

Meeting of the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Thursday, 20 February 2020, 2.00 pm

Committee Members present

Councillor Ray Wootten (Chairman)
Councillor Sarah Trotter (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Penny Milnes

Councillor Ian Stokes
Councillor Amanda Wheeler
Councillor Linda Wootten

Cabinet Members

Cabinet Member for Communities, Councillor Annie Mason
Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning, Councillor Robert Reid
Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, Councillor Adam Stokes
Cabinet Member for Culture and Visitor Economy, Councillor Rosemary Trollope-Bellew

Officers

Interim Strategic Director Growth
(Harry Rai)
Head of Repairs and Improvements
(Andrew Sweeney)
Head of Customer Experience and IT
(Nova Roberts)
Community Engagement and Policy
Development Officer (Carol Drury)
Scrutiny Officer (Zena West)
Democratic Officer (Lucy Bonshor)

Other Members present

Councillor Bob Adams
Councillor Jacky Smith

37. Membership

The Committee was notified that Councillor Linda Wootten was substituting for Councillor Mike Exton for this meeting only.

38. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Kaberry-Brown.

39. Disclosure of Interest

For clarity the Chairman wished to place on record that he sat on Lincolnshire County Council's Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Linda Wootten also stated that she sat on the same Committee as well as the Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee.

40. Action Notes from the meeting held on 16 January 2020

The notes from the previous meeting were noted and agreed.

41. Updates from the previous meeting

The Head of Repairs and Improvements gave an update on the condensate pipes that had been discussed at the September meeting of the Committee and subsequent meetings. Of the 215 properties affected by the big freeze in 2018, 178 properties had the work completed on the boilers and condensate pipes, of the remaining 37, 14 appointments had been arranged. Gaining access to the remaining properties was causing difficulties and statutory powers to gain access would be taken. One Member felt that the boilers were a nuisance especially in relation to access to hot water at intermittent intervals. On the whole Worcester Bosch boilers were good performing boilers and were the most efficient. It was stated that going forward regulations would mean that gas boilers would be phased out. The Chairman asked if an update could be given to a future meeting when the work was completed.

➤ Action Point

That once the work on all the properties affected had been completed an update was given to a future meeting of the Committee.

Another Member stated that all combi boilers were vulnerable in relation to their condensate pipes due to their design. The Interim Strategic Director for Growth informed the Committee that the boilers in Council properties had been checked to ensure that they worked efficiently as part of the gas servicing carried out.

The Chairman referred to the Committee's previous proposals in relation to Stop the Knock which would be revisited later in the agenda. In relation to the Healthy Conversation item, John Turner had indicated that he was happy to give a further update to the Committee at a future meeting.

42. Safeguarding Policy

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Communities to the Committee, who introduced the Safeguarding Policy which concerned the development of a joint Safeguarding Policy that had been designed to be

relevant to all seven district councils across Lincolnshire. The policy included a new requirement for Members to complete an e-learning module relating to Safeguarding within their first year in office with extra modules to be completed during their term of office.

The Committee was informed that the policy had been created for all seven district councils with specific “tweaks” for each individual Council. The Policy included a generic overview of safeguarding responsibilities. As a district council, the responsibilities for safeguarding children were the same as those for safeguarding vulnerable adults - to report incidents or concerns to the responsible authority (Lincolnshire County Council) and work with other agencies to ensure the welfare of children and vulnerable adults within the district. The policy also provided guidance on Early Intervention.

The policy covered a three-year period between 2020-2023 and would be reviewed on a three-yearly basis unless legislation or statutory guidance required the policy to be updated in the interim.

The Chairman indicated that Members needed to be aware of the policy in their role as elected Members but stressed that they were not safeguarding officers. They needed to know who the front-line officers were and what they needed to do if they found a safeguarding issue.

A brief overview was then given of each chapter on which Members were given the opportunity to comment.

