

Minutes

Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 9 February 2023, 14:00

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



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Committee Members present

Councillor Sarah Trotter (Chairman)
Councillor Barry Dobson (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Richard Cleaver
Councillor Richard Dixon-Warren
Councillor Hilary Westropp
Councillor Ray Wootten

Cabinet Members present

Councillor Annie Mason (Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities)

Other Members present

Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing
Councillor Phillip Knowles
Councillor Ian Selby

Officers

Nicola McCoy-Brown (Director of Growth and Culture)
Craig Spence (Acting Director of Housing)
Claire Moses (Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Service)
Jodie Archer (Head of Housing Services)
Carol Drury (Community Engagement Manager)
Michael Chester (Team Leader – Leisure, Parks and Open Spaces)
Alice Atkins (Corporate Project Officer)
James Welbourn (Democratic Services Manager)
Amy Pryde (Democratic Services Officer)

41. Public Speaking

There were no public speakers.

42. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Penny Milnes and Councillor Robert Reid.

43. Disclosure of Interest

There were none.

44. Minutes from the Joint Meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 15 November 2022

The minutes from the Joint Meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 15 November 2022 were previously approved at the Joint Meeting held on 6 February 2023.

45. Minutes from the meeting held on 8 December 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2022 were proposed, seconded, and **AGREED** as a correct record subject to the following amendments:

The term 'servants' be amended to 'service personnel'.

46. Updates from the previous meeting

The Committee noted the actions agreed at the meeting held on 8 December 2022.

47. Announcements or updates from the Leader of the Council, Cabinet Members or the Head of Paid Service

The Leader of the Council provided a written update to be read to the Committee:

Pink Freighter

- I am sure you have all seen amazing coverage of our new pink bin lorry; which is now out and about doing rounds, spreading a message which can literally save lives...
- The Council worked closely with our lorry supplier, Dennis Eagle, who were delighted to support such a good cause with a pink paint job on a freighter already on order for the refuse collection fleet.
- My thanks to everyone involved in organising this; which came about through our Housing Officer, Rachel Bradley, working tirelessly to help other sufferers after being diagnosed with breast cancer at the start of the COVID pandemic in 2020. I am so pleased to report that she is now in remission.

Garden Waste

- The fortnightly Garden Waste Collection Service scheme will start on Monday 3rd April for the 2023 – 2024 year so we are asking residents to start to renew their membership for this year. It is of course open to new members as well.
- This can be done from last Monday, 6th February – and payments can be made online, via card and direct debit. Residents can also ring up our Customer Services Team who will be able to assist.

SK Today

- Our SKToday magazine is going through the final stages of approval now and is due to land on our residents doorsteps from the 6th March
- As well as useful information regarding Bank Holiday bin collections, there's advice on how households can better cope with the cost of living, and features on some wonderful inspirational women of South Kesteven, our vital homelessness prevention work, and all the ins and outs of the Council Tax.

Cost of Living

- I am pleased to note that SKDC's Cost of Living Task Force continues to make progress supporting residents across the District.
- In the latest edition of SK Today, further information is included and an additional leaflet will be distributed alongside Council Tax reminders, rent letters and tenancy sign-up packs, and alongside other letters issued by SKDC.
- There is also an online hub with information and guidance available via the SKDC website: www.southkesteven.gov.uk/costofliving
- My thanks to everyone involved in this; I know you are really making a difference to our residents at this time.

Parking Payment Charge

- You will I am sure be aware that SKDC operated car parks have all been successfully upgraded to allow card and contactless payment meaning that customers will be able to pay with cash or by card

Please remember to support our Arts Centres; for those of you are fans of classical music – I am delighted to report that world renowned artists will be performing at the Stamford Arts Centre over the coming months.

Our Arts Teams work do a wonderful job in booking in exciting programmes of entertainment so please do go along and support.

48. Change4Lincs Update

Change4Lincs was an initiative which had been set up to tackle rough sleeping across Lincolnshire for South Kesteven, North Kesteven, West Lindsey and South Holland. The scheme is hosted by South Kesteven District Council and delivered in partnership with North Kesteven District Council, West Lindsey District Council and South Holland District Council from pooling the Rough Sleeper Initiative funding to create this scheme. The initiative was launched in October 2020 and funding had just been secured until April 2025.

Regular Change4Lincs Strategic Partnership Meetings have been initiated, the next meeting was scheduled for the 23rd of February 2023. Alongside these regular operational meetings take place with the Managers from the District Councils. Rough sleepers could be referred by each local authority as well as the general public who may have had concerns about a known rough sleeper. The outreach team then sought to visit the rough sleeper onsite to discuss their options and to see if they could be supported by the team to transition into accommodation.

The package of support provided by the team had the aim of preventing the individual from having to return to rough sleeping. Support included help with budgeting, benefit claims, signposting to mental health services and substance misuse services.

The team was currently managed by the Housing Options manager, along with a Team Leader. The team was made up of a team leader, 3 outreach workers, 6 intensive support officers, 1 reconnection and support officer and a lettings officer. Additionally, the funding received was less than the bid submitted for the next 3 years which meant the team had to be streamlined, deleting four posts that were vacant at the time.

One of the challenges was the area covered by the outreach team detailed above for all four District areas. This had resulted in a less responsive service as would be desired. As a result of the lack of available stock to utilise for accommodation, increasingly the Council needed to utilise B&B and nightly paid accommodation resulting in huge budget pressures. The decision had been made that from now until the end of the financial year, only exceptional cases were to be placed.

