

Minutes of a meeting of the **JOINT PERFORMANCE MONITORING PANEL AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL** held in line with The Local Authorities & Police & Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority & Police & Crime Panel Meetings) (England & Wales) Regulations 2020, on Tuesday, 17 November 2020 at 6.30 pm.

PRESENT

B Alcock	A C Cronin	A C Tennant
J R Astill	R A Gibson	J Tyrrell
J Avery	J D McLean	S C Walsh
A C Beal	N H Pepper	D J Wilkinson
M D Booth	P A Redgate	A R Woolf
C J T H Brewis	J L Reynolds	
T A Carter	G T D Rudkin	

Apologies for absence were received from or on behalf of Councillors F Biggadike, M Hasan, J L King, G P Scalese and S-A Slade

In Attendance: The Interim Director, the Executive Manager Growth ,the Housing Landlord Services Manager, the Democratic Services Manager, the Democratic Services Officer and the Democratic Services Trainee.

**1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

Councillor Woolf was elected Chairman for the duration of the meeting.

**2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

The Panel was advised of the following substitution for this meeting only:

Councillor A M Newton was replacing Councillor M Hasan

**3. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

There were none.

**4. HOMELESSNESS - HORIZON SCANNING**

The Housing Landlord Services Manager provided the Panel with a presentation on Homelessness in the District, the current situation and how the Authority planned to address the issues.

**Action By**

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The presentation provided information on the following:

- A definition of homelessness;
- The homelessness position in South Holland in the first week of November 2020;
- The 2020 year to date figure for households in interim accommodation (the average for the year was higher due to in year Covid19 pressures, largely impacted by the Everyone In initiative, where the Council was required to accommodate 29 rough sleepers, or those at risk of rough sleeping in hotel accommodation);
- Rough sleeping – Significant interventions into this problem were being addressed. South Holland, together with South Kesteven, North Kesteven and West Lindsey District Councils, had obtained grant monies from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) under their RSI3 scheme in the region of £600,000 – the project was aimed at targeting rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping. South Holland had been awarded a small amount of revenue funding from another MHCLG fund, Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) towards short term winter pressures. Finally, South Holland had recently been awarded a further MHCLG funding allocation from the Cold Weather fund, to provide enhanced winter support to rough sleepers or those households who the Council would not ordinarily have a duty to assist;
- Resources (People and Places). This detailed the various ways in which the team aimed to respond to homelessness: 1) Pathfinder - The Housing Options team were temporarily refocused into prevention, relief and private sector through a Tenancy Relations Officer role. Officers were being recruited to take on the role of Housing First Responder to assess, support and give basic advice to the increasing number of applicants contacting the Council for more general advice; 2) Change4Lincs – This project included access to a Rough Sleeping Coordinator, 4 Street Outreach Workers, 4 Supported Tenancy Officers, 2 Intensive Support Workers (1 dedicated to South Holland) and 2 Lettings Officers; 3) NSAP – In addition to accommodation solutions the Council could develop, there would also be access to additional support services through the provision of revenue funding for an additional Intensive Support Worker; 4) Help2Rent – The Council was currently in final negotiations with this insurance provider. This was a government backed service where local councils could purchase an insurance policy to support access to the private sector. The policy provided cover in place of a deposit, missed rent, damage, abandonment and legal fees.

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Additional cover was also being added in for pets. The scheme would be adopted by all other Lincolnshire District Councils offering the same product to ensure continuity for private sector offers; 5) Affordable Housing pipeline – There had been 31 rented unit completions for the year to date, with a further 42 expected. There were also 82 units planned for 2021/22; and 6) Void turnover – For the year to date - 207 Council properties had become void and available for letting. Of these, 144 were general needs and 63 were sheltered housing properties. The highest demand accommodation, 1 bed general needs, saw the lowest level of turnover, with only 11 properties becoming void. The highest property type becoming void was general needs, 3 bed houses, and 63 had become available during the period.

