

Meeting of the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Thursday, 7 January 2021, 2.00 pm

Meeting held virtually, via Skype

Committee Members present

Councillor Mike Exton	Councillor Amanda Wheeler
Councillor Mrs Rosemary Kaberry-Brown	Councillor Linda Wootten
Councillor Philip Knowles	Councillor Ray Wootten (Chairman)
Councillor Sarah Trotter (Vice-Chairman)	

Cabinet Members

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

Officers

Alison Hall-Wright, Head of Finance
Shahin Ismail, Director of Law and Governance
Ken Lyon, Assistant Chief Executive
Chris Stratford, Interim Assistant Director of Housing
Richard Wyles, Interim Director of Finance, Section 151 Officer
Paul Crow, Interim Head of Technical Services
Carol Drury, Senior Community Development Officer
Naomi Page, Democratic Officer
Susan Hislop, Democratic Officer

Other Members present

Councillor Annie Mason
Councillor Adam Stokes
Councillor Bob Adams
Councillor Penny Milnes
Councillor Jacky Smith

85. Comments from Members of the Public

A member of the public addressed the Committee to her experiences of witnessing racial prejudice as a mother of non-white children. She spoke in support of the resolution made at Council to tackle inequality and racial discrimination, praising the initiative while highlighting her own personal experiences; explaining these as being mainly a consequence to lack of awareness through unintended racism.

The Chairman thanked her for speaking to the committee and in statement welcomed others to join him in *“condemning racism in any form, that those who show prejudice or discrimination against other people because they are from a different background is wrong, there is no justification for racial discrimination and I would encourage any form of race or hate crime be reported to the Police and hope they do so and more are reported.”*

86. Register of attendance, membership and apologies for absence

Following a register of attendance all Members were confirmed as present.

87. Disclosure of Interest

No interests were disclosed.

The Chairman notified the Committee that he had received a request to present item 7, the Anti-Racism Report at this point of the meeting. A change of the order of proceedings to that shown in the agenda was then proposed and agreed.

88. Anti-Racism Report

The Senior Community Development Officer presented to members the Anti-Racism Action Planning Report which she explained emanated from a Motion put to Council in October 2020 that had received full agreement by all Councillors.

An Equalities Charter was to be developed to engage with businesses and organisations across South Kesteven who would be encouraged to sign up to the Charter. Once agreed, the equality objectives alongside the agreed actions would be included within the Council’s Annual Position Statement and Corporate Plan.

A ‘champion’ was to be identified within each service area with training provided. It was recognised that Covid-19 would impact on the timescale to deliver these plans. Further discussion was being undertaken to identify how the Council could encourage the reporting of hate crime.

Members discussed and noted:

- Inclusion within the report of unconscious bias
- A need for zero tolerance by the Police
- Importance of education and training
- Request for training to be compulsory

The mover of the original Anti-Racism Motion, Councillor Amanda Wheeler, requested it be recorded her appreciation to all Councillors for their full support of the Motion.

Members then voted to agree the recommendations outlined within the report:

To recommend the Anti-Racism Action Plan to the Cabinet Member for Communities and agrees that the actions be reported as part of the monitoring process for the Council's Equality Objectives.

89. Action Notes from the meeting held on 12 November 2020

The Action Notes from the meeting held on 12 November 2020, were agreed as a correct record.

90. Updates from the previous meeting

Updates from the previous meeting were noted.

91. Verbal Update from Cabinet Members

A verbal update was presented by the Cabinet Member for Communities. She reported that:

- A new variant of Covid-19 had caused significant changes including national lockdown
- A further 27,371 positive tests were reported in Lincolnshire (an increase of 2,435 on the previous week) with 1,066 deaths. These figures continued to be significantly below national average though South Kesteven was high
- Lincolnshire County Council continue to provide support to the clinically extreme vulnerable
- The SK Community Hub continues to provide support, opening 5 days a week with facility for 7 days dependant on demand and continued work with local groups and organisations
- Vaccination sites were operational at the Grantham Meres Leisure Centre and GP Surgeries across the District
- Mobile testing units were available every 10 days at Grantham and Stamford with a walk-in test facility at Queen Elizabeth Park in Grantham

- The Communications Team continued high activity to get messaging to residents
- Business grants of over £30million had been distributed to over 2,000 local businesses by InvestSK Ltd
- Prohibition notices for breaches during Covid-19 had been served against 6 businesses with 1 fixed penalty notice
- 729 covid-19 complaints had been dealt with and 3,024 visits to businesses by Covid Champions had been undertaken since September 2020 to provide advice and signposting
- Out of 50 enquiries to the Community Fund 8 had been received with 1 deferred and a further 1 refused.
- The Mental Health Working Party had been established. A Mental Health Champion was to be appointed to define focus, scope and objectives to then be returned to the Scrutiny Committee prior to being presented to Council.

In response to concerns expressed by a Member over clinically extremely vulnerable lists and possible disparity, the Assistant Chief Executive clarified that this data was held by Lincolnshire County Council. A data sharing agreement is in place that enables the Council were able to raise any concerns.

