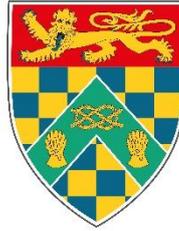


Minutes

Cabinet

Tuesday, 12 January 2021

Meeting held by Skype



**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

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 Annie Mason, Cabinet Member for Communities

Councillor Dr Peter Moseley, Cabinet Member for Commercial and Operations

Councillor Robert Reid, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning

Councillor Adam Stokes, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources

Councillor Rosemary Trollope-Bellew, Cabinet Member for Culture and Visitor Economy

Non-Cabinet Members present

Councillor Bob Adams

Councillor Ashley Baxter

Councillor Phil Dilks

Councillor Breda Griffin

Councillor Ian Selby

Councillor Jacky Smith

Councillor Judy Stevens

Councillor Amanda Wheeler

Councillor Ray Wooten

Officers

Chief Executive (Karen Bradford)

Assistant Chief Executive, Housing Delivery (Ken Lyon)

Interim Director of Finance/Section 151 Officer (Richard Wyles)

Strategic Director Commercial and Operations (Gary Smith)

Interim Assistant Director of Housing (Chris Stratford)

Interim Head of Technical Services (Paul Crow)

Director of Law and Governance (Shahin Ismail)

Acting Principal Democratic Officer (Shelley Thirkell)

Democratic Officer (Lucy Bonshor)

40. Register of attendance and apologies for absence

All Cabinet Members were present.

The Leader of the Council sent best wishes to Councillor Dean Ward for a speedy recovery on behalf of the Council. Councillor Ward had recently suffered a stroke but was now back at home.

The Leader gave a brief statement in relation to the return to lockdown following the impact that the spread of the new COVID-19 strain was having on the Country. He stated that everyone had to adhere to the restrictions in place. Vaccination centres were in place at the Meres Leisure Centre, Grantham and also at St Mary's Surgery in Stamford. He spoke of the work being undertaken by InvestSK and the Community Hub to help support communities during this difficult and challenging time.

41. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2020 were agreed as a correct record of the decisions taken.

The Leader of the Council stated that the call-in item, Public Realm Improvements discussed at the Culture and Visitor Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 5 January 2021 would be discussed at the next meeting of Cabinet.

42. Disclosure of Interests (if any)

None disclosed.

43. Local Council Tax Support scheme proposals 2021/22

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources presented a report on the review of the Council Tax Support Scheme 2021/22, which was based on the overarching criteria of the 2020/21 Scheme. The current scheme had been in force since 1 April 2013 and the key criteria had remained unchanged. The current cost of the Scheme was £7.2million. There had been an increase in claimant numbers since March 2020, specifically working age claimants, this was due to the pandemic and the economic situation. It was anticipated that claims would increase further, during the year. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources reminded Members that the Council's cost of the scheme was based on a 9% share of the total cost. The current scheme was capped at 80% for working age customers, although it was stated that pensioners were protected and received 100%.

The major precepting authorities, Lincolnshire County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner had been consulted and supported the current scheme. The Police and Crime Commissioner had asked that consideration be given to a discount for eligible Special Constables who resided within the District. Recognition was given to the work undertaken by Special Constables and also those who worked within the voluntary and care sector and their contribution to the community. It was felt that no distinction should be made for Special Constables and therefore the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources did not support the request to include Special Constables within the Scheme.

Cabinet Members felt that the Police and Crime Commissioner, as a precepting authority, had the ability to recognise the work undertaken by Special Constables directly. It therefore was, agreed to not support the request to include Special Constables within the Scheme. It was noted that only one other District Council supported the inclusion of Special Constables within their Scheme.

Further comments from Non-Cabinet Members followed who disagreed with the recommendation not to include Special Constables in the Scheme. It was reiterated that the Police and Crime Commissioner could give remuneration to recognise the work of Special Constables.

The proposal to recommend the Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2021/22 to Council based on the same overarching criteria as the current year's scheme was seconded.

