

# Minutes

**Cabinet**  
**Tuesday, 21 January 2020**



**SOUTH  
KESTEVEN  
DISTRICT  
COUNCIL**

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**The Leader:** Councillor Kelham Cooke, The Leader of the Council (Chairman)

**The Deputy Leader:** Councillor Barry Dobson, The Deputy Leader of the Council (Vice-Chairman)

## **Cabinet Members present**

Councillor Dr Peter Moseley, Cabinet Member for Commercial and Operations  
Councillor Robert Reid, Cabinet Member for Communities and HR  
Councillor Nick Robins, Cabinet Member for Planning  
Councillor Adam Stokes, Cabinet Member for Finance  
Councillor Rosemary Trollope-Bellew, Cabinet Member for Culture

## **Non-Cabinet Members present**

Councillor Charmaine Morgan  
Councillor Mark Whittington  
Councillor Ray Wootten

## **Officers**

Interim Chief Executive (Paul Thomas)  
Strategic Director, Transformation & Change (Lee Sirdifield)  
Strategic Director, Commercial & Operations (Gary Smith)  
Interim Strategic Director, Growth (Harry Rai)  
Interim Director of Finance (Richard Wyles)  
Director of Law and Governance (Shahin Ismail)  
Assistant Chief Executive, Housing Delivery (Ken Lyon)  
Assistant Director, Commercial & Operational (Ian Yates)  
Chief Executive, InvestSK (Steve Bowyer)  
Interim Principal Democracy Officer (Sarah Evans)

## **59. Apologies**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Goral.

## **60. Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2019 were proposed, seconded and agreed as a correct record.

## **61. Disclosure of Interests (if any)**

No interests were disclosed.

## **62. Customer Experience Strategy (Key Decision)**

The Cabinet Member for Communities and HR presented a report which had been considered widely by Members and by the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Constructive comments and suggestions had been incorporated where appropriate. He referred to the anticipated budgetary saving of £81k in 2020/21 which could be achieved as a result of delivering the service in the new ways proposed. The report set out a shift in the way the Council communicated with people which was a vital part of the transformation of the Council. There was a need to create a modern, flexible customer experience which offered choice and delivered convenience to customers, businesses and visitors. Services needed to maximise the use of all channels available and improve hours of accessibility by promoting self-service for all transactions. He recognised that approximately 15 percent of the district did not have digital skills and gave assurance that face to face and telephone support would remain available for the most vulnerable.

The Cabinet Member explained that North (Grantham) and South (Bourne) hubs would be created in the district providing digital services, payment kiosks, face to face support, enhanced access to web forms and signposting alongside the library services. There would be consultation on the removal of permanent face to face provision in Stamford and Market Deeping. It was considered that both sites managed transactions that could be facilitated through alternative solutions including an appointments system.

A non-Cabinet Member spoke on the proposals and was concerned that the decision had been made to close Stamford and the Deepings before the consultation and she felt that all the details were not available that affected the future service for the communities most affected. The Member referred to potential difficulties faced by service users and particularly those connected with the Blind Society. She said that public transport across the district did not help the situation for being able to travel to one of the towns where the face to face service was available. She also felt uncomfortable with the term customers as it implied there was a choice of where to go for services, when residents of the district had no choice but to use the District Council.

The Leader responded that the Council aimed to serve all people of the district and provide the best quality service possible. The transformation arrangements were part an important part of improvements to move the Council forward.

The Cabinet Member for Communities and HR responded on the term customer and suggested this could be client but felt the policy recognised the whole community. He endorsed and reiterated the position of those who needed a more personalised service such as telephone conversations or face to face interactivity. There would be a request service for a home visit and appointments could be made by anyone who felt they needed this service. He mentioned that due to the potential for savings and

a more modern approach to service delivery, the Council had to be resourceful in balancing the benefit of savings whilst still providing a good customer service. The Chairman of the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee supported the strategy and felt that making all Council services more digitally available was what the majority preferred. He felt this was already the norm in booking doctor appointments and dealing with tax returns. He reiterated the need to ensure that those who could not use the technology were provided for.

