

Meeting of the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Thursday, 11 March 2021, 1.00 pm

Meeting held virtually, via Skype

Committee Members present

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

Cabinet Members

Councillor Adam Stokes, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources
Councillor Robert Reid, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning

Other Members present

Councillor Ashley Baxter
Councillor Phil Dilks
Councillor Breda Griffin
Councillor Jacky Smith

Officers

Chief Executive (Karen Bradford)
Assistant Chief Executive (Ken Lyon)
Interim Assistant Director, Housing (Chris Stratford)
Senior Community Development Officer (Carol Drury)
Acting Principal Democratic Officer (Shelley Thirkell)
Democratic Officer (Naomi Page)

External Attendees

Maisie McMahon, Safer Together Coordinator, North and South Kesteven Office of
the Police and Crime Commissioner for Lincolnshire
Chief Inspector Phil Vickers and Inspector Gary Stewart, Lincolnshire Police

95. Register of attendance, membership and apologies for absence

Following a register of attendance, it was confirmed that six Members of the Committee were present. Councillor Mrs Rosemary Kaberry-Brown was not present.

96. Crime and Disorder - Neighbourhood Policing / Anti-Social Behaviour

The Chairman welcomed the representatives who had been invited to the meeting to provide an update on neighbourhood policing and anti-social behaviour in South Kesteven. The speakers were invited to provide an update and then Members had the opportunity to put forward questions.

Maisie McMahon, Safer Together Coordinator, North and South Kesteven Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Lincolnshire

Ms McMahon gave an overview of the focus of the Safer Together Team, which had been formed to empower and involve communities to participate in decisions that affected their lives. There was a particular emphasis on getting to know individual areas across the County to gain an understanding of how differing cultures impacted on public engagement.

In response to questions asked by Members, the following points were made:

- With the reduction in the number of Police Community Support Officers in recent years, the Safer Together Team were intended to alleviate pressure on the Neighbourhood Policing Teams
- A quarterly newsletter would be compiled by the Team to provide an update on the work they were undertaking and its effects on local communities
- The reduction in a visible policing presence in towns and communities was not indicative of a reduction in the prevention of crime; a significant proportion of crime prevention work was undertaken behind the scenes
- The Safer Together team would welcome invitations to Parish, Town or District Council meetings in relation to crime reduction and prevention

Chief Inspector Phil Vickers and Inspector Gary Stewart, Lincolnshire Police

Inspector Stewart explained the approach adopted by the Police in relation to the enforcement of breaches of Covid-19 restrictions by individuals. The method was to 'engage, explain, encourage and enforce', when investigating an incident that could lead to a fixed penalty notice.

In response to questions and comments put forward by Members, the following points were made:

- There had been an increase in assaults made towards Police Officers, in particular coughing on or threatening Officers when an arrest was being made. Officers were tested for Covid-19 on a regular basis
- The reported increase in drug use by the Police and Crime Commissioner reflected proactive police activity where drugs targeting teams had been introduced
- There had been a change in role for the Neighbourhood Policing Teams nationally due to the reduction in police officers and staff over the past 12 years. Rural Forces had suffered disproportionately in this reduction but a plan to increase numbers had begun
- The majority of anti-social behaviour identified in South Kesteven was low-level; major policing priorities focussed on protecting vulnerable children and adults, where risks were less obvious to the local community
- Investigation work and accumulating evidence presented a significant challenge in extracting information from large amounts of electronic data. An electronic casefile project was ongoing to address this issue for policing teams nationally
- Chief Inspector Vickers recognised the value of the Lincs Alert and Neighbourhood Watch schemes and commented that a re-instatement or replacement for these schemes would benefit both local communities and police officers

The Chairman thanked Chief Inspector Vickers, Inspector Stewart and Ms McMahon for their time and extended an invitation for them to provide an update in six months' time. An offer of thanks was also given for the hard work and dedication of the Police throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

97. Disclosure of Interests

No interests were disclosed.

98. Action Notes from the meeting held on 7 January 2021

The action notes of the meeting held on 7 January 2021 were agreed as a correct record, subject to the following amendment:

Minute 91 - The final sentence to read '*Four individuals volunteered; one person in the Deepings, one from Stamford, one from Grantham and one other*'.

99. Updates from the previous meeting

The progress of actions raised at the previous meeting was noted.

100. Verbal Update from Cabinet Members

Cabinet Member for Communities

The Assistant Chief Executive relayed an apology for absence from the Cabinet Member for Communities and presented the update on her behalf.

Key points included:

- The national picture regarding Covid-19 had developed positively since the Committee was last updated in January
- Infection rates had fallen significantly since the last lockdown and schools had reopened to all pupils
- The Council continued to work collaboratively with the Lincolnshire Resilience Forum
- Two vaccination centres had been established in South Kesteven; The Meres Leisure Centre in Grantham and St Mary's GP Practice in Stamford. Both were operating with speed and efficiency
- The SK Community Hub was still available and over 2800 enquires had been dealt with in the past year
- Over £38m had been given to local businesses through the implementation of Government grant schemes

The Chairman noted that Lincolnshire County Council had closed its grant scheme and asked if there was still time for applications to be submitted to SKDC. Officers confirmed that an email would be circulated following the meeting, to confirm the current status of the grants scheme at SKDC.