On being put to the vote, it was **AGREED:**

1. That Cabinet recommended to Council the Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2021/22 be based on the same overarching criteria as the current year's scheme.
2. That Cabinet considered the request from the Lincolnshire Police and Crime Commissioner to include Special Constables within the Local Council Tax Support scheme from 1 April 2021, however, Cabinet did not support the inclusion of Special Constables within the scheme.

44. Draft Budget Proposals 2021/22

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources presented the report on the Draft Budget Proposals for 2021/22, the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account. A Stakeholder consultation was being launched between 13-26 January 2021. He referred the Cabinet to the amended Fees and Charges proposal that had been sent out by email that morning. The proposals before Members were based on the draft Local Government's Finance Settlement funding proposals which had been published on 17 December 2020. The final settlement would be known in February 2021. The budget had been formulated within the context of the actions outlined in the recently approved Corporate Plan, to reflect the costs and income impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the current financial landscape, which was underpinned by a prudent financial approach. Variations to the budget were likely and therefore, it was possible that an amended budget would be required later in the year, but was being kept under review.

Funding levels were similar to that of 2020/21, however a one-off lower tier services grant had been allocated of £362k, it was proposed that the grant be moved to the Budget Stabilisation Reserve.

Table 5 of the report listed key budgetary proposals to ensure that a balanced position was achieved and to support the ongoing transformation of services to ensure efficiency and value for money.

Also detailed within the report were the levels of investment and fees for the Council owned companies. The funding levels were aligned to the business plans of the Companies, which had been considered by the Companies Committee. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources urged caution in respect of the management fees for LeisureSK Ltd, which had been completed before the current lockdown and closure of all leisure centres.

Assumptions within the budget had been made in relation to a Council Tax increase of £5 for Band D properties to £168.62. A final decision would be made by Cabinet following the results of the consultation at its next meeting in February 2021 to make a recommendation to Council.

A key element of the budget setting income for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was rental income. The Government's rent setting guidance formula was Consumer Price Index (CPI) +1%. The Government had reduced the CPI to 0.5% in September 2020 and the rent increase for 2021/22 was 1.5%. This had resulted in a lower than projected rental income within the HRA Business Plan.

It had only been possible to present a one-year balanced revenue account budget due to the pressures of rising expenditure and the forecast reductions in income. Reserves would need to be used to maintain service levels. Work would be done with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning to address the issues for the budget setting for 2022/23.

A summary of the Capital Programme was shown at Tables 15/16 along with Appendix B for both the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account. The General Fund was focused on investment in the Council's assets and the HRA was focused on investment in the housing stock and investment plans for the new build programme. A review of the HRA Capital Programme would need to be reviewed, once the amount of Homes England funding was known.

Details of the Council's reserves were also contained within the report and the budget had been prepared without the reliance on the use of reserves for the day to day expenditure. The Budget Stabilisation Reserve would be retained including the one-off grant. The on-going pandemic presented a risk to the Council in relation to expenditure and the reduction of income from fees and charges and commercial income that fell outside the scope of Government income compensation scheme.

Transformation savings were contained within the budget and these would be delivered, however some had been diverted away to deal with the on-going issues from the pandemic.

The Leader stated that the last year had been difficult for many people and that the Cabinet had worked hard to develop the budget proposals for 2021/22. He thanked everyone for their hard work, especially the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources and the Section 151 Officer. The Government had recognised the

significant role that Local Authorities had in the response to the pandemic and this had been shown by the one-off grant and the option to have a £5 increase in the Council Tax for Band D properties. The budget had been formulated recognising the ambitions of the Corporate Plan and the continued delivery of quality services. Views from the Joint Budget Overview and Scrutiny Committee who were looking at the budget on 13 January 2021 would be considered at the next meeting of the Cabinet. Funding was in place within the HRA to address issues following the Compliance Audit. The proposals contained within the report were seconded.

