worsening cost of living crisis and the removal of the protective measures that had been introduced during the pandemic. It was also highlighted that as well as receiving a higher volume of enquiries, clients were presenting with increasingly complex issues, requiring more time to be spent with individual clients.

It was highlighted that CA Lindsey worked in partnership with local foodbanks, the Salvation Army, Local Authorities and had membership with the LCC Financial Inclusion Partnership. Members were provided with monetary figures demonstrating the benefit of the services provided, however it was highlighted that the fiscal benefits were only a small representation of the value of the services provided. The value of, for example, keeping people in employment or helping them back to work, reducing demand on GP and mental health services, improving family relationships, was immeasurable.

The presentation was concluded by recognising the looming cost of living crisis and the impact that would have across the district. Demand for CA Lindsey services was likely to

increase further, with partnership working at the fore to provide necessary assistance where needed. Both Jenny Barnett and Paul Burrows thanked the Committee for the invitation to attend and offered Members the opportunity to ask questions.

The Chairman thanked them both for their detailed presentation and the work undertaken for the residents of West Lindsey, recognising the burden they helped to relieve on other services.

Members of the Committee recognised the increased demand and enquired as to whether there were specialist services offered for veterans, as they faced hardships that were perhaps unique to them. It was explained that there were several specialist services providing support, CA Lindsey would refer veterans to those specialist services when needed.

In response to a question regarding facing the increased demand, it was explained that there were limitations to how many people the organisation could support, whilst always striving to provide the best service to each client. They recognised where there were barriers to people accessing the service, for example language barriers, although all advisors were trained to use language line which offered a translation service. It was also recognised that the rurality of the district posed challenges, with vulnerable clients perhaps not able to travel for face to face appointments but also not best supported through phone calls.

A Member of the Committee enquired as to whether students of law were still available to offer free legal advice, referring to a previous scheme whereby it assisted both clients needing legal advice and students requiring experience of legal work. It was explained that this was not a current model however students often volunteered, most often in the city branches.

Members enquired as to whether there had been an increase in domestic abuse cases, to which it was recognised that it had been difficult to identify such issues when face to face appointments had been suspended. With these now re-started, cases could be more easily identified, with clients supported and referred to other agencies as needed. It was also noted that CA Lindsey worked closely with Trading Standards with regard to loan sharks.

In response to a query regarding support provided to younger people, it was explained that the service tended to deal with an older demographic, however during the pandemic there had been a noticeable increase in younger people accessing services. The introduction of webchats did appeal to a younger demographic.

A Visiting Member enquired as to levels of support for families over the pending school holidays, to which it was explained that CA Lindsey worked with the Local Authority to promote support packages available, however they were not directly responsible for providing support such as free meals.

The Chairman highlighted that CA Lindsey provided free, confidential and impartial advice regardless of circumstance and again thanked Jenny Barnett and Paul Burrows for their time and services, on behalf of the Committee.

11 FORWARD PLAN

With no comments, questions, or requirement for a vote, the Forward Plan was **DULY NOTED**.

12 COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

Members gave consideration to the proposed work plan for upcoming meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. With no questions or comments, the work plan was **DULY NOTED**.

13 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED that under Section 100 (A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

Note: The meeting entered closed session at 7:15pm

14 PREPARATION FOR PRESENTATION FROM LINCOLNSHIRE POLICE

It was explained to the Committee that there would be a representative from Lincolnshire Police attending the September meeting and the intention of the discussion item was to ascertain areas of focus from Members. It was acknowledged that Members had details of individual situations that could not be discussed in a public forum, but provided examples of concerns across the district that could be used to ask further information from the Police.

There was significant discussion regarding the challenges of policing such a vast area, with differing areas of concern across rural and urban settings. Members were keen to hear how the Force dealt with these challenges, with specific enquiries as to whether there had been much noticeable difference in numbers of Police Officers.

With regard to rural policing, Members voiced concerns that there did not seem to be sufficient Police Officers to deal with rural crime. With regard to urban policing, Members enquired as to whether there were still actions that could be taken in relation to anti-social behaviours, such as curfews or dispersal orders.

Alongside the concerns regarding rural vs urban policing, there were specific questions raised regarding domestic abuse cases throughout the pandemic, how reported cases in the area differed or compared with data from across the county and nationwide, and with whom did the Police work in order to support victims of domestic abuse.

The Committee also suggested that a summary of current statistics, and a map of the geographical area covered, would assist in understanding the unique nature of policing in West Lindsey and Lincolnshire as a whole.

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Members were in agreement for the discussions to be summarised and shared with the Police, in order to inform their presentation to the Committee at the September meeting.

The meeting concluded at 7.46 pm.

Chairman