A request was also made that the Covid-19 update details were circulated to the Committee, so that Members could update Parish Councils.

Action

- 1. An email to be circulated to update Committee Members on the current arrangements for the implementation of Government grants at SKDC**
- 2. Covid-19 update details to be circulated to Committee Members**

Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning

The Cabinet Member updated the Committee on the current status of the Housing service. Key points included:

- Due to the current national lockdown, aspects of the Housing provision remained restricted, including the maintenance service, housing management, sheltered housing visits and meetings with new tenants
- The works to complete the installation of new tanks and heating at the Riverside flats was in progress. A credit to the rent accounts of those residents affected by the issues would be made by the end of March 2021

- The emergency repairs service was currently up to date
- Ninety adaptations were due to be completed using Disabled Facilities Grant funding within the 2020/21 financial year

101. Safeguarding Review

The Senior Community Development Officer presented the Safeguarding Review report. The report provided an update on the current position of the operational review regarding safeguarding, including the changes and improvements taking place. The review was still in progress and a further report would be provided when it had been completed. Members noted the update provided in the report.

A request was made for reminder emails to be sent out to Members when Safeguarding training had been offered. The Senior Community Development Officer confirmed that this could be actioned for the recent training email that had been recirculated.

Action

- 1. A reminder email to be sent to Members when Safeguarding training had been offered**

102. Modern Slavery Charter

The Senior Community Development Officer presented the report, which highlighted the importance of Members and officers working collaboratively to tackle the insidious crime of modern slavery. In January 2021, a Modern Slavery Charter had been launched by the Safer Lincolnshire Partnership and the Committee were asked to consider recommending its adoption by the Council.

Members noted the importance of establishing clear actions to address the issue of modern slavery and welcomed the report. In response to a question enquiring who should be informed of any instances of potential modern slavery victims, it was confirmed that an identified Safeguarding Officer at the relevant local authority should be notified.

The Committee voted unanimously to agree the recommendations as outlined within the report.

Recommendation

- 1. It is recommended to the Cabinet Member for Communities that the Council adopts the Safer Lincolnshire Partnership's Modern Slavery Charter**

103. Mental Health Challenge - South Kesteven

The Assistant Chief Executive presented the Mental Health Challenge report on behalf of the Cabinet Member for Communities. The Committee was asked to consider supporting the Cabinet Member for Communities' motion, which would recommend to Council that SKDC joined the Local Authority Mental Health Challenge.

Members of the Mental Health Working Party gave their experiences of the discussions and work that had been undertaken, since the idea to join the Challenge had been put forward in mid-2020. It was highlighted that the mental health of residents, officers and Members was important to the Council.

Members voted unanimously to agree the recommendations as outlined within the report.

Recommendations

- 1. The Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee supports the motion attached in Appendix A that South Kesteven District Council join the Local Authority Mental Health Challenge, including the proposed appointment of a Member Champion for Mental Health**
- 2. The Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee requests feedback from the Mental Health working party every six months**

15:05 – 15:15 The meeting adjourned

104. Regulatory Non-compliance Notice

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning introduced the report, which detailed the findings of the Regulator of Social Housing and outlined the initial and ongoing core activities and actions. The Chief Executive confirmed that the first formal intervention meeting had taken place. Further meetings with the Regulator would be held monthly and data would be shared with them as required.

In response to a question asking how the failure to meet the Home Standard had occurred, it was explained that it had not been one incident but several factors that had caused a weakness in the service area. The present focus was on putting an improvement plan in place to rectify the issues but further work would also be undertaken to establish why the standards had not been met. There were also plans to engage tenant panels to consult on policy development and changes in the housing area.

The Committee noted the further work and activities planned in relation to the non-compliance notice and emphasised the need for the issues to be addressed quickly and transparently. The Chief Executive confirmed that a report would be given to the Committee at each meeting for the duration of the notice. The Chairman requested that a report was provided at the first meeting in the next municipal year to provide further information on the feedback and engagement with tenants.

Action

- 1. A report to be provided at the first Rural and Communities OSC meeting of the 2021/22 municipal year, giving an update of the engagement and feedback from tenants in relation to Housing Management**
- 2. The Committee to be updated at each meeting for the duration of the non-compliance notice, on progress made towards the improvement plan**

105. Work Programme

The Committee noted the contents of the Work Programme.

Exempt Item

As the following item of business contained exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3 and 5, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the committee agreed to remove any members of the press and public from the meeting before its consideration.

106. Rent Guarantee Scheme

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning introduced the report on the private rented sector insurance scheme. The scheme had been developed as a means to reduce the potential exposure to unpaid rent for private landlords.

It was proposed, seconded and agreed that the recommendations were made as outlined in option three of the exempt report.

107. Close of the meeting

The meeting closed at 16.05pm.