Members congratulated the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources on putting together a budget in uncertain times and supported the proposals contained within the budget for 2021/22. A comment was made in connection with room hire for Studio 4 at Grantham Arts Centre and the Section 151 Officer confirmed that it was a typographical error. A Non-Cabinet Member congratulated the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources and Section 151 Officer on presenting a balanced budget and asked about the proposal to stop funding for the Grantham Carnival. The funding was being diverted elsewhere and it was suggested that Grantham Ward Members could use their Member Grants to contribute to the Carnival. It was noted that there were still 23 Councillors who had yet to access their Member Grant funding for 2020/21, applications from Councillors should be in before the deadline of 31 March 2021.

On being put to the vote, it was **AGREED**:

1. That Cabinet considered the budget proposals for 2021 in respect of:
 - General Fund – Revenue and Capital
 - Housing Revenue Account – Revenue and Capital
2. That Cabinet approves that consultation be carried out in respect of proposed Council Tax levels for 2021/22 for the period 13-26 January 2021 (inclusive).
3. That Cabinet approves the cessation of the Deepings Special Expense Area from 1 April 2021.
4. That Cabinet considered the proposed fees and charges for 2021/22 as set in the supplementary Appendix D of the joint report from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources and the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning.
5. That Cabinet approves the increase of the regeneration reserve by £500k by the following movements:
 - £250k movement from the Commercial reserve.
 - £250k movement from the Invest to Save reserve.
6. That Cabinet approves the Climate Change reserve be included in the 2021/22 budget framework proposals at a minimum level of £20k.

45. Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy

The Cabinet Member for Commercial and Operations presented the report on the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy following the four-week consultation that had taken place. He drew the Cabinet's attention to the significant changes within the document and highlighted that the decrease in the maximum age at first licence from 7 to 5 years would not be implemented until October 2021, as per the recommendation contained within the report. The Cabinet Member for Commercial and Operations also highlighted the changes in relation to environmental sustainability; the discount in the licence fee for electric vehicles, the introduction of more in depth English language tests and the introduction of penalty points for idling vehicles on the hackney carriage rank. 157 replies had been received to the consultation with the proposals being broadly supported. The proposals were seconded.

Cabinet Members were supportive of the proposals and the process that had been gone through before the document was brought before the Cabinet.

On being put to the vote, it was **AGREED**:

1. That Cabinet notes the results of the public consultation.
2. That Cabinet approves the South Kesteven District Council Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy with effect from 1 April 2021, with the exception of reduction in vehicle age at first registration from 7 to 5 years which will take effect on 1 October 2021.
3. That Cabinet delegates to the Director of Commercial and Operations in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Commercial and Operations, to make minor amendments to the policy, such as legislative updates, which may become necessary from time to time to ensure its continued accuracy, but do not affect its direction or intent.

46. Voids Process and Performance - Housing Technical Services

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning presented a report which gave an update on the progress towards an efficient voids process and the provision of performance measures. The Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee had endorsed option 2 contained within the report at the meeting on 7 January 2021. Currently void performance was poor and the Council's objective was to significantly improve void performance, with changes to the processes and management. Structure changes had been identified to stop work being completed in 'silos'. The proposal streamlined the void work process reducing overall timelines to reduce turnaround times, to enable homes to be released for re-letting quicker. Minor and Major repair teams were being managed by a Technical Services Officer to improve interaction and co-operation, efficiency and effectiveness. Early re-letting had the benefit of increased rental income.

The Northgate integrated housing management system was critical to the allocation administration process and consideration of further integration of the housing management system was a significant project, which would be subject to consideration by Members in the future.

Performance Indicator reporting and a void standards policy would be looked at by the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Dashboards would be put in place to allow for comparisons to be made and would be a standard item on the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee's agenda. Work on a revised Voids Policy would be undertaken by the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee, once approved by Cabinet it would be reviewed every three years.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning proposed that Option 2 be adopted. It was a viable option that captured the core elements of the changes highlighted within the report, which included streamlined void processes to reduce the overall period and reduce rent losses, the introduction of key safe facilities at void properties to reduce days lost for key returns, tighter contract and project management of external contractors activities, merging the minor and major void teams, better van stock processes, early review of current voids standards and reduced costs associated with voids through tighter specification. The proposal was seconded.