The non-Cabinet Member who spoke previously understood that change could not be stopped and the strategy would be approved but still felt that conducting the consultation after approving the strategy was badly timed.

The recommendations in the report were proposed, seconded and **AGREED**:

1. That Cabinet approves the Customer Experience Strategy.
2. That Cabinet commissions the consultation for proposed changes to the Stamford and Market Deeping area offices.

### **63. Budget Proposals for 2020/21 and Indicative Budgets for 2021/22 and 2022/23**

The Cabinet Member for Finance presented the draft budget proposals for 2020/21 prior to stakeholder consultation being launched. He explained that the Budget Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee had considered the draft proposals at its 14 January meeting. In its Corporate Strategy, the Council aimed to be self-sustainable by 2025 and the budget strategy was underpinned by this ambition. The budget did not rely on General balances, reserves or New Homes Bonus receipts to fund the delivery of services. This approach placed the Council in a positive place to deal with the funding challenges that lay ahead. With regard to the finance settlement, funding levels would remain the same as this year. He referred to the key budget proposals as follows :-

- Savings from the development of the Customer Experience Strategy
- Reduction in grounds maintenance costs following transfer of the service to an arm's length company (Environment SK)
- Additional responsibility for taking on grass verge cutting in and around Grantham which would be met by the Grantham taxpayer through the Special Expense Area
- Corporate Management savings
- Savings from the process automation programme
- Procurement savings
- Bringing together grants - reduce the Ward Member Scheme to £500 per Member and reduction of the Community Fund

It was noted that the Council tax consultation would focus on three options: an increase of £5, 3 percent or no increase. The Leader added that the budget proposals were positive and the consultation would be live from 22 January to 14 February 2020.

A non-Cabinet Member stated that the Labour group would be putting forward budget amendments as part of the budget consultation process.

The Leader expressed disappointment at the timing of this input from the Labour group, as he felt all Members had been involved in the budget process for the past few months and there had been opportunities to discuss and put forward different proposals at each stage.

The non-Cabinet Member explained that some issues had come up since previous discussions and they weren't identified until the budget was presented at this stage. The Member referred to the cutting of the grass verges which may be aesthetically pleasing but she felt having the grass grow was good for biodiversity and this tied in with the work of the Climate Change Task Group. She also mentioned that appropriate land needed to be allocated for travellers.

A Cabinet Member defended the funding for cutting the Grantham verges and advised that more complaints were received last year on having long grass verges than anything else and he had worked with the Cabinet Member for Finance to solve this public concern. He felt it did not negate biodiversity and wildflower planting could be beneficial but the complaints had demonstrated that the people of Grantham preferred to have tidy verges. He advised that the Council was looking at biodiversity through the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee and was hoping to have a Biodiversity Strategy and identify the Council's needs through that process. He felt that a presentable district was good for growth, visitors and made people feel happier and hopefully it would reduce the number of complaints this summer. The Council would carry out around 14 cuts. It was also noted that Grantham Members had been surveyed on the grass verges issue and the majority were in support of the proposal.

With regard to a travellers' site, the Leader advised that we would deal with sites required on a needs basis and when reviewing the local plan we would also be looking at sites moving forward.

The recommendations in the report were proposed, seconded and **AGREED**:

1. Considered the budget proposals for 2020/21 in respect of :
  - General Fund – Revenue and Capital
  - Housing Revenue Account – Revenue and Capital
2. Approved consultation in respect of proposed Council Tax levels for 2020/21 for the period 22 January – 14 February 2020

#### **64. Housing Strategy Refresh (Key Decision)**

The Deputy Leader of the Council presented a report on a refresh of the Housing Strategy. The 2017-2021 strategy had been adopted by Cabinet on 12 April 2018 and a mid-term review of the strategy had identified some areas which needed to be refreshed. The review was undertaken to ensure main themes and direction

reflected current priorities. The strategy now included some priority areas to add focus. The refreshed strategy had been considered by the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the majority of the Committee's comments related to clarification. A delegation to the Cabinet Member for Housing was requested along with approval of the refreshed strategy, to allow for appropriate amendments to be made.

