

Meeting of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 22 January 2024, 2.00 pm



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Committee Members present

Councillor Virginia Moran (Chairman)
Councillor Lee Steptoe (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Matthew Bailey
Councillor Anna Kelly
Councillor Zoe Lane
Councillor Penny Milnes
Councillor Paul Wood

Other Members present

Councillor Tim Harrison
Councillor Ian Selby

Cabinet Members

Councillor Phil Dilks, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning
Councillor Rhea Rayside, Cabinet Member for People and Communities

Officers

Karen Bradford, Chief Executive
Jodie Archer, Head of Housing
Nick Thacker, Interim Head of Technical Services
Sarah McQueen, Housing Options Manager
Andre Ford Hamilton, Tenancy Services Manager
Debbie Roberts, Head of Corporate Projects, Performance and Climate Change
Suniel Pillai, New Build Project Officer
Graham Watts, Assistant Director (Governance and Public Protection) Monitoring Officer
Ayeisha Kirkham, Public Protection Manager
Tom Amblin-Lightowler, Environmental Health Manager – Environmental Protection & Private Sector Housing
Lucy Bonshor, Democratic Officer

42. Public Speaking

A question was received but was referred to Housing Officers and subsequently the question was withdrawn.

43. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Emma Baker and Councillor Habib Rahman.

44. Disclosure of Interest

None disclosed.

45. Minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2023

The minutes from the meeting held on 16 November 2023 were proposed, seconded and **AGREED**.

46. Announcements or updates from the Leader of the Council, Cabinet Members or the Head of Paid Service

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning referred to the number of items on the agenda for consideration by the Committee and how important the creation of a standard alone Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been. The reports before the Committee showed how the Housing service was being improved but there was still a long way to go.

The Chairman introduced Nick Thacker to the Committee who was the Interim Head of Technical Services (Housing) who had joined South Kesteven District Council just before Christmas.

The Chairman also commented on the discussion that had taken place at the last meeting and stated that she objected to the criticism of Officers within a public meeting.

The Member concerned stated that he felt that the minutes hadn't reflected the discussion but they had been agreed. He asked the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning to clarify "a long way to go" to which the Cabinet Member responded that although they had come out of special measures, there were still challenges ahead but steps were being made to improve these areas such as voids.

47. Private Sector Housing Houses of Multiple Occupation Licensing Policy

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning introduced the report which concerned a Private Sector Housing, Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing Policy. There was no requirement for the Council to have a policy, however it was good practice to have a policy. The Policy would provide clear operational guidance, provide Officers with a clear working reference document and the clear legal requirements around the licensing of these premises and also the statutory requirements under the Housing Act 2004. There were currently 56 of these type of properties within South Kesteven. The policy covered licensing and the various checks and suitability of premises and the length of the licence. He asked the Committee to recommend adoption of the Policy to help clarify the Council's procedures and position in respect of these properties.

The following questions/comments were made during debate:

- Number of tenants per type of premise – average was 5 or 6.

- The Council was required to keep a public register of HMO properties which detailed the number of bed spaces.
- Current number of tenants within the district was approximately 200.
- How many HMO were used by the Council to house homeless people and were they used to house children.
- One unit on Thames Road was used for temporary accommodation, a further unit that was also used but this was currently void and only single people would be housed there.
- It was not good practice to house families within these properties and if families with children were within HMO, then stricter regulations were in place.
- A question was asked in respect of Planning Permission on HMO properties and that a licence could be granted for a short period of time whilst Planning Permission was sought. It was stated that only HMO properties with seven or more required Planning Permission anything that was six or less was classed as permitted development. If Planning Permission was refused then any license in place would be revoked or reduced in length.

Members welcomed the policy before them and it was proposed, seconded and **AGREED** to recommend the Policy for adoption by Cabinet.

Recommendation

1. ***The Committee notes the proposed Private Sector Housing Houses of Multiple Occupation Licensing Policy is in line with best practice and will provide clear operational guidance.***
2. ***The Committee recommends the Private Sector Housing Houses of Multiple Occupation Licensing Policy for adoption by Cabinet.***

48. South Kesteven District Council Anti-Social Behaviour Policy

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning introduced the report which concerned a new draft Anti-Social Behaviour Policy which addressed how the Council would manage any anti-social behaviour of occupants of Council owned housing stock.