Cabinet Members were fully supportive of the proposals before them in respect of the void process and performance and the need to have an effective Voids Policy.

A question was asked in relation to the current costs of the Northgate system and proposals for further integration of the system to which the Interim Assistant Director of Housing responded.

A comment was made in relation to Ward Members being able to see samples of void properties both before and after work had been completed and it was stated that this was something that could be looked at when the Voids Policy was reviewed.

Further comments were made in respect of the Northgate system, the Section 151 Officer stated that the Northgate system was a market leader and had been used by Revenues and Benefits Section for a number of years.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning confirmed that he had been involved in random inspections of void properties and referred to the introduction of a working group for housing which he had mentioned at the recent meeting of full Council. He wanted Members who were interested in housing to come forward to be a part of the working Group, for the whole of the District.

On being put to the vote, it was **AGREED**:

1. That Cabinet notes the content of the report.
2. That Cabinet approves Option 2 as providing the most efficient operational way forward to implement changes to the process and management of voids at this time.

3. That Cabinet requests that the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider at its next scheduled meeting in February 2021 proposals for a new suite of Key Performance Indicators relating to the effective monitoring of void property management performance, and thereafter to receive updated performance data, and progress on further actions being taken to improve overall void management performance.
4. That Cabinet receives a following up report within six months relating to the implementation of the Option 2 proposals.
5. Cabinet receives a comprehensive report covering the full review of the revised void management and process changes, to ensure the objectives and anticipated benefits have been achieved, within the next 12 months.
6. That Officers update Cabinet on the progress made to introduction imprest van stocks through a preferred supplier, and the impacts anticipated in the context of the current stores and stock arrangements be subject to a further report to Cabinet.

47. Procurement of Housing Stock Condition Survey

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning presented the report on the Procurement of the Housing Stock Condition Survey following the agreement at Council on 17 December 2020 to bring forward the survey contract to 2020/21. The Council needed to urgently improve its stock condition information especially following the recent internal audit report highlighting regulatory and compliance shortcomings.

It was critical to understand the current stock condition to prioritise investment and to compile an Asset Management Plan. All tenants would be visited by a surveyor, who would carry out both internal and external examinations. It was hoped that local people with local knowledge, would take part in the survey.

The results of the survey would be uploaded to the current APEX asset management system, to provide up to date information held in a single location to be able to put together five and ten year investment plans. The last stock condition survey was carried out in 2009.

The HRA Business Plan would be reviewed and a new three-year investment plan would be compiled.

In determining the most appropriate way to procure the new stock survey, officers took account of the need to procure a preferred contractor in the most efficient and effective way possible with minimum time frames. Survey work would start as soon as possible, the contractor had confirmed costs which were under budget. Bi-monthly updates would be given to the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee and confirmation of the final completion date. A dashboard would be put in place for Members to be able to make comparisons month on month and to ask questions of the work undertaken to date. The proposal was seconded.

On being put to the vote, it was **AGREED**:

1. That Cabinet approves the award of a contract to Faithorn Farrell Timms LLP (FFT) to carry out a stock condition survey to all dwellings, blocks and communal areas, including Energy Performance Certification (EPC) to the housing stock of South Kesteven District Council. This appointment will be undertaken via the National Framework Partnership.
2. That Cabinet includes within the budget proposals for 2021/22, a budget of £50k for the employment of an additional member of staff on a fixed term contract to conclude at the end of the stock condition activities, to support the necessary project management of the contract with Faithorn Farrell Timms LLP.
3. That Cabinet includes in the budget proposals for 2021/22, a budget of up to £50k in order to procure the additional licences for the current APEX asset management software system, to enable Faithorn Farrell Timms LLP to update the Council's system with the new survey data.
4. That Cabinet notes that at the Full Council meeting held on 17 December 2020 a budget of £780,000 was approved in order to procure the necessary stock condition, EPC, and project management activities as outlined within the report from the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning.

