

Action Notes

Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 8 December 2021, 14:00

Council Chamber, South Kesteven
House, St. Peter's Hill, Grantham.
NG31 6PZ



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Committee Members:

Councillor Ray Wootten (Chairman)
Councillor Sarah Trotter (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Philip Knowles
Councillor Hilary Westropp
Councillor Amanda Wheeler

Other Members in attendance:

Councillor Jacky Smith

Cabinet Members in attendance:

Councillor Robert Reid (Cabinet Member for Housing and Property)
Councillor Annie Mason (Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities)

Officers

Andrew Cotton (Director of Housing and Property)
Craig Spence (Assistant Director for Housing)
Nicola McCoy-Brown (Director of Growth and Culture)
Debbie Roberts (Interim Organisational and Development and Change Manager)
Ken Lyon (Assistant Chief Executive)
Ben Russell (Performance Lead)
Emma Sharpe (Leisure and Events Officer)
Alice Atkins (LGA Graduate)
Amy Pryde (Democratic Services Officer)

28. Comments from Members of the Public

There were none.

29. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Rosemary Kaberry – Brown.

30. Disclosure of Interest

There were none.

31. Action Notes from the meeting held on 7 October 2021

Members considered the Action Notes of the meeting held on 7 October 2021. It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED** that the action notes were a true and accurate record.

32. Updates from the previous meeting

Concern was raised about unanswered questions from the previous meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property confirmed that Environment SK Ltd had required a new mapping system that would categorise gardens based on the square meterage for transparency of costs. The following costings were provided:

- 14 cuts a year for 114 customers would be £410, meaning £29.28 per visit.
- 14 grass cuts and 1 hedge cut a year for 2600 customers would be £490.
- 1 hedge cut for 125 customers would be £80 per application of hedge cutting.
- A desktop exercise showed that the appropriate hourly rate would be £30.78.

In addition, the Cabinet Member for Housing and Property discussed the change in specification from a 'grass cut' to a 'cut and collect'. The specification change had impacted the price and length of time for each visit. The 'one-off' costs for the provision of green bins to enable the collection of cuttings, had an expected out-turn of 180,000.

The Committee were provided with benchmarking and statistics of other Council's regarding grass cutting schemes. It was noted that the cost and findings of South Kesteven District Council were in line with other Councils.

It was emphasised that the costings provided were a charge from Environment SK Ltd to the South Kesteven District Council. Reference was made to the questions asked at the previous meeting regarding on-costs, overhead charges and profit.

One Member stated that he had sent a letter to the Monitoring Officer about the Cabinet Member for Housing and Property also being a Director of Environment SK Ltd. He felt that the two roles were not compatible and there would be a conflict of interest.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property confirmed that he had sought advice from the Monitoring Officer, and that nothing would prevent the Cabinet Member for Housing and Property also becoming the Director of Environment SK Ltd. The Cabinet Member assured the Committee that advice from the Monitoring Officer would always be sought prior to taking any decisions.

ACTION:

- 1. For an update on the assisted garden scheme to be reported at the next meeting.**
- 2. For the Director of Housing and Cabinet Member for Housing and Property to circulate information prior to the next meeting regarding on-costs, charges for overheads and the profit of the assisted garden maintenance scheme.**
- 3. For an Update on Crime Disorder to be added to the Work programme and brought to the next Committee meeting.**
- 4. For the Monitoring Officer to respond to the relevant Members letter before the next meeting.**

33. Progress of Corporate Plan - Performance against KPI's

The Performance Lead presented the report that outlined the quarterly update and the ambition to review the corporate plan actions and indicators. It was highlighted that the performance actions had been positive and appropriate mitigation plans had been put in place to ensure that other targets would be met by the end of the year.

The Performance Lead emphasised that one action had been rated as red, meaning this target could not be met by the end of the year. The action covered the supply of high quality, sustainable council houses and that no completions had been undertaken due to the target being too ambitious and the redirection of budget.

One Member sought clarification over actions relating to healthy and strong communities.

The Performance Lead confirmed that when the initial set of indicators and actions had been put together, the actions in question were delivered by different directorates, on review they had been split out for clarity. The Assistant Chief Executive also explained the 2 parts to the action. The first part related to the voluntary sector and community funding and the second part related to culture funding.

The Chairman raised a query regarding the replacement of solid fuel heating.

The Director for Housing and Property confirmed that the replacement would be for the benefit of tenants. He highlighted that surveys were progressing on properties in rural areas and to assess which replacement heating system would work best for them. It was confirmed that planned work would include a 'complete package', this included electric storage heaters, solar panels to assist with running costs and the installation of new doors and windows if required.

One Member raised concern of what work would be undertaken in the interim over the winter months whilst the replacement of heating systems took place. It was also queried if a record was held of properties that don't have new heating installed.