- Systems (Northgate upgrade) – Members were advised that an upgrade to the Northgate system was well underway. The system had been used for certain areas of housing for some time, but all housing work was now being moved onto it, and this would allow Northgate to be used more effectively in areas such as business intelligence. Housing options would have a much improved back office and customer facing experience through Housing Online and My Options, which would be much more interactive than was currently the case. Customers could upload information, which would be sent directly to the case officer, and would be more efficient by reducing the amount of time officers spent on administration tasks. Personal housing plans could be managed online with the customer. For those customer unable to access the system however, alternative arrangements would be made.
- Use of intelligence – There were sources of intelligence that could be used to shape services going forward: 1) Employment rates within the district were being closely monitored; 2) One of the most significant changes had been the number of people claiming Universal Credit, rising from 2891 in October 2019 to 7278 in October 2020; 3) There had been a significant rise in those seeking work and in receipt of benefits, rising from 1150 in October 2019 to 2590 in October 2020 – this information indicated a significant change in people’s circumstances, and that these circumstances were changing quickly; and 4) There had been a large increase in the take-up of the Discretionary Housing Payment – to date, £82,611 had been claimed from a total of £159,737, leaving £77,126 available until 31 March 2021. This was a strong position for South Holland, where take-up normally had to be encouraged. Officers confirmed that early intervention, and recognition of where other opportunities existed was vital. The Council had important links with the DWP which were very

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important, and also with the economy in South Holland which could highlight any knock-on effects that might affect people's circumstances. There had been an incremental rise in homelessness in South Holland and it was very important to monitor the intelligence to reach conclusions and respond effectively at an early stage.

- Opportunities – There was an opportunity for Policy development and how performance was interpreted: 1) Housing Assistance Policy – this had recently been approved by the Cabinet and had been updated to improve access to financial assistance for homeless households, to provide greater scope to apply discretion to Disabled Facilities Grants (grants to support home owners and options for bringing empty homes back into use), and to highlight financial assistance available to existing council tenants facing hardship to support them in sustaining their tenancy; 2) Allocations Policy – work was currently underway on reviewing and making substantial changes to this policy. It was important to have a policy that met the needs of the client group and that also allowed the council, as a landlord, to allocate its properties effectively, and to also manage and host a suitable housing register that fulfilled the requirements of the Council's registered provider partners; 3) Sheltered Housing Review – it was proposed that a sheltered housing review be undertaken to look at the type of properties and facilities on offer within SHDC's sheltered housing stock. Consideration would be given to the type and quantity of stock held and whether it was appropriate to meet needs. Properties could be proposed for alternative uses which could assist the Council in fulfilling its wider housing demand; 4) Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy – the current strategy was due to come to an end next year and this was an opportunity for the replacement strategy to be revised and shaped to take account of local priorities and pressures; and 5) Future funding opportunities – The Council had been successful in the last 12 months in achieving funding, with outline commitment from MHCLG of over £1million of funding in support of rough sleeping. It was important that SHDC continued to secure any additional monies and continued to position itself effectively to take advantage of opportunities when they arose.

Members considered the information and the following issues were raised.

- During the Covid period, there was an embargo on undertaking any evictions – did officers anticipate many problems once evictions could proceed again?

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- Officers advised that the extended notice period, previously 2 months, was currently 6 months, and this provided a greater lead-in time to work with people. There was a significant backlog of cases to be heard through the County Court system and these were being held in order of priority. There were also other factors that would affect the rate at which people presented themselves. The numbers presenting themselves for loss of accommodation in the private sector had reduced from around 30% of SHDC's homelessness statistics to 10% currently. There were various reasons that this, for example, changes in financial or personal circumstances, the state of the property etc. The Council was working with partners and encouraging tenants to contact the Council at the earliest opportunity. In addition, two resources had been re-positioned as Tenancy Relations Officers to respond and build up expertise to try and address the rise in private sector evictions that was likely to occur.
- What type of properties did the Council need to acquire in order to meet the needs of the homeless, and for general needs?
  - The reason for the higher void figures for three bedroom properties was that these were the properties that the Authority had the most of. The highest demand currently within general needs housing was for single person accommodation, and one or two bedroom properties, of which the Authority had a low number within its stock. With regard to the development of properties, officers explained that one of the main roles of the Strategic Housing Team was to liaise with developers when planning applications were submitted, in order to negotiate and secure the maximum level of affordable housing to meet needs, and to try and influence the design and type of properties in line with local identified need. Over the last few years, the focus of delivery had been on increasing the amount of 1 or 2 bedroom accommodation. The Authority played an important role in working with developers and housing associations to shape the type of properties that were built in order that they could meet identified need. The Council could also directly dictate accommodation type when it built its own properties and again, the focus was on 1 and 2