He further explained connections had been made between this and other relevant strategies including the housing allocations policy, tenancy policy, homelessness strategy, the HRA Business Plan, corporate strategy and the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The new strategy would encourage modular housing and more affordable private homes.

The Leader praised the document and the work of the overview and scrutiny committee in considering the detail of the document. He referred to a mistype on page 38 under the heading of 'Lobbying' and explained that the Council was not looking to abolish the right to buy as it did not have those powers as this was government policy, but the Council was looking for 100 percent of the sale cost to reinvest into more Council housing. He welcomed comments on the garden village and wanted this to be exemplary across the country and a place others came to visit and take inspiration from.

A Cabinet Member referred to page 139, and that he understood the Chairman of Planning wished to work towards developing an approach for ensuring there was an adequate supply of housing.

A non-Cabinet Member supported lobbying the government to get funds back and that affordability targets for new build were met. She explained that income against purchase of new build was a bigger gap which left people not able to afford housing in the new green village. She questioned whether there was commitment from government for additional funding.

The Leader advised that the government was currently working through budgets and the LGA was heavily lobbying for fairer funding for the shire counties and business rates retention and the Council was awaiting the outcome. With regard to growing the economy, affordable housing, viability, cost of land and sale of properties was subject to regional variances of the property market.

The Chair of the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee advised that challenging questions were asked at their meeting and congratulated the Director for Growth and the Cabinet Member for Communities and HR in responding well and helping to ensure a positive debate at the meeting.

A non-Cabinet Member mentioned that she had visited residents where families were underhoused living in 2 bed properties, where the second bedroom was a box room. She questioned whether there was scope for expanding existing stock by building into larger gardens to make bigger properties. The Deputy Leader responded that supporting housing independence was an ongoing issue and the Council was looking to remodel and convert houses moving forward.

The Leader explained that when a property became empty a full review was made on what could be achieved to improve the property and meet the needs of future tenants. He said that the Council wanted good quality housing for all its residents.

The recommendations in the report together with and an additional recommendation to delegate amendments to the Cabinet Member for Housing were proposed, seconded and **AGREED**:

1. Cabinet approved the Housing Strategy refresh.
2. Delegation be given to the Cabinet Member for Housing to make minor changes to the final document.

#### **65. Collaboration Agreement relating to Saint Martin's Park, Stamford (Key Decision)**

The Leader of the Council presented a report to request that the Council enter into a collaboration agreement with Burghley Land Limited in respect of the land purchased by the Council at Barnack Road, Stamford in March 2019. The land was purchased due to being strategically important to the Council's growth ambitions in Stamford. The site provided an opportunity for a business space, creation of jobs, housing and regeneration. It was a key gateway into Stamford and was located near to historic Burghley house. The Council would work with the Burghley estate to boost the economy and local residents could be assured that the estate had a vested interest in ensuring the best for Stamford. There had been a lot of preparation work behind the scenes over the past few months to bring this report to Cabinet and the decisions made at the meeting would also be reviewed by the Companies Committee at its meeting on 4 February 2020.

A Cabinet Member added that there was some pressure on the general fund to roll out the project and he welcomed the collaboration agreement to ensure the development plans progressed by the summer to maximise the investment.

The Leader responded that it was intended that the site would be marketed as soon as possible. Through meetings he had attended, he understood there was already interest in the site and businesses were keen to move there.

The recommendations in the report were proposed, seconded and **AGREED**:

1. Cabinet agreed to enter into a contractual Collaboration Agreement with Burghley Land Limited as set out in the Heads of Terms relating to land at Barnack Road, Stamford to bring forward the redevelopment of circa 35 acres of land for commercial, residential and retirement uses on a 50/50 shared development cost and profit basis.
2. Cabinet delegates to the Cabinet Member for Growth in consultation with the Director for Growth, the Chair of Companies Committee and the Monitoring Officer to sign and complete the contractual agreement required to implement the recommendation above, based on the approved Heads of Terms.