Chapter 1 – generic overview and who had specific responsibility

Designated Safeguarding Officer, Harry Rai

Prevent Lead, Mark Jones

Operational Lead for Safeguarding and Deputy Prevent Officer, Carol Drury

The level of training and knowledge required was determined by each person’s role and their level of contact to vulnerable persons. Training was completed on a six-year rolling programme and all roles within an organisation had been categorised using the requirements of the National Competencies Framework for Children and Adults. The greater the responsibility, the higher the number of years of training required. Safeguarding was everyone’s responsibility. When Members were first elected, they were given an overview of safeguarding. The policy sets out a new requirement for Members to undertake an e-learning module on Safeguarding with further modules to be undertaken during their term of office. One Member stated that she had undertaken e-learning in her last job, it had been helpful, but she asked if there was anything to assist those who were not technologically confident or had accessibility issues. The Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer stated that the system was user friendly and easy to navigate and help would be available for those who needed it. The face to face briefing that Members had as part of the induction would also be kept in place.

Chapter 2 – Safeguarding Children and Young People. This chapter dealt with all situations within the Council's operation which could potentially involve children or young people. Although people's work may not directly impact on, or relate to, children or young people, everyone had a duty to recognise and respond to a child protection situation or concerns appropriately and people needed to be aware of the policy and its procedures.

Chapter 3 – Safeguarding Adults at Risk. This chapter was in effect a mirror image of Chapter 2 but with Adults as the focus. The Lincolnshire Safeguarding Adults Board was responsible for the development of the multi-agency policy and procedures that were all relevant to organisations in Lincolnshire. Safeguarding adults required people and organisations to work together to prevent and stop abuse or neglect and make sure that the adults' wellbeing was promoted.

Chapter 4 – This chapter dealt with Domestic Abuse in relation to either a child or an adult and came under safeguarding. Reference was made to MARAC which was a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference where victim focused information sharing, and risk management took place and was attended by key agencies where high risk cases were discussed. Sanctuary Schemes were also discussed. Again, this was a multi-agency victim centred initiative which aimed to enable households at risk of violence to remain safely in their own homes. Safeguarding required a multi-agency approach with any criminal activity being the domain of the Police. A question was asked about privately rented housing and it was stated that Social Registered Landlords were responsible for their tenants.

Chapter 5 – Preventing Violent Extremism. There was a duty under Prevent to have due regard to prevent people being drawn into violence and extremism and this sat outside of the criminal space. The Counterterrorism and Security Act enabled local authorities in addition to the Police to refer an individual at risk of being drawn into terrorism for discussion at a Channel panel. Previously this power had only been available to the Police. A support mechanism was available for victims to go through Channel with a mentor to bring them back to a place of safety. 98% of those individuals who were referred within Lincolnshire accepted help.

Chapter 6 – Hate crime and Mate crime. This was a rising issue with the crime not being reported properly or efficiently. Although an incident would be dealt with by the Police, racist graffiti on property would be dealt with by the local authority. One Member asked what Mate Crime was. It was where people were befriended in order to exploit them. It was noted that following the recent motion at Council reference to anti-Semitism and Islamophobia had been included within the policy.

Chapter 7 – Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking. Reference was made to a previous meeting of the Communities and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny

Committee at which Detective Chief Superintendent Davison had spoken to the Committee on Operation Pottery, which was the largest modern slavery operation to have taken place in Lincolnshire. Victims were tied in through threat or emotional exploitation and often this was hidden in plain sight, such as within nail bars or car washes. A question was asked about how this could be identified, and mention was made of the Safe Carwash App that was available. Members asked if the name of the App could be e-mailed to them.

➤ **Action Note**

That the name of the App to identify legitimate businesses be e-mailed to all Members of the Committee.

Chapter 8 – County Lines and Cuckooing. These were forms of criminal exploitation and were the responsibility of the Police. This type of exploitation involved children and vulnerable adults. They were geographically widespread forms of harm about which little was known or recognised.

Chapter 9 – Stalking. Stalking in its broadest sense could also be linked with domestic abuse and was a criminal activity. If made aware it must be reported to the responsible authority. This could include both cyber and physical stalking. Everyone had a duty to report it.

Chapter 10 – Mobile Families. The guidance within the Policy was adapted from Mobile Families guidance produced by the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership and was aimed at raising awareness. It encouraged vigilance about families that moved frequently and appeared to live transient lifestyles.