The Cabinet Member referred to the wide legal definition of anti-social behaviour which was outlined within the report. The policy covered issues such as neighbourhood disputes, high hedges and car parking. The policy aimed to tackle the causes and the impact of anti-social behaviour in respect of housing. To improve public perception and also build confidence and support victims and vulnerable people and detailed how the Council would manage anti-social behaviour. The policy also aimed to promote the wellbeing, safety and health of its tenants. It was stated that incidents of anti-social behaviour within the district were low compared to other areas of the country.

The Safer Lincolnshire Partnership was as countywide multi agency initiative whose approach recognised that no one organisation alone could deal with anti-social

behaviour in isolation and therefore partnership working was central to the approach required. The new policy sets out how anti-social behaviour could be reported and the powers and tools that the Council had at its disposal such as acceptable behaviour contracts and injunctions.

Consultation on the draft policy had been carried out in December 2023.

A question was asked in respect of the number of cases of anti-social behaviour that the Council had prior to the new policy and the routes that had been taken in respect of the behaviour.

The Head of Housing stated that she didn't have the information to hand but she could bring back to the Committee that information.

➤ **Action**

That information in respect of the number of cases of anti-social behaviour be reported back to the next meeting of the Committee.

The request for information in respect of anti-social behaviour was echoed by the Vice-Chairman who was keen to see the information. He stated that he was often given anecdotal reports of anti-social behaviour on the estate that his Ward covered.

A comment was made that the policy did not mention shared facilities and various examples were given, the Member wanted to know whether specifics were included in tenancy agreements about how communal areas should be used.

It was noted that the new Anti-Social Behaviour Policy under pinned the policy framework within housing. It complimented other policies with regard to the management of tenants and would include other documents such as the Tenancy Agreement and also the Tenancy and Estates Management Policy which was the next item on the agenda. Alongside that was support from the Neighbourhoods Team and other areas such as lease holders, private rented areas and owner occupiers to work together with the tools available to deal with issues.

The Tenancy Services Manager stated that there were other tools such as Good Neighbourhood Agreements which were voluntary agreements signed at the start of a tenancy where people agree to a set of behaviours in addition to those within a Tenancy Agreement.

Members welcomed the policy and supported its recommendation to Cabinet for adoption.

A question was asked in relation to anti-social behaviour when it occurs in social media, did the policy cover this aspect of anti-social behaviour. Technically the policy could be amended to encompass this aspect however, it was very difficult to police. The Housing Team would work alongside the Police if an issue was raised but action would be pursued through the civil courts.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning stated that any instance of anti-social behaviour would be taken seriously. The Policy gave clear guidance of how anti-social incidents would be dealt with and what the Council would do. A question was asked about the timeframe, 10 days, to which it was stated that where possible a response would be given sooner rather than later.

Members welcomed the draft Policy and noted the content. It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED** to recommend the draft Policy to Cabinet for adoption.

Recommendation

That the Housing OSC recommends the draft South Kesteven District Council Anti-Social Behaviour Policy to Cabinet for adoption.

49. Estate and Tenancy Management Policies

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning introduced the report which considered a Tenancy Management Policy which outlined the circumstances in which changes to a tenancy may happen and any possession action which could be taken, why this could happen and the tenancy support which would be offered. The second policy was in respect of an Estate Management Policy and set out the Council's approach to the delivery and management of estate services to internal and external communal areas.

Comments were made in respect of the communal areas and mobility scooters and the paying of electricity bills, it was felt that it was unfair that other people were paying for the electricity for mobility scooters. This point was echoed by other Members with other examples being given.

The Head of Housing stated that a wider programme of work was being done in respect of storage areas. A rent setting and service charge policy was currently being worked on and this would come to a future meeting of the Housing OSC.

Following the comments made in respect of where mobility scooters were stored, the floors that people lived on who used mobility scooters and service charges it was stated that the mobile scooter policy would be reviewed.

A question was asked about the number of inspections carried out and who undertook the inspections. Inspections were carried out quarterly by Housing Officers, a formal inspection programme was currently being compiled.

Questions were asked about the eviction process and homelessness to which the Head of Housing replied. A query was asked about the Tenancy Support Service referred to within the draft policy and it was confirmed that the service currently existed.

It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED** that both the draft Tenancy Management Policy and the draft Estate Management Policy be recommended to Cabinet for adoption.

Recommendation

That the Housing OSC recommends to Cabinet the draft Tenancy Management Policy and the draft Estate Management Policy for adoption.

50. Housing Regulatory Compliance Update

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning introduced the report which updated the Committee on actions to ensure regulatory compliance of the Council's social housing landlord function following the non-compliance notice issued by the Regulator of Social Housing which was lifted in October 2023.