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bedrooms, as well as other options such as shared ownership accommodation for older people.

- At the meeting of Performance Monitoring Panel on 10 November, officers had been asked to explain the rise in void properties over the period. Had there been any further analysis on the information?
  - Officers confirmed that there had been a higher level of notices submitted within the pandemic period which had resulted in a higher number of voids. As stated at the meeting of Performance Monitoring Panel, the reason for many of the notices to quit had been that tenants were seeking accommodation where care was provided. Officers needed to understand specifically what that meant – were tenants moving to a more formal care setting, or to live with family or friends to receive care? The restrictions imposed as a result of the pandemic had meant that it was very likely that the level of informal support from friends, families and neighbours would have dropped, which could be affecting the rise in notices to quit. When analysis of the information had been undertaken, officers would provide this to a future meeting. Officers also stated that the Authority needed to be clear on the Sheltered Housing offer available, in order that people could make informed choices. There were now many tiers of sheltered provision and it was not as straightforward as it had been in the past.
  
- Did the Authority still work with P3? Was Change for Lincs the replacement for the service provided by P3? SHDC had not been directly involved with P3 however, this would change with Change for Lincs – was the Authority stretching itself by being more directly involved, and did it have the specialist knowledge required?
  - Officers advised that P3 wished to exit from Lincolnshire and had therefore not submitted a bid for the Housing Related Support Contract. The new contract was now in place. P3 would still be providing the Street Outreach service until the end of March 2021, when the service would end. Officers explained that SHDC could have bid for RS13 monies in its own right however, in terms of support from the bid and monies allocated, this would have limited the services that the Authority could provide. Instead, it had pursued the Change

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for Lincs project, which involved working with North Kesteven, South Kesteven and West Lindsey District Councils which created a greater bidding power to allow each of the authorities to do what they wanted. Working together also allowed for the sharing of expertise and also the sharing and moving around of particular resources to address specific areas of pressure in each of the districts. A Partnership Board had been set up and each Authority was equally represented. South Kesteven was the lead authority and undertook the administration of the contract, finances, human resources and associated elements. The arrangement was working well, and 14 members of staff had been brought on board

- What was the Cold Weather Fund?
  - Officers advised that SHDC had access to a Cold Weather Fund which funded eligible individuals to be helped in situations over and above what the Housing Options Service would normally do.
- Members were pleased to hear that the Allocations Policy was being reviewed, and asked for a summary of the proposed recommendations.
  - Officers advised that they were hoping to both broaden the number of applicants on the register, and were also seeking to use the Allocations Policy strategically in attracting applicants, to create momentum in the market and ensure a robust Housing Register. They were also proposing to give equal priority to customers with a prevention or relief need, to encourage people to engage with the Authority at an earlier opportunity, rather than leave it too late when their circumstances may have worsened. The register was currently top heavy with individuals in the most extreme circumstances, and there needed to be more movement across it. Rather than re-shaping the Allocations Policy as a matter of course, it was essential that the Authority brought forward a procedure that worked effectively, that it engaged with its partners, encouraged people to join the register and that encouraged registered providers in having confidence in developing social accommodation in South Holland.
- Members acknowledged that the Authority had a very large

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task ahead of it with regard to housing individuals, and that there was a great risk that this could prove overwhelming. It was important therefore to put a greater emphasis on prevention or early intervention. The cost to, and suffering of individuals was of great concern.