The Director for Housing and Property confirmed that information held on the housing stock showed areas of weakness. It was highlighted that the stock condition survey was currently being rolled out which would assist in validating the information held by the Council. He emphasised that the Council was aware of its responsiveness with regard to heating failures, where better contract management was required.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property noted an issue raised by a Member in regard to heating systems, which were being addressed by the Green Homes Grant. He stated that a programme was available in each Members' ward of houses being addressed under the scheme.

The Cabinet Member for Housing & Property provided the Committee with an update on heating systems on Riverside. It was noted that issues had been readdressed with heating and hot water and the ongoing programme. The grounds maintenance contract and the number of cuts had also been readdressed. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property confirmed that the team were still working on this project.

One Member raised concern over the time limits and that numerical specific targets were not being reached. It was suggested that graded targets may be a better option where targets can be reviewed quarterly throughout the year rather than twice a year to enable accuracy.

The Performance Lead confirmed that when the targets were set in 2020, the circumstances around the organisation were different. There had been longer-term ambitions this year. He stated that targets this year were more specific and focussed on the Council monitoring its services. The Performance Lead stated that quarterly reporting was currently carried out and all information was collected and brought before a performance management meeting where issues were challenged.

ACTION:

- 1. For the Committee to receive more frequent updates and to review the statistics outside of Committee meetings, when appropriate.**
- 2. For the Performance Lead to provide clarity on CCTV statistics relating to direct arrests and information leading to an arrest.**

AGREED:

- 1. To note the contents of the 2021/22 mid-year performance report.**
- 2. That the Committee supports the amended Corporate Plan Actions and Key Performance Indicators in line with the outcomes of the review.**

34. Void Policy and Re-let Standard

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property presented the report which outlined that the Council currently had 93 voids, of which 10 were being held for decamp and re-housing. He highlighted the importance of the Council's role as a landlord in quickly and safely re-letting properties once a tenancy had ended. The benefits for

the Council by reducing rent loss within the budget and easing pressure on the waiting list and allowing surveys to be carried out on Council properties. It was noted that the voids performance had been under scrutiny due to the slow turnaround of properties.

The Director for Housing and Property stated that in terms of voids and void properties, the challenges faced by officers included systems that had not been working sufficiently to support them. Data and reporting had not been a quick and simple process, and this had added to the confusion around the different teams involvement (repairs, allocations, and housing management). The report also contained main considerations of performance, which had been poor.

The Assistant Director of Housing informed the Committee that a weekly meeting had been put into place with stakeholders from individual teams to discuss the void process. It was also highlighted that the team had been currently going out to market for a new housing management system. The new system that was being procured would have embedded workflows to enable the system to generate actions to be completed within timescales.

It was highlighted that the re-let standard enabled a 'front-foot' position to ensure tenants kept the Council's properties in a good condition. Ongoing tenancy management would be put into place to ensure regular visits and property inspections took place. The Assistant Director of Housing noted that termination inspections would take place over the 'notice-period' and active recharges would be taken if necessary.

It was confirmed that if a tenant was to disappear following the end of their tenancy, it would be kept on record and further costs would be applied to their rent account if they happen to apply for housing in the future.

The Director of Housing and Property highlighted that the tenancy agreement required the tenant to provide 4 weeks' notice and that the tenant would still be liable for the rent if they happen to leave immediately.

One Member raised asked if the Housing team liaised with surrounding neighbours when visiting Council properties. It was confirmed that liaising with neighbours would depend on the appropriateness of the case.

Another Member raised a query as to whether the Council had a deposit scheme for Council properties.

The Director for Housing and Property confirmed the differences between private rented sector and social housing. He stated that due to the Council being a social landlord, a deposit scheme would not be applicable.

One Member raised a query over why the void rent loss had increased and the void time had decreased. The Member also queried the replacing of fitted carpets and the problems and responsibilities around insect infestations.

The Director of Housing and Property confirmed that a void figure was only provided at the time of when a property was let, if properties were not re-let, it still accumulated void rent loss, but they would not show in the re-let figures.

It was confirmed that following the end of a tenancy, carpets would be removed due to the possibility that flooring may need repair. In regard to vermin and pests, the Council would provide appropriate treatment whilst a property was void. Once the tenancy agreement had been signed, the tenant would then be responsible for vermin and pests.

A comment was made about the wording of the policy objectives compared to the policy that had been reviewed in January 2021.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property emphasised the failings within the housing service had been the onus of both officers and Members of the past. He highlighted that the 'Review of Voids' brought before the Committee in January 2021 provided similar information to the policy. He noted the differences between the two documents and that the heads of terms would be improved.

AGREED:

- 1. To note the content of the report.**
- 2. To provide comments and feedback on the Void Policy and Re-let Standard.**

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. To support submission of the Void Policy and Re-let Standard for Cabinet consideration and approval.**
- 2. For the Committee to receive timely specific targets, in relation to the Void Policy and Re-let Standard.**

35. Regulatory Compliance

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property presented the report which included the latest version of the Housing Improvement Plan.

The Assistant Director of Housing assured the Committee that the Corporate Management Team (CMT) had approved access to a framework to procure a new housing management system which would take approximately 12 months to implement.

