

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber - The Guildhall on 15 October 2024 commencing at 6.30 pm.

Present: Councillor Paul Howitt-Cowan (Chairman)
Councillor Jacob Flear (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Trevor Bridgwood
Councillor Liz Clews
Councillor Paul Key
Councillor Lynda Mullally
Councillor Maureen Palmer
Councillor Roger Pilgrim
Councillor Stephen Bunney
Councillor Mrs Mandy Snee

In Attendance:

Inspector Michael Head	Lincolnshire Police
Nova Roberts	Director of Change Management, ICT & Regulatory Services
Andy Gray	Housing & Environmental Enforcement Manager
Darren Mellors	Performance & Programme Manager
Ele Snow	Senior Democratic and Civic Officer
Natalie Smalley	Democratic and Civic Officer

Apologies: Councillor Moira Westley
Councillor Eve Bennett

18 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Senior Democratic and Civic Officer explained there were two sets of minutes for signing. She explained the minutes from 30 July 2024 were presented at the last meeting, and had since been edited to include the required amendments; however, it was brought to Members' attention before the meeting that evening that whilst some Councillors were present at the 30 July meeting, the record no longer reflected that. Members were asked to agree the 30 July minutes as a correct record, being assured that the attendance record would be updated accordingly.

Having been moved and seconded it was

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 30 July 2024 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

The Committee was then asked to confirm the accuracy of the second set of minutes, and having been moved and seconded it was

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 3 September 2024 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

19 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

20 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE

After the Senior Democratic and Civic Officer had provided a short update regarding the Matters Arising Schedule, a Member of the Committee asked a question regarding the Future4Me organisation. He emphasised the importance of the service offered by the organisation and enquired whether an explanation of the service provided by Future4Me could be distributed to all Members before Future4Me representatives came to Committee to present.

Councillor T Bridgwood then proceeded to inform the Committee that the Government had produced an online Renewable Energy Planning Database, with 1,564 applications for battery storage sites nationwide, and 14 of those sites approximated in the West Lindsey District. He explained that he was aware of Councillors in other areas raising concerns regarding these sites, and highlighted concern that there was a lack of legislation in relation to battery storage sites. He continued that local fire authorities were not statutory consultees, meaning that their comments may not have been considered by policymakers.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Bridgwood for raising the issue and stressed the serious nature of the matter. This was further reiterated by another Member of the Committee, who enquired whether the matter could be moved at Full Council, with a view to a potential lobbying standpoint.

The Director of Change Management, ICT and Regulatory Services added that the Committee had requested the Director of Planning, Regeneration and Communities to present to the Committee regarding legislation and policy around battery storage sites. She confirmed that the presentation would take place after an active planning application had been determined, and that continued liaison would be maintained with Members to update them regarding ongoing battery storage site concerns.

With no further comments or questions, the Matters Arising Schedule was **DULY NOTED**.

21 PRESENTATION ITEM - LINCOLNSHIRE POLICE

The Chairman welcomed Inspector Michael Head of Lincolnshire Police to the Committee, who proceeded to present the Lincolnshire Police Annual Update.

Inspector Head gave an overview of his background in the role and explained that the previous year had been difficult due to a force-wide restructure resulting in a reduced number of Police Community Support Officers (PSCOs); alongside issues at Scampton; and other serious issues force-wide that had impacted on staffing in West Lindsey. Despite this,

he attributed policing successes in the local area in large part due to the close working partnerships established with Council Officers and Councillors, working closely together to reduce Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), providing safeguarding education, and partnering on long-term problem solving. Inspector Head detailed how regular updates were sent via email to Parish Councils but explained how he hoped to get more feedback from them in the future. A Member later responded that a closer working relationship may be more of a challenge for some Parish Councils, due to the infrequency of Parish Council meetings.

The Inspector then outlined the Neighbourhood Policing Remodel, which entailed a transition to an evidence-based policing approach, which ensured a better allocation of resources for different areas; he explained how areas which were considered high-risk in terms of crime would be allocated more resources, such as PCSOs, compared with low-risk areas. It was added that PCSOs had been reduced in numbers, with fewer in operation than expected due to funding, meaning fewer were allocated to rural areas as planned.

Members heard there were four different teams working from Gainsborough and Market Rasen; each team consisted of one Sergeant and ten Constables who would respond to 999 and 101 calls. He then gave an overview on the policing model for West Lindsey, highlighting that the district was split into nine separate beat codes, each of which had their own Neighbourhood Policing Team and priorities. Details of the geography of each of the nine areas was then outlined together with the staffing and priorities for each. Detailed crime figures for each beat code were presented to Members, with a summary that the crime figures had generally reduced.

Attention was drawn to the impact of the crime statistics, as the Inspector explained that by using an evidence-based policing model, it was challenging to make the case for additional resources for his team when lower crime figures appeared to reflect less criminal activity. He emphasised that he believed the lower crime figures were impacted by reduced reporting rates, rather than primarily a reduction in criminal activity.

It was explained that Criminal Behaviour Orders (CBOs) were being considered as one of their main policing tools in neighbouring policing. Inspector Head outlined that such orders could run for a period of two years and recipients could face a custodial sentence should they breach the mandated condition; Members heard there were six CBOs in place in West Lindsey. The increase in use of Closure Orders (COs) was also brought to the attention of the Committee, as the Inspector detailed how these could be used to police anti-social behaviour, as well as drug-related crime. It was explained that a full Closure Order could prevent the residents living at a particular address, or a partial Closure Order, which would stop visitors to a particular address.