The Council's compliant position was now better than a lot of other authorities within the Country.

Reference was made to the red areas (lifts and gas) and paragraph 3.1.6 in respect of lifts. It was confirmed that since the report had been compiled the inspections had been carried out and the certificates had been issued for the lifts which were now at 100% as were Fire Risk Assessments, Asbestos and Smoke and CO₂ alarms.

In respect of gas checks there were currently a small minority of cases where access to the properties had presented a challenge and court action was being taken to address this. Regular updates would continue to be brought to the Committee and the next one would come to the March meeting of the Committee.

The Chief Executive stated that the scrutiny around the figures was critical and she met with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning and the Leader of the Council every month to look at the figures before they came before the Committee for scrutiny. The Chief Executive made reference to recent lift certifications but stated that there were still problems with one of the lifts which had necessitated the requirement of new parts which were on order.

In respect of the gas checks there were still 50 outstanding, but the courts had a ceiling to the number of court orders to gain access to properties which was 20 per month, the orders had been going through Lincoln Court but were now going through Boston Court. Meetings were being held with the Cabinet Member to discuss more extreme action, once the cold period had passed. Where gas servicing was done externally the Council could look at capping the gas off to force the tenant to allow the Council access to service the gas appliances including boilers within the house.

The Chairman indicated that she was impressed with the figures before the Committee but dismayed that tenants would not allow access to have their gas appliances serviced.

Other Members echoed the comments made and asked for clarity in respect of the difference in figures between gas and electricity which was down to the tolerance given to each. A comment was also made about those with mental health issues and allowing access to properties. It was stated that the Housing Compliance

Team did review the individual profile of tenants and worked with Social Services where there were vulnerable tenants involved.

The Interim Head of Technical Services stated that a new gas contract would be in place from 1 April 2024 and that working together between all the relevant teams would be a lot more seamless.

Further concern was expressed in respect of vulnerable tenants and whether they should have gas appliances. It was stated that gas supplies were legislated and that if people smelled gas, they should report it immediately to the National Gas Emergency Service.

Further discussion followed in respect of getting access to properties and the safety of tenants and who was responsible in respect of gas leaks. It was reiterated that the Council was doing all that it could to gain access to properties to service all necessary appliances. The responsibility for cost and gas leaks was between the tenant and the gas supplier.

Members noted the report.

51. Total Housing Compliance Policy

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning introduced the report which concerned a new Total Housing Compliance Policy. The Policy presented a framework for the monitoring of key consumer standards.

Reference was made to the Council coming out of National Special Measures and the new Policy was a vital tool in how the Council would deliver its legal requirements to ensure that the Council stayed legally compliant.

A full audit was required to be considered by the Housing Regulator before the notice was lifted. The audit made recommendations regarding the implementation of key policies relating to compliance.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning stated that the new Policy incorporated previous guidelines, management plans and protocols into a transparent policy framework complimented by best practice and legislation. The Policy defined who was responsible for delivering a safe housing environment and managing risks such as, water, water hygiene and Raddon. The document also detailed a clear path in respect of access to properties to meet legal requirements and the legal implications if secure access could not be found. It reassured tenants that the property that they lived in was compliant with the laws and current standards and was well managed.

The Chairman stated that a massive amount of work had gone into the document and congratulated Officers. The Interim Head of Technical Services thanked the Health, Safety and Compliance Officer for his help in putting the document together.

A question was asked in respect of legal challenges to which the Chief Executive replied, a further question was asked about the legal requirements and

maintenance to which the Interim Head of Technical Services replied with details around the major and minor repairs programme and how stock condition survey data fed into the programme.

It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED** to recommend the Total Housing Compliance Policy to Cabinet for adoption and to scrutinise the procedures and management plans associated with the Total Housing Compliance Policy as part of the Committees ongoing work programme.

Recommendation

That the Committee notes the content of the Policy and recommend its approval to Cabinet and that the procedures and management plans associated with the Total Housing Compliance Policy form part of its ongoing work programme.

(An adjournment took place between 3:15 – 3:30)

52. Update on the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund wave 2.1

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning presented the report which provided an update on the ongoing Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund project to upgrade South Kesteven District Council owned properties with energy efficiency measures. The cost of the programme was £7.62m and was funded 50/50 by Government and the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The programme would make significant improvements to the Council's most carbon emitting properties. The programme would improve the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of council properties from a D to C rating by 2030.

