



Scrutiny Annual Report 2025/26

Report of: Chairmen of Overview and Scrutiny Committees

1. Introduction

1.1 During 2025/26 South Kesteven District Council had five Overview and Scrutiny Committees each comprising nine members of the Council.

- Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1.2 There were also joint meetings held between the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee. A Budget Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee was also held which comprised all Members from the five Overview and Scrutiny Committees and was Chaired by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

1.3 The Overview and Scrutiny Committees are responsible for discharging the functions conferred by Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 and the discharge of functions under Section 19 of the Police and Justice Act 2006 and the Crime and Disorder (Overview and Scrutiny) Regulations 2009, which require councils to put arrangements in place to designate a committee as a crime and disorder scrutiny committee.

1.4 Each Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for monitoring the Council's performance, considering its decisions, questioning how those decisions are made and recommending improvements. The Committees may also undertake external scrutiny to examine wider issues that affect the District.

2. Role of Scrutiny

2.1 There are four key functions of scrutiny:

2.1.1 To provide a "critical friend" challenge to the Cabinet as well as external authorities and agencies

- Challenge by scrutiny should be constructively robust and purposeful
- Scrutiny should work effectively with the Cabinet and senior management
- Scrutiny should provide an effective mechanism for the Cabinet to demonstrate public accountability

2.1.2 To reflect the voice and concerns of the public and its communities

- Scrutiny should take a community leadership role by focusing on issues of public concern
- Scrutiny should have a constructive relationship with the press and media
- Scrutiny should create the conditions for plural views and concerns to be considered

2.1.3 Scrutiny members should take the lead and own the scrutiny process on behalf of the public

- Scrutiny should operate with political impartiality
- Scrutiny should have ownership of its work programme
- Scrutiny members should have a worthwhile and fulfilling role

2.1.4 Scrutiny should make an impact on the delivery of public services

- Scrutiny should have access to timely and accurate performance information
- The scrutiny work programme should be balanced well-coordinated and integrated into corporate processes
- Scrutiny work should be carried out with strategic objectives in mind
- Scrutiny should contribute to improving local public services

3. Budget Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Chairman: Councillor Bridget Ley

Vice-Chairman: Councillor Gareth Knight

3.1 The Budget Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 13 January 2026 to consider the Fees and Charges Proposals for 2026/27 and the budget proposal for 2026/27 and indicative budgets for 2027/28 and 2028/29 for both the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account.

3.2 The Charging Policy had been reviewed and this was also considered by the Budget Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the Fees and Charges Proposals for 2026/27.

3.3 The Budget Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered revenue and capital budgets in respect of the General Fund covering:

- The funding position for the General Fund
- Draft General Fund budget proposals
- The draft Capital Programme 2026/27 – 2028/29
- Capital Financing
- Reserves and Balances

3.4 In respect of the Housing Revenue Account this had been set in the context of balancing the sustainable 30 year financial business plan following priorities outlined within the Housing Strategy.

4. Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Chairman: Councillor Murray Turner

Vice-Chairman: Councillor Barry Dobson

During 2025/26 Committee cycle the Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee held six meetings, one of these was an extraordinary meeting where the Committee considered the business plan for the refurbishment of gym equipment at Grantham Meres Leisure Centre. The Committee received a number of reports during the year in respect of LeisureSK Ltd and the Committee reviewed the operational performance and received updates on the financial performance.

The Committee received progress reports in respect of the Market Action Plan and the Play Area Strategy which included the significant work that had been undertaken to improve play areas across the district following the implementation of the Play Area Strategy the previous year and the £100,000 that had been allocated to invest in replacement equipment.

At the October meeting a presentation was made to the Committee from the founder and CEO of Pop-Up Art in support of the work that had been done through the Cultural Strategy.

Thatcher Fest Celebrating Thatcher's 100th Birthday

- 4.1 Thatcher Fest, a week-long cultural programme marking the centenary of Margaret Thatcher's birth had been held in Grantham. The collaborative approach taken by the Council to act as a facilitator, had enabled a diverse programme of events to be undertaken with strong audience participation, including engagement from first-time visitors. The programme of events had attracted extensive regional, national and international media coverage which had raised Grantham's profile and supported local organisations demonstrating the value of partnership working.