48. Matters Referred to Cabinet by the Council or Overview and Scrutiny Committees

No report had been submitted, but the Chairman of the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee mentioned about a debate that had taken place at the last meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 7 January 2021 in connection with Anti-Racism. The Chairman of the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee urged anyone who had been subject to racial abuse to report it as a hate crime to the Police.

49. Key and Non Key Decisions taken under Delegated Powers

The Leader of the Council presented his report on Key and Non-Key decision taken since the last meeting of the Cabinet. Four Non-Key decisions had been made, Invest to Save Reserve, J C Decaux Bus Stops, Procurement and award of contract for refurbishment works associated with Stamford Customer Service Point to Stamford Arts Centre and the Payment of Costs. The Leader asked that the wording in the report covering the Stamford Customer Service Point be rephrased as it was an additional customer contact point.

50. Representations and questions from Non Cabinet Members

A Non-Cabinet Member asked the Cabinet Member for Communities what was happening with the Befriending Service that had been put in place during the first lockdown, was it continuing for this lockdown. The Cabinet Member for Communities stated that the Befriending service, which had involved both employees of the Council and Councillors had been put in place during the first lockdown. Since then

the Council had worked closely with the voluntary sector and Beehive, based in Grantham and Evergreen, based in Stamford had taken over the Befriending service. Currently, due to the pandemic everything was being done over the telephone, but it was hoped that in time when circumstances allowed, face-to-face conversations would take place.

The Non-Cabinet Member also made reference to the death of Terry Shelbourne who had died over New Year, his contributions to the community through his art and that he would be sadly missed and whether some sort of commemoration could be held when possible to do so. The Non-Cabinet Member asked if any progress had been made in relation to the lending of the picture of Baroness Thatcher held in the archives at Lincoln, which had been done by Terry Shelbourne. The Leader stated that he too, was saddened by the news of Terry Shelbourne's death and that the Head of Arts was looking in to the painting. The Leader stated that an event to commemorate the life and death of all those who had died during the pandemic and the work undertaken by the NHS and voluntary workers would be explored after we had come out of the pandemic. A Non-Member from the Deepings agreed with the proposal and stated that she had been speaking to local churches in her area, in relation to holding memorial services.

Members were informed that the new Chief Constable for Lincolnshire was Chris Haward. It was proposed that he visit Grantham to meet the Cabinet and local businesses when it was safe to do so. It was also suggested that he be invited to speak to Members at an all Member briefing to be arranged.

A Non-Cabinet Member asked about the recommendations contained within the recent Cratus report on the Planning service. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning gave an update to Members and stated that some of the recommendations within the report would be delivered, these would be shared with the Planning Committee Chairman and Planning Committee Members. Other recommendations contained within the report would require further input from Cratus. Those recommendations that required changes to the Constitution would be forwarded to the Constitution Committee, then on to Council for ratification. The aim was to make a better planning delivery service for all. The Chief Executive stated that further pieces of work would be required with support from Cratus moving forward. Further comments were made by the Chairman of the Planning Committee on the planning function and dealing with planning applications as quickly as possible, but having due regard to the impact that planning applications had on residents.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning thanked the Chairman of the Planning Committee, and Planning Committee Members for their support. Moving forward he hoped that Members and Officers would have a better working relationship. The Leader stated that following the findings of the Cratus report, the planning process would be more robust and efficient with clear delegations between Members and Officers.

51. Cabinet Forward Plan 1 February 2021 to 31 January 2022

Cabinet Members noted the Forward Plan for 1 February 2021 to 31 January 2022. It was noted that the Forward Plan item for Stamford North would be withdrawn from the Plan until further notice.

52. Exempt minute 38 Cabinet 1 December 2020

Exempt minute agreed.

53. Close of Meeting

The meeting closed at 15:50.