The Chairman requested feedback post-Covid from the Cabinet Member for Communities to the running and support provided by the SK Community Hub.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning provided the following update:

- Homeless Partnerships were working hard, and cold weather payments were being processed for homeless people
- No update to the Local Plan was presented due to progress to review being awaited
- External planning review – The management structure had changed with a new Interim Head of Development of Planning and Policy appointed. Work was ongoing on the findings to present to Committee
- Disability Facility Grant was on Quarter 3 with national Government funding having been awarded of £115,742 with £578 spent to date; any underspend could be carried forward. The following works had been undertaken: 22 stair lifts; 23 level access showers; 1 garage conversion; 19 ramps; 5 heating installations and 12 various improvements on behalf of residents
- Priority was given to emergency housing repairs. Contractors were able to continue repairs during lockdown, provided notice was provided to residents and with no human contact. Work on Manor Court in Bourne for a new heating system was in consultation at time of the report and the same was to follow at Windsor
- Restructure of housing repairs and improvements was progressing
- Garden maintenance was progressing to be in place for April 2021

In response to questions, the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning confirmed that the Disabled Facilities Grant was means tested for those over 18 years. Apart from a minor issue with heating replacement/repairs over the Christmas period, residents who had requested for work to be suspended until after Christmas was supported with completion to upgrades on water systems envisaged to complete by the end of January 2021. Those residents impacted were to receive credit to their accounts.

Progress had been made on setting up a Residents' Working Group to cover the whole district however the impact from Covid-19 had resulted in some delay with the first meeting envisaged for April 2021. Four individuals volunteered; one person in each of Deepings, Stamford and Grantham and one other.

92. Review of Voids

In presenting the report, the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning warned of concerns over the process for health and safety and compliance issues due to performance and length of time for voids. He reported that new measurements were now in place towards addressing issues that had been identified; these included structure change to improve efficiency and effectiveness as well as avoidance of silo practice as well as a new KPI reporting process using green, amber and red flags.

A fully revised Voids Policy would be sent for approval to full Council and, once set up, continue to be presented every three years.

Members raised a number of questions and concerns that included:

- Delays to keys being returned by vacating tenants. The Interim Head of Technical Services explained that keys not placed in the key safe on the day of vacancy were pursued. The Interim Assistant Director of Housing also explained that where damage to property was proven by the occupant then the tenant was liable to the cost associated with the repair. Random inspections of homes had been introduced however most tenants were dealt with on need due to resource issues
- While stressing the importance of 'getting it right first time', where other items could be identified during a repair and could be adequately corrected /repaired, a tradesman, having reported back to the office, could complete the works required. A culture change away from 'not doing any more than the assigned job' was progressing through future structural changes and services
- Following evaluation of available systems, it had been concluded that Northgate was the favoured software provider
- Quality of works had been identified as a consequence of lack of project management that through improved monitoring of KPI's, would be resolved in future. All operations were to move 'under one roof' for a

more integrated approach. Once in place, the KPI's would be provided to the Scrutiny Committee

- Improvements to the stock management system would result in savings
- A request to consider improved communication of the scrutiny committees

In response to a question by a guest Councillor, the Interim Assistant Director of Housing outlined that future training had been considered to meet compliance requirements as well as to update skills, including traditional apprenticeships.

It was confirmed that typographical errors identified within the report would be amended.

The Chief Executive confirmed that scrutiny committees should have been made aware of performance which through the new Corporate Plan and associated KPI's, each scrutiny committee had been assigned management of their respective area. A housing dashboard was required as well as a staff appraisal system. In response to questions by Members she advised:

- A review of scrutiny had been agreed at the Council meeting held on 17 December 2020. The Local Governance Association had advised that due to consequences of the pandemic no reviews would take place until the summer of this year.
- A new policy on voids was to be drafted and would be considered by this committee prior to adoption by the Council. This would be reviewed every 2-3 years.
- Digital feedback to quality of services to feed into the appraisal system and management process was being investigated.

Members then voted to agree the recommendations and to Option 2 as outlined within the report:

1. Recommends that the Committee notes the report and particularly the potential operational and financial benefits identified in the report by adopting the changes being proposed.
2. Supports the initial steps proposed to improve performance and the further work needed to achieve a final revised policy proposal was critical to the overall process.
3. Reports its views and comments on these proposals to Cabinet on 12 January 2021.
4. Receives, at its next meeting, a proposed performance dashboard of key performance indicators.
5. Supports option 2 as detailed on page 14 of the Voids Report namely:
 - Streamlined voids process to reduce overall period and reduced rent loss.

- Introduction of key safe facilities at void properties to reduce days lost for key returns.
- Tighter Contract and Project Management of external contractor activities.
- Virtual inspection process to improve inspection regime leading up to re let.
- Merging of Major and Minor voids team under single management post.
- Better van stock process to reduce lost time collecting materials.
- Early review of current voids standard for consideration by members.
- Reduced costs associated with voids through tighter specification control.

ACTION 1

- To add to the committee work programme to receive a proposed performance dashboard of key performance indicators at their meeting on 11 March 2021.

93. Future Work Programme

Members were requested to email the Chairman with any additional items for consideration within the future work programme.

An update to the Riverside Health and Safety Compliance Report was provided by the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning that it was now anticipated to be received in April 2021.

ACTION 2

- That the Health and Safety Report update scheduled for 11 March 2021 to now be presented to the Committee on 29 April 2021

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

None had been received.

Meeting ended 15:50