Leisure Investment Programme

- 4.2 Progress on the Council's Leisure Improvements Programme, which supports the priorities set out in the Council's Corporate Plan 2024–27 by investing in high-quality leisure facilities and improving health and wellbeing outcomes for local communities was considered by the Committee. A Leisure Investment Reserve of £500,000 had been established to support improvements to leisure facilities, including decoration and the replacement of worn-out fixtures, with the reserve used primarily to improve and refresh changing room areas across the leisure centres. During the year the Committee received reports outlining the work being undertaken to improve both the Council's leisure facilities and the wider leisure offer within the district. The subsequent updates provided Members with information on planned investment works across the leisure assets, wider support for community organisations, and the opportunity to ask questions on these areas. The Committee was also updated on Phase 1 of the Leisure Improvements Programme, following the report presented to the Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 18 November 2025, when the funding allocation criteria had

been agreed. The scope of works was developed by Officers and consultants, with support from Welland Procurement, and procured through an open tender process. Cabinet approved the award of the contract to Northdown Property Services at its meeting on 5 May 2026. Members noted that, while works at Bourne and Stamford Leisure Pools could be completed without pool closures, Grantham Meres Leisure Pool would need to close for a period of time to allow the works to be carried out.

Cultural Strategy

- 4.3 The Committee received a progress update on the Cultural Strategy at its October 2025 meeting, which outlined the continued delivery of cultural opportunities, community engagement and support for the wider cultural sector across South Kesteven. Members noted that the 'Pay it Forward' scheme had raised over £13,000 to help improve access to arts and cultural experiences for residents who may otherwise face barriers to participation. The Committee also considered the ongoing work of the Arts and Culture Team across the Council's three artistic venues, district-wide outreach activity and partnership work with cultural organisations. Members welcomed the Council's continued support for cultural activity, including its annual contribution of just over £3,500 to the Arts Council England-funded Rural Touring Scheme, delivered by Live and Local, which brings high-quality drama, music and comedy performances to rural communities. The update also highlighted the continued success of the Music in Quiet Places programme, with four rural church events held in 2025, family fun days delivered in Bourne and the Deepings, and Stamford Arts Centre's participation in the Into Film Festival for the first time, helping to broaden access to film and raise the profile of cinema at the venue and the continued success of the pantomimes held at both the Guildhall Arts Centre and the Stamford Arts Centre.

Sports and Physical Activity Strategy

- 4.4 The Committee reviewed the refreshed Sports and Physical Activity Strategy (2026-2031), building on delivery over the previous five years. The strategy set out partnership-led opportunities to support residents and visitors to live healthy, active lifestyles. The strategy was structured around four key pillars and included an action plan along with key performance indicators. The refreshed strategy was essential to ensure the goals and objectives remained relevant and aligned to the national context along with the needs of the community in South Kesteven. The Committee recommended the Sports and Physical Activity Strategy (2026-2031) for adoption and Cabinet approved the Strategy in March 2026.

5. Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Chairman: Councillor Elvis Stooke

Vice-Chairman: Councillor Emma Baker

The Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee met five times during 2025/26. The Committee received various external presentations during the

year including from the Grantham Canal Partnership and a Leisure Energy update on Grantham Meres Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme. Public speaking at the Committee referenced air traffic pollution from idling engines and the effect on Air Quality particularly in Grantham and how this could be addressed. The Committee also received information in respect of Section 19 flooding recommendations following the flooding that had arisen from storms Henk and Babet although it was noted that most Section 19s within the district did not have any recommendations for South Kesteven. Policies considered included the Corporate Enforcement Policy and a review of the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy.

Air Quality

- 5.1 The Committee scrutinised the Annual Air Quality update which reported that the Annual Status report continued to give a positive picture with the Air Quality Management Area continuing to be monitored and reported to the Committee providing assurance on ongoing compliance and trend data. Further detailed consideration was programmed and would enable the Committee to revisit the evidence base and any mitigation activity in light of emerging data.