The Chairman thanked Inspector Head for his presentation and his dedication in policing the community; this sentiment was reiterated by several Members throughout the discussion.

Cllr S Bunney expressed concern regarding the lack of crime reporting in the local area, and the reduced levels of Police staff. He highlighted the relationship between a lack of Police presence in rural areas and a lack of crime reporting, explaining that people would be less likely to report crime if they felt that the Police did not have the resources to address it. In the event of reporting a crime as a third party, it was enquired how Councillors could support the Police to ensure that reporting figures were as accurate as possible. Inspector Head later clarified that third party reporting was recorded in the statistics, and that it was used to

determine what kind of investigation would take place; he gave the example of obtaining intelligence through monitoring local social media groups.

The same Member raised the crime statistics regarding the large rural area of Welton and Hemswell, and other similar large rural areas; he suggested that if Welton and Hemswell had been examined as statistically separate, then more resources may have been allocated to one of the areas under an evidenced-based policing model, due to one area necessitating more resources than the other. The Inspector later agreed with the Member regarding the impact of understaffing and responded that he would raise the possibility of dividing the crime figures of Welton and Hemswell.

Cllr M Snee enquired about the reported increase in sexual offences; she asked whether the increase was explained by an improved Police approach to dealing with domestic violence. Inspector Head responded in agreement, stating that he believes the reported increase was largely due to Officers being better skilled when engaging with victims of crime, as well as increased societal awareness of violence against women and girls.

A question was asked by Cllr P Key regarding the redeployment of resources outside of West Lindsey, and whether the negative impact of redeployment could be mitigated or compensated against under the evidence-based policing model. The response from Inspector Head explained why redeployment occurred, which was often due to crimes outside of West Lindsey requiring a temporary need for more Police staff, which would often inadvertently affect the region by reducing the capacity of other forces to assist in West Lindsey. He explained that the largest current constraint on his team's time was in making an arrest, which involved extensive travelling amongst other time-consuming processes.

Cllr P Key enquired about the impact of the Government's early prisoner release scheme on the West Lindsey District. Inspector Head replied that the effects of the scheme had not been felt as much in the district as in bigger cities, such as Lincoln, due to many prisoners being released as homeless, and remaining in the city to access its support services. It was emphasised that despite the scheme, national shoplifting figures appeared to have reduced.

Cllr S Bunney returned to the topic of barriers to reporting crime; he asked whether progress had been made on improving the reporting system. The Member outlined how contacting 101, or reporting via the internet, was off-putting and difficult for some. He cited how excessive waiting times on the phone deterred many from reporting a crime. Inspector Head agreed, explaining he had raised these obstacles with the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). Questions were asked regarding how dropped calls were reported in the statistics, with more detailed statistics of call handling requested from the Director of Change Management, ICT and Regulatory services. The Housing and Environmental Enforcement Manager then reiterated these issues, adding that he believed there was a general trend in under-reporting which needed addressing, which had affected the Council as well as the Police; he stressed that the public should follow reporting procedures, where accessible, to ensure concerns were appropriately addressed.

The Vice Chairman enquired about the use of police drones in Gainsborough; the Inspector responded that a drone unit was now established in Gainsborough, with a drone-trained operator on each response shift. He added that drones had been used to locate missing people, and to assist in policing anti-social behaviour; this was an asset to the local area, and it was being publicised on social media.

After no further questions, the Chairman thanked Inspector Head for his contribution at Committee, and for the excellent work being carried out by his team. The Chairman concluded that the overarching message was to encourage the reporting of crime.

22 PROGRESS AND DELIVERY MEMBER WORKING GROUP

The Change, Programme and Performance Manager gave a short presentation to the Committee regarding the report. It was explained that the Progress and Delivery framework was under full review, with a cross-party Members' group to be created. He highlighted the need for Members of the Committee to volunteer to join the group, and proposed that they met for a two-hour workshop at a date to be confirmed during November 2024. It was explained that the input from the Members' group would inform the development of the Progress and Delivery Framework report, which was scheduled to be presented at the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee in January 2025.

The Manager added that the proposed measure set was circulated to Members on 7 October, with the engagement outcome to be included in the November workshop.

Councillor S Bunney explained that the report was currently paper-based and released on a quarterly basis, however, he enquired whether the report could be digital, and accessible via a dashboard, to enable Members to be more frequently updated. The Manager responded by agreeing with the Member and confirmed that they were looking to roll out dashboards in the future to increase transparency and engagement.

The Chairman asked the Committee for volunteers for the aforementioned cross-party Members' group, with interest expressed by Chairman Cllr P Howitt-Cowan, Cllr M Snee, Cllr T Bridgewood, Cllr M Palmer, with Cllr Westley's interest confirmed by the Chairman in her absence.

With no further comments, and having been moved, seconded, and voted upon, it was

RESOLVED that the creation of a cross-party Member working group to review the 2026/28 Progress and Delivery framework and associated measures be approved.

23 FORWARD PLAN

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

24 COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

With no comments or questions, the Workplan was **DULY NOTED**.

The meeting concluded at 8.00 pm.

Chairman