- Officers agreed that housing was currently a significant risk area for the Council, which it had to get right. Homelessness was very much a reactive service – predictions could be made, and trends analysed, and this information was useful to the service however, situations such as the current Covid pandemic and the problems that it was causing could not have been foreseen. Homelessness would always inevitably cause huge challenges - the service had moved forward and would need to continue to do so at some pace.
- Would the flow of properties becoming available to the Council keep pace with the volume of people requiring it, or did the Authority need to be more innovative in its approach to providing the most needed type of property?
  - Officers stated that the challenge with regard to supply was that for certain parts of the South Holland area, rents were relatively high (although they could seem low in comparison to other areas of the country) and therefore access to the private sector was not always possible for people seeking homelessness assistance. As a social housing provider in the area, the Authority could help by increasing the flow of rented properties, thus regulating rents. The level of housing need compared to the level of housing supply were often far apart, and it was important therefore to maximise all opportunities. It was vital to have homes across all tenures, and the Authority therefore needed to engage with the private sector, to be an enabler as well as a delivery partner. It was also important to assist home owners, although it was not always possible to know how many were in difficulties. Supply would be a challenge as the number of affordable social homes that needed to be built was unaffordable. It was important therefore to have access to the greatest level of accommodation possible and to look at different ways of assisting those in need. Officers intended to fully address the difficulties around the supply of homes, to make the most of every opportunity that came forward, and



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would explore different opportunities to address these difficulties.

- Who had control of the allocation of affordable houses, when they became available? In the past, some houses had gone into the private sector for private letting and now the priority was for urgent cases around social housing.
  - Any new build properties that were built by the Council were allocated in line with the allocation policy i.e. those in the greatest need. With regard to the new Allocations Policy, officers would be recommending that schemes over a certain allocation would be of a mixed band allocation, and therefore not allocated solely to those in a higher band. It was hoped that this would create more balanced and sustainable communities. With regard to negotiating nomination agreements, most schemes would have 100% nomination rights to the first allocation. Having a nominations policy that made it easier for registered providers to approach the Authority for individuals from its own list, rather than identifying tenants elsewhere, was a better position to be in.
  
- The Housing IT systems were becoming more updated and integrated however, improvement had been promised some time ago. Was there a timetable for when these improvements would take place? These improvements were needed now, not in the future.
  - The build was well underway for My Options and Housing Online. The switch on date was currently scheduled for January however, this was subject to testing, and was dependent on making sure that the system worked and that the customer service element for the user was satisfactory. The desire was to switch over to using the Northgate system early in 2021, and many of the elements of this have been brought on line. For operational reasons, the system had been set up first for the private sector housing team. Officers understood members' frustrations with IT upgrades taking longer than anticipated however, this upgrade would ultimately bring significant improvements.
  
- Members commented that those involved in addressing the problems around housing needed members' great thanks and support, but it was important that in the future, there was more

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lateral thinking to address these issues.

- Officers had stated that there was a postponement on evictions, and that the courts would consider these in priority order when they re-opened – what were the criteria with regard to prioritisation?
  - Any action relating to rent arrears only was prioritised on the level of debt, and other applications were prioritised dependent upon their nature. Some emergency action had been taken, listings had been secured for emergency injunctions and gas injunctions, but this had not been possible for possession claims. Private sector landlords were all suffering similar delays and the authority continued to liaise with solicitors and the local court user groups. Consideration needed to be given to the private sector as some private landlords were suffering significant hardship themselves - it was possible that the delays could ultimately result in a reduction in the number of private sector homes offered in the future. The court situation was not currently causing any operational problems for the Authority, as income collection was being sustained.
  