Waste and Recycling

- 5.2 The Committee focused on service resilience, efficiency and readiness for national policy change. Members considered a review to restructure waste collection rounds, noting that rounds had not been significantly changed since 2012 and examined how proposed changes would support reliable collection performance and future demand. The Committee also received updates on revisions to the Waste Policy, including winter garden waste collection arrangements. The Committee reviewed the planned introduction of weekly food waste collections from 13 April 2026, in line with the Environment Act 2021. Members noted that the service would divert food waste, which makes up around a third of residual waste, from black bins to anaerobic digestion, supporting recycling and reducing carbon emissions. Food waste would be collected separately and taken to a different site, although the additional 12 vehicles required may increase overall fleet fuel use and emissions.

Trees and Woodland

- 5.3 The Committee's work on trees and woodland covered both governance (policy) and delivery (planting), ensuring that operational practice aligns with the Council's strategic ambitions. Members reviewed draft Tree Management Policies to replace the 2019 Tree Guidelines, updating the framework to better reflect the adopted Tree and Woodland Strategy. Scrutiny also considered analysis and modelling of the potential costs associated with changes to the Council's approach to managing tree-related risk, and the Committee recommended the policy for approval, which Cabinet subsequently approved in January 2026. Alongside policy development, Members endorsed the 2025/26 tree planting programme—covering planned planting numbers, locations and delivery methods—and later considered a strategy setting out the principles and financial constraints that guide annual planting, including

how planting distribution is assessed against areas of greatest need across the district.

Climate Action and Decarbonisation

- 5.4 In relation to climate action and decarbonisation, the Committee maintained oversight of performance, investment decisions and major delivery programmes. Members received the Council's 2024/25 carbon emissions update, noting reductions across leisure and waste emissions and overall electricity usage, and scrutinised the Draft Climate Action Plan, including its delivery framework, the remit of actions and lead officer responsibility; the Committee recommended the Plan to Cabinet and it was adopted in March 2026. The Committee also tracked delivery through the Climate Change Reserve Fund, receiving updates on initiatives designed to deliver carbon and cost savings, including the £1m programme to accelerate the upgrade of Council-owned streetlights to energy-efficient LEDs (reporting a 66.8% reduction in electricity use, £122k annual saving and 136 tonnes of carbon avoided annually). Further scrutiny covered external funding and partnerships, including the Grantham Meres Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme following the award of £3,587,500 funding to support installation of a new low-carbon heating system, alongside wider solar PV and low-carbon heat projects across the Council's estate.

6. Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Chairman: Councillor Bridget Ley

Vice-Chairman: Councillor Gareth Knight

The Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee met six times during 2025/26. The Committee considered a wide range of significant issues affecting the Council and the district, including major capital projects, financial performance, housing investment, economic growth and support for residents.

Regular scrutiny was given to the delivery of the Turnpike Depot, the Grantham Future High Street Fund, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and wider infrastructure and regeneration projects, alongside detailed monitoring of the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account. Members consider the impact of maintenance backlogs across housing and corporate assets, investment priorities for leisure facilities, the review of the Economic Development Strategy, car parking changes, the Local Council Tax Support Scheme and discretionary payment policies. Collectively, this work demonstrated the Committee's role in holding decision-makers to account, monitoring financial resilience, highlighting delivery risks and ensuring that major programmes and policies remained aligned with local priorities and the needs of residents.

Turnpike Depot

- 6.1 A significant focus of the Committee's scrutiny during the year was the Turnpike Depot project, which Members monitored through regular updates, site engagement and closure reporting. This reflected the scale and

importance of the scheme as a major corporate investment, the Committee reviewed progress against the programme, considered financial forecasts and risk information, and noted changes to the construction timetable as the project moved towards completion. Members also maintained oversight of delivery risks and key milestones throughout the build. This sustained scrutiny helped ensure transparency, supported effective Member involvement and provided assurances that progress and challenges were being closely monitored. By the conclusion of the project, the depot was reported to have been delivered on time and within budget, demonstrating a strong example of effective oversight of a major capital scheme.