Currently the Council had 200 properties with coal fires and wave 2.1 of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund aimed to upgrade the energy performance of the Council properties over the next year with targeted energy efficiency and low carbon heating with renewable energy. The programme had three phases:

- i) Installation of solar panels - 148 properties
- ii) Air source heat pumps - 180 properties
- iii) External wall insulation - 39 properties

The project had been slow to start but since November 2023, 66 measures had been put in at 49 properties. The scheduled 367 measures should be completed by March 2025. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning introduced the Decarbonisation Project Manager, Peter Park to the Committee.

The Decarbonisation Project Manager stated that the Council's delivery partner was EON and the project would be overseen by himself together with a retrofit inspector and an administrator who would check that funding criteria was met.

A question was asked in respect of the properties done to date and it was confirmed that the project was fabric first to ensure that the insulation measures were in place before any heating source was installed.

The Chairman asked when it was perceived that all properties would reach the C EPC rating level. It was confirmed that by the end of March next year for this particular programme, the properties should be at C or above. There was a caveat that if properties reached a higher rating level than C then the funding criteria would ask if more money was being spent on a property than was necessary. Reference was made to the D properties and it was felt that these could be rated up to a C by 2030.

The Chairman asked about those properties that were F and G rating. It was stated that there were currently around 19 G properties. G, F and E properties were being tackled as part of the programme with the worst performing properties being those with solid fuel and these were being incorporated in to the funding.

It was asked if future funding would be available to which the Decarbonisation Project Manager stated that the Council wasn't eligible for wave 2.2 funding as they were in receipt of wave 2.1 funding but the Council should be eligible for wave 2.3 funding, different funding streams were being looked at constantly.

A question was asked about whether there would be sufficient funding to ensure all the Council's housing stock would be able to be C or above rated by 2030 or whether the Council would have to supply the funds. It was stated that this did depend on the funding criteria in respect of wave 2.3 funding.

Discussion on the subject followed and it was suggested that six monthly updates on the project be added to the Committee's work programme.

➤ **Action**

Add Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund update to Work Programme, next update in six months.

Further discussion followed and covered what insulation measures took place, where the solid fuel properties were located (these tended to be in rural areas), who undertook the EPC rating of the Council properties was it internal or external. The Chairman of Environment OSC who was in attendance stated that he would be inviting someone to speak about EPC's and their benefits to a meeting of the Environment OSC and he invited Members of the Housing OSC to attend. It was confirmed that EPC ratings were undertaken by an external contractor.

More discussion on what stock conditions surveys were carried out and the Chief Executive responded that 20% of the housing stock had surveys carried out each year and stock condition surveys were carried out every five years. A question was asked whether having all properties at an EPC C rating by 2030 was an aim or aspiration. It was an aspiration to have all properties at an EPC rating of C before 2030 but this was limited to what funding and investment was available to the Council through the HRA.

Further comments were made in respect of whether properties that were G rated were worth being upgraded and kept. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning indicated that Best Value for Money was always being considered and it if was in the best interests to sell a property and reinvest the money that would be considered.

Members noted the report.

53. Corporate Plan Key Performance Indicators 2023/24 Mid-Year (Q2) Report

The Committee had been circulated with a report on the Mid-Year update of South Kesteven District Councils performance against the Corporate Plan Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) from April 2023-October 2023. A copy of the KPI's were circulated to Members at the Committee.

The Chairman reminded the Committee that item 10 on Healthy and Strong Communities, which was red was not under the remit of the Housing OSC. The red item shown under Housing that meets the needs of all Residents was and she asked the Housing Options Manager to speak on this item.

The Housing Options Manager stated that the red didn't reflect poor performance within the Team but reflected the pressure that increased homelessness was having on the Team.

Sometimes homelessness was not preventable and she gave examples of this such as people having to leave asylum accommodation and the Ukraine cohort which was not preventable. She felt that the target of 50% prevention was not an accurate target and this would be reviewed as the KPI did not reflect the hard work that was undertaken by the Team, but more the pressures that the Team were under.

Reference was made to the homelessness duty cases which was currently at 205 compared to 104 the previous year. Increased pressures were the cost of living and less landlord accommodation available in the private sector. Accommodation that was available was becoming more unaffordable. It was hoped that the Local Housing Allowance increase from April would have an effect. She concluded by stating that prevention and relief options were limited and that Quarter 1 data could be supplied if required.

The Vice-Chairman agreed with what had been said and felt that central government had a huge role to play and massive investment in social and council housing was required to address the homelessness issue. This was echoed by other Members of the Committee.

The Team was congratulated on the work that they did.