- The rough sleeping aspect of homelessness was the most visible. Significant efforts were being made to address this however, for many individuals, homelessness could be only one of a number of issues to be addressed. What was the relationship between the Authority and other bodies that could be involved in assisting these individuals in a variety of ways?
  - There were many challenges involved in engaging some individuals in mainstream services. One of the reasons for the level of resources within the Change for Lincs project was to recognise this fact, and one of the posts was for the provision of a nurse to work with, and to support these individuals to provide immediate care. Other projects would involve mental health professionals but there was some evidence to indicate that addressing physical health symptoms in the first instance assisted in future engagement with individuals to discuss other problems. The aim was to take help and services out to those in need, so they could be assisted there and then. Communication and engagement with other partners was a work in progress. There were a number of demands on the various agencies and some work needed to be done with regard to

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engaging with all these agencies. However, Lincolnshire authorities were well connected through involvement with the Housing Health and Care Delivery Group and the District Housing Network was also well attended. Projects were being brought on by the District Council and it was important that the link between the Authority and other partners was built up to ensure that people were connected with the services they needed.

- It was clear that with regard to voids, properties could not be built fast enough in relation to the problems that abounded. In the long term, what was the situation with hard to let flats? It was important to look at stock and how it could be used better. It was also important to work in partnership with other organisations such as housing associations and the private sector, and for results to come out of this.
  - Officers stated that the Authority held in its stock some flats that were hard to let studio flats. These were one of the biggest problems, so the voids standards on these had been increased to make them more attractive. The Authority had also written to all tenants over 70 asking them to move to one of these properties, should they wish and although there had not been a large response to this, some positive feedback had been received. The current waiting list was small, and officers were looking at longer term actions. With regard to the private sector, it was important for the Authority to work in partnership with this sector and to engage with landlords to assist as an enabler. It was vitally important that there was no downturn in this level of accommodation.
- With regard to the snapshot data provided in the presentation, how did SHDC compare with neighbouring Councils that it was partnered with?
  - The South Holland area was the highest however, this was a snapshot and not necessarily representative of the overall situation. The partnership had taken place to provide a stronger response. Some surrounding areas such as Boston, the City of Lincoln and coastal areas had a significant imbalance of rough sleepers in regard to the size of their districts. In 2018/19, SHDC saw a steep rise but although figures were the highest among the partners, they were not the highest in

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Lincolnshire. Data around unemployment was not available for all districts in the area however, there was a document from the DWP which provided more detail.

- Was there any delay in dealing with general applicants on the waiting list? In general, how long did homeless people have to wait to be housed, and were they given any priority over individuals already on the waiting list?
  - With regard to the housing register, there was no significant backlog in applications. For those customers approaching the Authority as homeless, or in need of advice or assistance, there were some delays but not if they were eligible to be included on the housing list. With regard to allocations where a number of properties became available, a match list from the housing system would be undertaken to identify those in most need and they would be offered housing accordingly, should the housing be suitable for their needs. Reserve nominations would also be identified. For smaller, rural areas, applicants would sometimes be contacted to ask them to widen their areas of preference. Individuals in most need would be placed in a higher band on the list and priority would then fall on those that had been on the list the longest. With regard to homeless applicants, where they were joining the housing register as a result of being threatened with homelessness, they were allowed a choice of areas. If they were eligible through a duty of care by the Council because they were homeless, one reasonable offer of accommodation within the district would be made. The roles of Housing First Responders had been created to assist the user in a quicker way.
- Did the Authority work with any other partners or any other homeless charities?
  - The Authority worked with other providers in the district, other charities and domestic abuse charities. It always looked at how best to use its stock to create flexibility.
- Members agreed that it was important that, where individuals had found themselves in difficulties, or had any concerns, that it was important for them to speak to the Authority at an earlier stage, before it became a bigger problem. Could work be

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undertaken with Parish Councils in order to liaise on a more local level with people? Could members do more?

- Members could help officers to understand how services could be shaped in order to address aspirations, and meetings such as this one were useful. There were a number of opportunities in relation to stock and services. Not everything could be achieved, but there needed to be a broad understanding of the key deliverables, bringing into focus priorities that could deliver aspirations. Officers often saw individuals at crisis point, and the work being done, as discussed during the meeting, could assist in improving this.