One Member raised concern about the servicing of smoke alarms in Bourne, the poor responses from subcontractors and the wait times of telephone system at the Council.

The Director for Housing and Property confirmed that a sheltered housing improvement plan update had been provided to the regulator every month, where

these issues had been identified. It was confirmed that the telephone system had been reviewed and the main problem had been a shortage of staff within the Repair Team's customer contact officers, and that vacancies had now been filled.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property informed Members about the digital solution for housing management for the future. It was stated that the IT system would allow tenants to raise their faults, track the level of progress, length of calls made and timings for the repair. It was noted that there would be a backup practical team as well as the IT solution.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property confirmed that the existing systems would be used in the interim until the new system was live. During this 12 month period, up to date information would be loaded onto the new system.

AGREED:

- 1. To note the latest compliance position following ongoing meetings with the regulator of social housing**
- 2. That the Committee receive a further update report at the next Committee meeting.**
- 3. To review the performance level.**

36. Covid Update

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities provided a Covid Update for the Committee which outlined the concern of the Omicron variant, which had led England to reintroduce restrictions:

- Mask wearing compulsory unless exempt
- Covid testing on re-entry to the UK for international travel
- Moving countries onto the red list for international travel

The importance of social distancing, mask wearing and vaccinations was emphasised.

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities provided the Committee with statistics in relation to Lincolnshire and South Kesteven:

- Total positive cases in South Kesteven since the start of the pandemic was 20,579 resulting in 300 deaths within 28 days of a first positive test.
- The rate of positive cases (per hundred thousand) in South Kesteven was 520.
- The rate of positive cases (per hundred thousand) in Lincolnshire was 450.

The majority of positive cases had been found in primary school-aged children and unvaccinated people.

The Cabinet Member highlighted the excellent professionals and volunteers that had been delivering the vaccination programme.

A query was raised regarding what could be done to recognise the hard work of the volunteers. It was confirmed that the Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities and the Assistant Chief Executive would be addressing this.

37. Mental Health Working Party Update

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities provided the Committee with a 6 monthly update on the Mental Health Working Party. It was highlighted that a Member/Officer working party had been put together to promote positive mental well-being in South Kesteven.

The Assistant Chief Executive outlined key areas of focus:

- Supporting positive mental health in our communities.
- Supporting positive wellbeing in Officers and Members.
- Embedding within decision making and policy.
- Working with local partners and the voluntary sector.
- Engaging with LCC and the Health and Wellbeing Board.

A Member of the Mental Health Working Party highlighted the fantastic opportunity to work across a variety of organisations with Officers and Members. The importance of the work that the group did was emphasised and that it had sent out a positive message of putting the community at the heart of South Kesteven.

Concern was expressed about services in the Arts Centres which had previously been free for communities to utilise.

The Assistant Chief Executive clarified that the acronym 'PCN' stood for Primary Care Network which outlined how the local health services were divided across the County.

AGREED:

To note the contents of the report and presentation.

38. Homelessness Update (Change 4 Lincs)

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property presented the report which outlined the aims of a project to provide a new response to tackling rough sleeping, through partnership working with the housing options team in four Districts.

The aim had been fulfilled by identifying and engaging with rough sleepers to source accommodation and deliver intense support by providing a chance to escape homelessness and transition into settled accommodation.

One Member raised a point regarding an application called 'Street Link' that had been available on the App Store. The application provided the opportunity to log and

send the whereabouts to local services of a rough sleeper around England and Wales.

A query was raised about the wait time for a home following the reporting of a homeless individual.

The Director for Housing and Property confirmed that engagement with an entrenched rough sleeper could be difficult. It was highlighted that Change 4 Lincs had been designed to offer support to individuals where the local Council would not have a full duty to accommodate, if an individual was in priority need, the Council held a full duty to accommodate them on the same day, even on a temporary accommodation basis.

A comment was made about the alleged link between rough sleepers and alcohol/drug users.

It was confirmed that the support team who worked with rough sleepers had dealt with homeless individuals with mental health issues, drug and alcohol dependencies.

ACTION:

- 1. For the Director of Housing and Property to provide data to the Committee on the average wait time for a homeless individual to be homed.**
- 2. For this item to be brought back in 6 months' time for an update.**

AGREED:

To note the contents of the report and presentation.

39. Work Programme 2021 - 2022

Members requested that the following items be added to the Work Programme for the next meeting on 17 February 2022:

ACTION:

- Add update on Voids to the Work Programme**
- Add update on Crime Disorder to the Work Programme**

40. Community Awards

One Member queried the feedback from the Community Awards and the criteria required, and changes/plans for future years.

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities confirmed that the criteria had been presented in the report and that she had been hopeful of the awards taking place in future years. It was suggested that a workshop be formed within this

Committee in order to discuss ways in which the Community Awards could be improved.

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

There were none.

42. Close of meeting

The Chairman closed the meeting at 16:25.