Financial Monitoring and Budget Oversight

- 6.2 A core part of the Committee's work was the regular scrutiny of the Council's financial position across both the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account. Members reviewed provisional outturn reports, quarter two and quarter three budget monitoring and policy proposals relating to council tax support and discretionary payments. These reports highlighted both areas of strong performance, including General Fund underspends and prudent reserve management, and areas of pressure, particularly within the Housing Revenue Account where additional investment was required to respond to repairs, voids and compliance responsibilities. The Committee's scrutiny helped ensure that financial decisions were transparent, evidence-based and responsive to emerging risks.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund 2025/26

- 6.3 The Committee received updates during 2025-2026 on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Funding had been directly allocated to the Greater Lincolnshire Combined Authority (GLCCA) which in turn had passported the funds to the Unitary/District Councils and County Council. South Kesteven was awarded approximately £1,212,660 with an additional £162,103 being awarded in respect of the Rural England Prosperity Funds (REPF). Almost all funding had been allocated to a variety of projects across the entire District with grants being allocated in a more strategic and targeted direction than previously under the headings of Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills. The Rural England Prosperity Fund was used to fund improvements to community facilities and amenities across the District.

Leisure Investment Reserve

- 6.4 The creation of a Leisure Investment Reserve was approved by the Governance and Audit Committee in July 2025. The Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutinised the criteria for how the reserve would be allocated with a clear focus being on cosmetic and decorative works where the £500,000 would be prioritised across the four locations: Grantham Meres Leisure Centre, Bourne Leisure Centre, Stamford Leisure Centre and Grantham Football Stadium. An improvement plan for each of the locations was developed focussing on those areas with a strong interface with customers and where there was clear evidence of investment required.

7. Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Chairman: Councillor Lee Steptoe

Vice-Chairman: Councillor Zoe Lane

During 2025/26 the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee met five times. Throughout the year, the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee maintained a strong focus on both strategic direction and operational delivery across the Council's housing responsibilities. The Committee considered a broad programme of reports covering housing supply, homelessness services, tenant satisfaction, performance and compliance, and key policy development. In doing so, Members provided challenge, oversight and support to ensure that services remained responsive to resident's needs, reflected legislation and regulatory changes, and contributed to the Council's wider priorities of delivering safe, sustainable and high-quality homes across the district.

New Build and Acquisitions

- 7.1 The Committee received regular updates on the Council's housing delivery programme, reflecting the importance of increasing housing supply across the district. Members monitored progress on a range of schemes including Swinegate, Larch Close, Wellington Way, Toller Court, Kesteven Road and Bourne Road, as well as the Council's use of acquisitions where these complemented development activity. The Committee noted key milestones during the year, including the handover of new apartments at Swinegate and continued work to progress pipeline schemes, demonstrating the Council's hybrid approach to meeting housing need.

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

- 7.2 Homelessness and rough sleeping remained a recurring and high-priority area of scrutiny throughout the year. The Committee reviewed updates on the work of Change4Lincs, outreach provision, winter night shelter arrangements and wider partnership activity designed to prevent homelessness and support people into stable accommodation. Members also considered how grant funding was being used to meet local need and noted successful outcomes from the winter night shelter resettlement work. This ongoing oversight reflected the Committee's commitment to ensuring a proactive, compassionate and effective response to some of the most acute housing pressures faced by residents.

Housing Performance and Tenant Satisfaction

- 7.3 The Committee maintained regular oversight of housing performance data across technical services, housing management and compliance, enabling Members to monitor progress and identify areas for improvement. Reports during the year highlighted improvement in repair, void turnaround, damp and mould response times, stock condition coverage and compliance in key safety areas. Alongside this, the Committee also scrutinised the Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey, including the Council's decision to undertake the survey in two waves to better assess the impact of service improvements. Together

these reports helped ensure that performance monitoring remained closely linked to tenant experience and service quality.

Strategic Policy Development

- 7.4 A significant part of the Committee's work involved considering and shaping key housing policies and strategies before they progressed to Cabinet. During the year, Members scrutinised the draft Housing Strategy, Tenancy Agreement, Tenancy Strategy, Asset Management Strategy, Voids Policy and updates to the Corporate Enforcement Policy, ensuring that these documents reflected current legislation, regulatory expectations and local priorities. The Committee's role in reviewing these proposals helped strengthen the policy framework supporting housing services and demonstrated its contribution not only to accountability, but also to informed and evidence-based decision-making. The committee has been fully updated by officers of the progression, implementation and likely consequences of the Renters' Rights Act, 2025.

8. Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Chairman: Councillor Nikki Manterfield

Vice-Chairman: Councillor Rhea Rayside

The Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee met six times during 2025/26 and considered a broad and varied programme of work focused on community resilience, customer access, public wellbeing and support for local residents. The Committee scrutinised reports on customer services, welfare and financial assistance, health and wellbeing initiatives, community engagement, rural safety and support for the armed forces community. Members also received a number of presentations during the year, including on the Armed Forces Covenant, rural crime, environmental health and the *We are Undefeatable* campaign, which added context and insight to the Committee's wider scrutiny work. Through this work, Members provided constructive challenge and oversight to ensure that services remained accessible, responsive and aligned with the Council's wider priorities for supporting strong, safe and inclusive communities across South Kesteven.

Customer Services and Customer Experience

- 8.1 The Committee maintained regular oversight of customer access and service performance throughout the year, considering updates on customer contact volumes, call handling, appointments and the increasing use of digital channels. Members noted improvements in telephone response rates and examined how customer behaviour was changing across online forms, portals and face-to-face services. The Committee also scrutinised the Customer Experience Strategy 2025-2029 and its supporting action plan, helping to ensure that the Council's approach to customer contact remained modern, accessible and focused on meeting residents needs across a range of service areas.

Welfare and Financial Advice

- 8.2 Supporting residents through financial hardship remained a significant area of focus for the Committee. Members received a number of updates on the work of the Welfare and Finance Advice Team, including delivery of the Household Support Fund, voucher schemes, referral routes and wider wrap-around support for residents facing cost of living pressures. The Committee reviewed how funding had been distributed locally, the level of referrals received and the value of additional assistance provided, as well as preparations for the introduction of the Crisis and Resilience Fund. The Committee also received presentations. This scrutiny reflected the Committee's interest in ensuring that practical support reached residents effectively and responded to changing need.

Health and Wellbeing and Age Friendly Communities

- 8.3 The Committee continued to monitor the Council's contribution to improving health and wellbeing across the district, including progress against the South Kesteven Health and Wellbeing Action Plan. Members were updated on the Council's work to refresh actions and also noted the important milestone of South Kesteven being accepted into the UK Network and Age Friendly Communities. Alongside this, the Committee considered presentations and updates linked to community wellbeing campaigns and activity aimed at supporting people with long-term health conditions. Collectively, these items demonstrated the Committee's support for preventative, partnership-based work that helps residents live healthier and more connected lives.

Community Safety and Armed Forces Support

- 8.4 The Committee also considered a range of issues relating to safety, resilience and support for specific communities. This included presentations on the Rural Crime Action Team, the Corporate Enforcement Policy and the Council's ongoing work under the Armed Forces Covenant. Members reviewed how partnership working, enforcement activity and advocacy were being used to support rural communities tackle local issues and meet statutory responsibilities on the armed forces community. This area of work highlighted the Committee's role in overseeing services that contribute to confidence, fairness and community wellbeing across the district.

9. Joint Scrutiny Committees

There were two Joint Scrutiny Committees held during the year:

- **Joint meeting of the Environment and Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (10 December 2025)** This meeting looked at a review of the Street Trading Policy and also included on the agenda were Planning issues covering the Annual Infrastructure Funding Statement (2024-25) and Section 106 updates, Planning Enforcement update, the annual publication of the Authority's Monitoring Report and an update on Planning Performance in respect of Major Planning Appeals.

- **Joint meeting of the Environment and Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (24 February 2026)** This meeting considered the Small unmanned aircraft (Drone) Policy which had been referred to the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee from the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Body Worn Video Policy both of which were recommended to Cabinet for adoption. Also considered again by the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee was the Street Trading Policy which had been discussed at a workshop for Members at which robust discussion and debate had taken place. The mandatory introduction of CCTV in Hackney Carriages and Private Hire vehicles was debated but the Joint Committee were minded not to recommend the introduction due to the current national loopholes with regard to the licensing of hackney carriages and the local impact this would have.

10. Call-in

During the 2025/26 period no issues were called in.