Members thanked the officer for the detailed presentation, and also wished to thank him and his team for the work they were currently undertaking.

**5. TOWN CENTRE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME**

The Interim Director and the Executive Manager Growth provided the Panel with a presentation on the Town Centre Improvement Plan (TCIP), and how this would affect the towns of Spalding and Holbeach. The presentation included information on the following:

Background to the Town Centre Improvement Plan

Council had considered a report on 27 November 2019, concerning support for town centres, and the following had been agreed:

- A remit to develop an improvement plan for both Spalding and Holbeach. The TCIP was a programme of activity to support town centres, rather than a wholesale regeneration programme;
- Approval of a £500,000 budget, spread across three years, to support the programme. Funding to go to delivery projects directly, but also to support wider initiatives and make the case for further funding;
- Creation of a new Town Centre Improvement Co-ordinator role;
- Establishment of a partnership governance structure for the TCIP work;
- Acceptance of government funding to progress a business case for capital investment into Holbeach town centre.

Spalding TCIP – activity so far

- A successful launch event was undertaken in February 2020

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with over 50 partners. This was used as a forum to bring partners into the project and share ideas. A number of short, medium and long term themes were identified by partners – Identity/Brand; Town Centre Living; Digital; Business and Enterprise; Making the town clean, safe and vibrant; Access and transport; and Culture and leisure offering. A small number of attendees were invited to form the Spalding TCIP Steering Group.

- In March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic and national lockdown commenced:
  - This had had a huge immediate impact on all town centres with a 12 week period of retail closure. Cultural venues such as the South Holland Centre still remained closed;
  - This had brought about a fundamental shift in immediate priorities during Spring/Summer for both SHDC and its Steering Group partners;
  - £18.4million in grants had been allocated to businesses across the district;
  - The TCIP co-ordinator had commenced her role in May 2020, with an immediate focus on the safe reopening of the town centres, rather than undertaking TCIP work;
  - Covid had accelerated a number of trends that created challenges for town centres.

Spalding TCIP - Current activity

- Detailed work around devising the Town Centre Improvement Programme had re-commenced. The Steering Group had been established, with 22 partners. Initial engagement was very positive. A long list of project proposals for the programme, led by partners involved, was being developed, with themes around – Improving appeal (street scene, untidy areas, aesthetics, sense of safety); Travel and accessibility (bus connectivity, car parking incentives); Covid-safe events and activities (heritage, arts, Christmas trails); Enhancing and diversifying the market; and Business and economy (business incubation, digital infrastructure).
- The TCIP Co-ordinator was taking forward various other activities, including a town centre user survey and prioritisation of projects within the programme.
- Covid challenges persisted, with the planned November and December events programme, funded by the TCIP, affected by the second lockdown.

Principles underpinning the Town Centre Improvement Programme

- The focus was on developing a two stage programme:

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- Short to medium term projects, with the focus on getting the basics right, to encourage the use of the town centre by local residents;
- Medium to longer-term ideas and projects that might deliver longer term change e.g. a business incubator space.
- Joint buy-in and accountability amongst stakeholders for the creation of and delivery of the programme was essential. It was for everybody, and not just the Council, to deliver the plan;
- It was important to develop a plan that used the resources of others, not only those of the Council;
- There was an expectation that the Steering Group members would bring their time, capacity and connection to help the Council to deliver;
- The TCIP would provide the basis for developing future external funding requests and the potential use of Springfields S106 monies.

Town Centre Improvement Plan – Holbeach

- The approach to the Holbeach TCIP was different to Spalding. In August 2019, Holbeach had been invited to submit a full business case for capital funding under the Government's Future High Street Fund. A business case had been submitted in July 2020 seeking approximately £5million in capital funding to support capital investment in three major projects:
  - Creation of a new mixed use development at Chequers Yard, Holbeach;
  - Highway configuration work to address traffic challenges at the Market Hill junction;
  - Investment in a cycle network to improve accessibility to the town centre.
- The TCIP budget had been used to support the business case to government, with a full time project manager, funded by government to develop the business case. The outcome of the funding application was expected this winter, with the outcome of the application shaping the focus of the TCIP for Holbeach.