## **66. Position Statement on the Intentional Release of Sky (Chinese) Lanterns and Balloons (Key Decision)**

The Cabinet Member for Commercial and Operations presented a report which gave the Cabinet the opportunity to consider the Council's position in relation to the intentional release of sky (Chinese) lanterns and balloons on Council owned public open space. He reported that the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee had considered the report and there would be consultation with the minority groups most affected. He added that there had been a recent case where a lantern had caused a fire at a zoo in Germany and this emphasised the need to discourage this practice on Council land. It was usual that sky (Chinese) lanterns contained a naked flame and there was no control over where these could land, they could then cause damage to buildings, fields, trees or wildlife. He referred to the position statement and that it related to Council owned land, car parks and open spaces.

The Leader advised that there was support from the Police and other Councils across Lincolnshire, the statement also aligned with the Council's ambitions to improve the attractiveness of the district through the Big Clean and the debris from these lanterns and balloons have a detrimental impact on the local environment.

A Cabinet Member felt the use of lanterns and balloons currently went under the radar of health and safety and the Council's proposed position was something to endorse. He also felt it could start a conversation on the use of fireworks in respect of public safety and protecting animals. He referred to an awareness campaign on the firework code that would start in schools in the autumn term. He felt misuse of lit lanterns was not dissimilar to fireworks.

Enforcement of the use of lanterns and balloons was raised and how this could be achieved and what would be the penalty. It was considered that the statement and its awareness was a starting point but it was recognised there would be challenges.

The Leader responded that a message would be conveyed to Town Councils in the district as they may wish to follow the Council's lead on their property.

The recommendations in the report were proposed, seconded and **AGREED:**

1. That the position statement on the intentional release of sky (Chinese) lanterns and balloons is adopted by Cabinet, subject to public consultation.
2. That the minority groups potentially affected by the adoption of the position statement be consulted.
3. Authority is delegated to the Strategic Director of Commercial and Operations, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Commercial and Operations, to make any consequential changes as a result of the consultation.

## **67. Matters Referred to Cabinet by the Council or Overview & Scrutiny Committees**

The Leader of the Council presented a report which highlighted matters referred to the Cabinet by the Council or the Council's overview and scrutiny committees since the Cabinet's last meeting held on 10 December 2019. The Leader invited representatives of the overview and scrutiny committees to report on their activities.

The Chairman of the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee referred to the Council's initiative to reduce the number of bailiffs and that the Council had a 97 percent success rate. He felt that the Council should not only be efficient but also compassionate and caring in their approach to debt collection and bailiffs should only be used as a last resort. He asked the Cabinet to agree a set of 3 recommendations as follows :

1. Makes a clear public commitment to reduce the Council's use of bailiffs over time.
2. Put in place a formal policy covering residents in vulnerable circumstances.
3. Develops and adopts a local Council Tax Protocol rather than the National Council Tax protocol.

The Leader noted the recommendations and explained that formal notification was required for policy change and looked forward to a proposal being brought to a future meeting of the Cabinet.

Members were in agreement of supporting those who were vulnerable but recognised there needed to be a mechanism for debt collection and looked forward to the committee's report.

The Chairman of the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee thanked John Turner from the CCG for the Healthy Conversation which looked at health throughout the district and Lincolnshire. He referred to the overnight closure of the Grantham A&E service and hoped the Council would support the campaign through a motion which would be presented at the next Council meeting on 30 January 2020.

The Leader expressed his support for the campaign and felt there would be unanimous support for the motion.

## **68. Items raised by Cabinet Members including reports on Key and Non Key Decisions taken under Delegated Powers.**

The Leader of the Council presented his report giving an overview of decisions taken by individual Cabinet Members and it was noted that no such decisions had been taken since the last Cabinet meeting held on 10 December 2019.

## **69. Representations and questions from Non Cabinet Members**

There were no representations and questions from Non Cabinet Members.

**70. Cabinet Forward Plan - 1 February 2020 to 31 January 2021**

Cabinet Members noted the Forward Plan for the period 1 February 2020 to 31 January 2021 which had been distributed prior to the meeting. The Forward Plan gave an indication of the items that would be presented to Cabinet over the coming 12 month period.

**71. Any other business which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstances, decides urgent**

Following consultation with the Chief Executive, the Leader reported that the Cabinet meeting due to be held on 10 March 2020 would be held on 17 March 2020.

**72. Close of meeting**

The meeting was closed at 15:02.