A discussion followed with reference being made to homelessness and it was stated that the Safeguarding Policy complemented the Homelessness Policy. The Homelessness Strategy was due to be reviewed by the Committee at its next meeting and this included the Council's homelessness prevention duty.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning referred to the Members handbook and having numbers contained in a flow chart. The Community Engagement Policy Development Officer said that information had been put on to an easy to carry credit card with contact information for children's safeguarding on one side and adults safeguarding on the other. Members asked if these could be circulated to all Members of the Council.

➤ **Action Note**

The Community Engagement Policy Development Officer to circulate the safeguarding credit card to all Members of the Council in their pigeonholes.

Further discussion followed on the use of acronyms within the document and it was asked if these could be reduced. A question was asked in relation to the flow chart contained within the document, and Members requested that a copy be shared with them. It was stated that the process was the same whether it was an officer or a member wanting to report a safeguarding incident.

The Cabinet Member for Communities thanked the Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer for her hard work in putting the document together to make it suitable for South Kesteven. She asked the Committee to consider adopting the policy before them together with the requirement for Members to undertake the e-learning module in their first year of office. The Chairman reiterated his thanks to the Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer for her work in putting the document together. He proposed that Committee agree to the mandatory safeguarding training by e-learning, to recommend that the Cabinet adopt the Policy with fewer acronyms and that the Safeguarding credit cards be circulated to all Members of the Council. This proposal was seconded, and on being put to the vote, was agreed.

Recommendation

- 1) The Committee recommended to Cabinet that Councillors undertake mandatory Safeguarding training by e-learning.***
- 2) That Cabinet adopts the Safeguarding Policy with fewer acronyms and***
- 3) That the Safeguarding credit cards be circulated to all Members of the Council.***

43. Tenancy Strategy

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning introduced the item and stated that the Strategy aimed to make the best use of stock provision to meet the housing needs of communities and set clear guidance to other registered providers so that all housing in the district was used to its best ability. The Strategy was to guide social landlords using best practice. Private registered providers were required to publish their own tenancy policies but needed to take account of the Local Authority's Tenancy Strategy. He also referred Members to page 128 of the agenda which gave rent averages for the district.

The Interim Strategic Director for Growth then gave the Committee details on the Strategy. The Localism Act 2011 required all Local Housing Authorities to produce a Tenancy Strategy to help guide social registered providers which operate in their area to make decisions about what type of tenancies to offer. The Council's current Tenancy Strategy was published in 2013. The use of assured or secure and flexible tenancies appropriate to the household's need or property type was supported by the Council. Where flexible tenancies were used the Council wished to see fixed term tenancies of five years or more.

Longer term tenancies tended to create more buy-in by tenants from a financial and social aspect.

Consultation had taken place with all 25 private registered providers of social housing across South Kesteven. Two responses had been received from Cross Keys Homes and Muir Group and these were outlined in the report. Overall the responses were supportive of the criteria for use of fixed term tenancies. Pay to Stay was no longer supported nationally and had been removed from the Strategy. Other amendments to the Strategy were outlined under section 7 and section 5. Subject to comments made by the Committee the Tenancy Strategy was due to go to Cabinet for approval in March 2020.

Discussion on the Strategy followed with the following comments/questions raised:

- SHMA stands for Strategic Housing Market Assessment.
- It was felt that there had been a poor response to the consultation. The Interim Strategic Director for Growth indicated that close working was carried out with some of the registered providers who were already familiar with the document.
- The amendments to section 7, following consultation with Housing Providers – ‘Tenants with large rent arrears (threshold amount would need to be set)’ changed to ‘Tenants with large rent arrears (the threshold amount to align with the amount used by our Rents Team in the serving of a notice seeking possession of the property)’ had not yet been made to the draft strategy presented to Members, as officers were awaiting feedback from the Committee first. These changes would be made following the meeting.
- Facts and figures contained in the document were taken from the 2014 Peterborough Sub Regional Strategic Housing Market Assessment of which South Kesteven was a part.
- Members asked whether the picture on page 132 of the agenda (page 6 of the Tenancy Strategy) could be changed, as it contained elements specific to the American housing market.
- Members requested that the final strategy contain fewer acronyms.