Upcoming activity and next steps

For Spalding:

- The focus was on prioritisation and sequencing of a shortlist of projects that would form the immediate TCIP for Spalding;
- Some 'quick win' projects for 2021 were to be identified;
- There would be a continued building of the partnership involved in delivery, with the Steering Group meeting again in

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the next week;

- The town centre user survey would seek resident views to inform the TCIP;
- The monitoring of key town centre buildings and engagement with businesses would continue;
- External funding opportunities would be monitored.

For Holbeach:

- Preparatory work for the Future High Streets fund projects would continue, whilst the outcome from government was awaited;
- TCIP planning for Holbeach would be re-engaged in early 2021

All of the proposed activities for Spalding and Holbeach had to be balanced with the challenges of Covid-19.

Panel members were invited to provide their views, thoughts and perspective.

- The towns of Holbeach and Spalding needed improvements. One of the main concerns from businesses currently was that while small shops had to remain shut as a result of the lockdown, supermarkets and larger stores could stay open.
- The schemes only related to Spalding and Holbeach – would the scheme be extended to other towns in the district in due course?
  - It was recognised that many towns within the district required help, and the debate at the meeting of Council where the TCIP had first been considered had borne this out. It was important that the principles of the work to be undertaken were tested - if these were successful, they would be extended further to other towns. It was essential to get the fundamentals right in Spalding and Holbeach, and the most successful elements could then be rolled out further.
- A current priority for many businesses was when the next tranche of grants would become available – many business owners were in need of these funds.
  - The next set of grants were to be released the next day and would support many of the district's retailers. It was a banded scheme where the amount of grant awarded was in relation to rateable value. A lot of background work was being undertaken to prepare for the administration of the grants. Details of how businesses could apply would be shared with



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members and with businesses that had already approached the Authority.

- A lot of good initiatives were being undertaken by the Communities team – which budget was being used to fund this?
  - The Nutcracker project was being funded through the Communities budget.
- How much of the £500,000 budget had been spent so far?
  - The Town Centre Improvement Plan Co-ordinator role was funded from the budget. With regard to Holbeach, a report that had been considered by Cabinet in June committed a five figure sum out of the Town Centre Improvement Plan budget to support the work around the Holbeach Future High Streets fund bid. With regard to the Spalding spend, this was still a relatively small amount, in the region of £5,000 – the low spend was as a result of the postponement until next year of the majority of events that had been planned.
- Improvements to the Holbeach public toilets had been promised – when would this be starting?
  - Prior to the Covid outbreak, this was being addressed. The renovation of the toilets had been included in the Holbeach bid and it was necessary to await the outcome of this before committing further funds to this project. With regard to toilets on a wider scale, the scrutiny Task Group looking into this had undertaken a robust piece of work, and this had now been recommissioned with a view to moving forward.
- Councillor Carter commented that as a Holbeach councillor, she had not yet met the new Town Centre Improvement Plan Coordinator.
  - Officers stated that this would be arranged.
- Were there any stakeholder contributions or external funding for any of the schemes?
  - Officers advised that this was not currently the case however, this was to be discussed at the next meeting with stakeholders who would be asked how they could contribute to the delivery of the plan in relation to time, resources, connections and money.