It was stated that following the Cabinet's agreement in respect of the new Corporate Plan and a new suite of KPI's would be drafted which measured impacts and had more meaningful targets. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning stated that the new KPI's would come before the Committee for them to comment

on and for any suggestions. He also commented on the amount of work that the Homelessness Team carried out.

More discussion followed in respect of homelessness to which the Housing Options Manager replied.

Members noted the report.

54. Build and Acquisitions update

Members received an update in respect of the new build housing pipeline and also properties that had been acquired using the Local Authority Housing Funding. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning stated that it was necessary to have a robust housing growth strategy in place with a range of ways to acquire properties to help mitigate the sale of Council houses through the Right to Buy scheme and also to increase the Council's housing stock.

Currently contractors were on site at Swinegate, Grantham building 20 apartments which should be completed in February 2025. Further work had started in Stamford on a former garage site at Elizabeth Road for four apartments which were due to be completed at the end August 2025.

The Head of Corporate Projects, Performance and Climate Change referred to the funding received from phases 1 and 2 of the Local Authority Housing Fund which had enabled 21 units to be purchased as outlined within the report with phase 1 funding, 8 units were due to be delivered under phase 2 funding. The Council had met the local need for the Local Housing Authority Fund and therefore no bid was being considered for phase 3 funding.

Members noted the update.

55. Earlesfield Programme update

The Committee received a report which gave an update on progress with the Earlesfield Project in Grantham. The project covered 154 homes on the Earlesfield Estate. The initial project was to remove asbestos from properties but this progressed to whole house modernisations due to the type of properties and whilst the tenants were vacant from the property.

There had been concerns before Christmas due to the slow delivery of the project but a meeting had been held at the beginning of January with the contractor, Chief Executive and the Interim Head of Technical Services and improved monitoring had been agreed.

The Vice-Chairman, who was one of the Ward Councillor for the Estate stated that the project was fantastic and had a positive impact on those living on the Estate. He asked if the documents referred to in paragraph 2.5 had been sent through.

The Chief Executive stated that the meeting had taken place with the Contractor and two new project Managers had been appointed. There had been issues with the sub-contractors but these had been addressed and monthly meetings were held with her and the Interim Head of Technical Services and the Project Manager. There had been a positive outcome from the meetings held. The Vice-Chairman asked if the weekly updates that he had received previously, but had stopped in November could be reinstated. It was stated that these would be reinstated.

Further discussion followed in respect of the project with the majority of Members expressing their appreciation that in the absence of a Director of Housing, the Chief Executive had been involved with the project from an early stage. Some concern was expressed in relation to costs due to the slow progress and it was acknowledged that early problems at the beginning of the project had delayed the project slightly, but these had now been addressed and the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning was regularly briefed on the project.

A question was asked in respect of the EPC ratings on the properties and it was confirmed that the properties would be a C as a minimum.

Members noted the report.

56. Choice Based Lettings update

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning introduced the report. At the last meeting of the Committee, Members had received a demonstration on the Choice Based Lettings process which had gone live in October 2023. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning congratulated the Team on implementing Choice Based Lettings which was used all over the Country.

The Chairman indicated that she had been on the system but asked if the photographs of properties would be included as this had been mentioned previously. She also queried a property that had received 15 applications but none were "suitable". The Head of Housing Options stated that she would speak to the Chairman outside the meeting. The Void Team had been tasked with taking photographs of properties and they would be uploaded shortly.

Questions were asked in respect of the pending applications; these were often due to further information being required. The use of the portal was a two way process and applicants had to actively engage when they applied for properties. It was asked if there was a theme to the outstanding information being requested to which the Housing Options Manager stated that one hadn't been identified.

A question was asked about those tenants who struggled with IT and it was confirmed that there was assistance available. Auto bids were facilitated for those without the necessary IT equipment. A further question was asked about waiting lists and it was confirmed that currently there were 252 applications pending assessment but work was being undertaken to reduce the number. Had historical applications been removed with the implementation of the new system. It was confirmed that no data was transferred.

Further discussion followed in respect of applications and banding. It was suggested that a guide on hints and tips would be helpful and the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning indicated that he would take this forward.

Members noted the update.

57. Work Programme 2023/24

The following items to be included on the Work Programme:

- Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund – 6 monthly updates next update July 2024
- Update on Garage Site developments – March 2024
- Update on Voids – March 2024
- Draft KPI's – March 2024

58. Any other business which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstances, decides is urgent

There was none.

59. Close of meeting

The meeting closed at 16:51.