A reference was made to not having lifetime secure tenancies and therefore protecting Council stock. The Interim Strategic Director Growth said that as a Local Housing Authority the Council could not offer assured tenancies, they had to be secured as required under the Housing Act 1985. Social Housing Landlords could offer these types of tenancies but there was a large turnover and a tendency towards shorter term tenancies. A longer tenancy gave more security, with tenants more likely to invest more in the property.

Updates in relation to the impact of changes made to the Strategy were discussed and Members agreed to receive any updates by e-mail.

The recommendations were proposed, seconded and agreed by the Committee.

Recommendation:

The Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends:

- 1) That Cabinet approves the amendments to the Tenancy Strategy as set out in 2.5 and 2.6 of the report of the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning.**
- 2) That Cabinet adopts the updated policy subject to the rewording of 4.1, the reduction of acronyms and that a different picture is used on page 6.**
- 3) That the Committee receives annual updates (by e-mail) on the impact of changes to the Strategy.**

44. Best Practice Policy and Protocol on Debt Collection

At the last meeting of the Committee three recommendations were made and forwarded to the Cabinet. At the Cabinet meeting a request was made for the Committee and Officers to develop those recommendations and create a Best Practice Policy and Protocol on Debt Collection and produce a report with recommendations for the Cabinet to consider in more detail.

The report before Members was to approve a way forward to develop the policy/protocol looking at best practice policies and agree a format to work towards recommendations being put before the Cabinet at its April meeting.

Reference was made to the legal requirement to collect council tax and non-domestic rates, which should be collected as normal.

The Chairman stated that a very long discussion had ensued at the last meeting of the Committee and the recommendations put forward had been unanimously supported. He was happy to recommend that Officers continue to put together a policy/protocol based on work that was currently undertaken and the comments made at the last meeting of the Committee. It was proposed that once the policy/protocol was adopted that six month review was undertaken by the Committee.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources stated that the Council did need to retain the ability to collect council tax and needed processes in place to do this.

The recommendations were put forward, seconded, and agreed by the Committee.

Recommendations:

- 1) ***That Officers are requested to develop an appropriate written policy/protocol on debt collection taking account of the comments made at the January meeting of the Committee.***
- 2) ***That the draft policy/protocol is e-mailed to Members of the Committee including Councillor Baxter for comment.***
- 3) ***That the final policy/protocol is presented to Cabinet in April 2020 for approval.***
- 4) ***That the policy/protocol is reviewed six months after adoption.***

45. Work Programme

The Chairman informed the Committee that Inspector Gary Stewart from Lincolnshire Police had been invited to the meeting but had been unable to attend. It was within the remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees to have a Crime and Disorder meeting during the year and he asked if Members wanted Inspector Stewart to be invited to the next meeting of the Committee. Members agreed to have the invitation re-issued, but if Inspector Stewart could not attend, they asked that Mark Jones, Community Resilience Lead be invited to the meeting.

➤ ***Action Note***

That Inspector Gary Stewart be invited to attend the next meeting of the Committee, if he is unavailable, Mark Jones, the Community Resilience Lead to attend.

Other items for the March meeting to include Homelessness and Community Cohesion.

Items for the April meeting to include the Assisted Garden Maintenance Scheme and rural access to leisure facilities. Disabled Facilities Grants and the Community Infrastructure Levy to be referred to future meetings of the Committee.

The Chairman stated that if any Member had an interest in a particular area within the remit of the Committee that they wished the Committee to look at then they should e-mail him direct.

A suggestion was made that those areas already discussed by the Committee should be deleted from the work programme.

46. Extra meeting of the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee agreed to hold a further meeting on Thursday 19 March 2020 at 2:00pm.

➤ **Action Note**

That a further meeting of the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held on Thursday 19 March 2020 at 2:00pm.

47. Close of meeting

The meeting closed at 4:04pm.