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- Members were very interested in what happened to Spalding. It seemed that the Authority had been slow in realising that efforts needed to be made with the town. Issues such as cleanliness of the area, and public toilet provision were a real issue and the basics needed to be done well. Spalding needed an identity, it needed a better ambiance and people needed a reason to go there. It had some good features and more needed to be made of these. Consideration needed to be given to the market, which was important to the town. Enforcement of parking was an issue, as was the pedestrian aspect of the town – if this was not enforced or there was a need for the public to use their cars in the centre of the town, should this be addressed? Conversion of buildings in the town centre should be considered. Transport issues caused by the railway were an ongoing problem. Could the South Holland Centre be used for a different purpose whilst being closed because of lockdown? There were many ideas that needed to be considered.
  - Officers advised that many of these points were included in the improvement plan. Getting the basics right was at the root of a successful project. Members were also advised that a gentleman from the Princes Trust had visited the town a few months ago and had commented that the river was a very positive feature within the town - it was felt that the river should be used as a focus for many of the plans going forward.
- Town regeneration did not affect only Spalding and Holbeach – this was a national issue, with much information available online – benchmarking against other towns was important, and existing information and the successes of others could be used.
  - This was an improvement plan rather than a regeneration however, it was agreed that there was much information that could be used. Getting the fundamentals right could contribute to large successes.
- Had there been any discussions with towns of similar sizes to learn what they had done?
  - The Town Centre Improvement Plan Coordinator had undertaken much of this research already, and had also attended a number of events through the District Councils network and the Local Government Association. Many people were happy to share information and intelligence. The Authority also

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worked together with district neighbours.

- Members requested that with regard to Holbeach, the Parish Council be involved in discussions.
  - If the funding bid was successful, there would be much work to be undertaken and this would be done with partners.
- Members suggested that wider paths for alfresco dining and better cycle routes would be beneficial.
  - Officers advised that an officer from the Highways Department at Lincolnshire County Council sat on the Steering Group – this was a great opportunity to work together to ensure that some of the projects could come to fruition. A small amount of funding was available to encourage cycle routes, and routes connecting the town to other areas such as Springfields, to make access easier were to be encouraged. As a result of the Covid pandemic, there was now more alfresco dining, and some of the rules and regulations around this had been relaxed to make this easier. This could be used as an opportunity.
- How much of the Springfields S106 monies were still available, and had these yet been allocated?
  - There were two amounts of S106 funding. There was a small amount remaining from the original development, which had been used for a number of years to support Christmas events in the town. Officers would confirm with members what the remaining balance was.
- Many businesses were leaving towns – what encouragement could be given to them to return.
  - This was a difficult issue. Officers confirmed that, as a result of the Covid pandemic, businesses were in receipt of a business rate holiday. The Authority was working closely with businesses to understand their needs, and although there wasn't a suite of options available for every business, where a business had a particular problem, the Authority would work with them to try and resolve it. More funding was also coming from Government as part of the Covid response – this consisted of a lump sum of cash over the next 18 months to assist any business within the Authority's economy. A policy

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would be developed to understand how this could be used to support businesses, including town centre businesses.

- The Portfolio Holder for Commercialisation and Growth thanked the officers for their presentation. He stated that it was not currently 'business as usual' – much time was being devoted to supporting businesses through the administration of grants. However, efforts to work with the Steering Group on this project still needed to proceed. The key point was partnerships - it was encouraging that this was not just a Council initiative, and that town businesses also needed to be on board. A survey was being undertaken – it was important to find out from this what the public wanted and did not want, to listen to this, and to give them confidence in using the towns. Some good points had been made by Panel members. It was important to consider how the town could attract people into them, and also to attract independent retailers.
- Members commented that the recent Springfields application had a £200,000 S106 fund attached to it which could assist with the Town Centre Improvement Plan.
- Many good points had been raised during the meeting and those working with the Steering Group should take these on board. In particular, officers should be thanked for the help they provided to market traders and small businesses, particularly with regard to the administration of grants. It was very important to keep small businesses going and to support them.
- With regard to Holbeach, much was reliant on a successful outcome to the bid – was there a Plan B?
  - The business case had highlighted a number of issues to be resolved. If unsuccessful, the Town Centre Improvement Plan would need to be looked at again however, the key principle would always be to work with local businesses and stakeholder.

Members thanked the officers for the clear and detailed presentation.

**6. ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT**

There were none.

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(The meeting ended at 9.30 pm)

(End of minutes)