Next steps for the initiative were to provide a greater focus on support, scaling back the outreach and working more closely with districts to support clients with a joint goal of rehousing.

One Member queried the financial figures and the budget around providing the Change4Lincs service. It was confirmed that the budget was within the region of £930,000 for the three-year period.

ACTION: For the Acting Director of Housing to provide budgetary figures around Change4Lincs.

The number of individuals who received repeat presentations with Change4Lincs was questioned.

ACTION: For the Acting Director of Housing to provide figures around individuals who received repeat presentations with Change4Lincs.

Clarification was sought on numbers around referrals and whether they were being received from other authorities.

The Head of Housing Services highlighted that referrals came from each of the Districts into the South Kesteven District Council, who host referrals. It was noted that a number of referrals may be for the same individual. Once a referral was received from either of the four Districts, an outreach worker would find the individual and understand their reasoning for rough sleeping and work to provide accommodation for the individual.

It was noted that the total number of referrals was 239 and the number of individuals accommodated was 23. It was queried as to what happened to the 90% of rough sleepers who had not been accommodated. The age range of rough sleepers was questioned.

ACTION: For the Head of Housing Services to provide the Committee with statistics around the age, gender and ethnicity of rough sleepers.

The Head of Housing Services confirmed that the 23 individuals accommodated had been supported into long term, permanent accommodation through the Council's stock or assisted on a privately rented property. Other individuals may require supported accommodation which would also provide support with their mental health.

It was queried as to whether an upturn of rough sleepers could be seen within the District and how long an upturn was expected for.

The Acting Director of Housing highlighted that as a result of the cost-of- living crisis an increase of rough sleeping was evident, meaning an upward curve was expected. A visible increase was seen in Stamford over the past few months. It was noted that certain factors made finding accommodation particularly difficult e.g., pets, single person living.

One Member questioned as to whether rough sleepers in South Kesteven had local connections or were from elsewhere.

An assessment would be undertaken on referrals to establish personal information and the location of their local connection. If necessary, the Council would liaise with another Local Authority to ensure the individual is reconnected to their local area.

One Member queried as to how many rough sleepers within the District were veterans. It was further queried whether any mental health services would be provided to them once they were accommodated.

ACTION: For the Head of Housing Services to provide the Committee with a figure on the number of rough sleepers that were veterans in the District.

One Member requested contact details of an out of hours Officer in relation to identifying a rough sleeper.

The Acting Director of Housing confirmed that during severe weather conditions, the Council provide nightly accommodation for rough sleepers. The Council's out of hours contact number could be used to report rough sleepers.

The Council's revised Allocations Policy provided stipulations in regard to veterans and their access to the housing register and housing stock.

Concern was raised on individuals that had been accommodated but were begging in the community and what could be done to prevent this.

The Chairman noted that begging in the community should be dealt with by the Police.

The Acting Director of Housing confirmed that the Council's CCTV team actively liaise with the Police in relation to individuals seen begging.

Details around the out of hours would be provided to Members after the Election in May 2023.

That the Committee:

That the Committee notes the latest update for the Change4Lincs partnership initiative.

49. Regulatory Compliance

The Acting Director of Housing presented the report.

The Committee were aware the Chief Executive determined, in consultation with the Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning, to self-refer the Council to the Regulator of Social Housing. Since this referral Officers had been providing further data and details relating to the core issues of non-compliance for the Regulator to consider and review.

Updating Tenants and Members:

Following on from previous briefings, further All Member Briefings were to be arranged to ensure Members were fully informed on progress and continued challenges.

As reported to the Committee's meeting in June 2022, a full tenant consultation exercise had been undertaken – "The Big Listen". This involved several questions on both the current experience of tenants in terms of the services the Council offers as a landlord and what they wanted to see prioritised in the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan, requiring a complete review in 2022/23. The questions were based on the Regulator of Social Housing's proposed Tenant Satisfaction Measures and the initial report was provided to Committee in the meeting on 23 June 2022.

The Council were committed to an ongoing programme of regular costed building condition surveys to inform a proactive, planned maintenance programme and reduce the need for more expensive reactive repairs.

A key activity to support the HRA Business Plan review was up-to-date information on the Council's housing stock. As noted in previous reports, the last full Stock Condition Survey was completed in 2009; good practice suggested a comprehensive Stock Condition survey should be completed every 5 years, usually by undertaking a survey of 20% of the stock each year. The Survey has now concluded, and analysis of the findings continued.

The Council continued to utilise its Rant and Rave feedback, seeking real time feedback from tenants following responsive repairs. The Council continued to see overall satisfaction of 4.5 out of 5, demonstrating sustained high satisfaction at the point where repairs were undertaken.

Regular Meetings with the Regulator:

Monthly meetings between the Chief Executive, Director of Housing and Property Services, Assistant Director of Housing, and the Regulator's Officers were taking place as scheduled. The next meeting at time of writing was due on 17th February 2023. Progress had been significant right across the landlord health and safety compliance function (latest monthly figures attached as Appendix One to this report) and the relationship with the Regulator was positive, with the Regulator acknowledging that the Council was moving to a position to seek removal of the Notice that was formally served in February 2021.

That removal was contingent on three issues:

- (a) Sustained maintenance of performance in relation to the key landlord health and safety areas (i.e., those shown on Appendix One)
- (b) Clear programmes of work related to the actions that arose from those areas (these were provided to the Regulator monthly)
- (c) A satisfactory external audit of the above, providing external assurance.

To enable the Regulator to remove the notice we were required to undertake an external audit of our compliance related functions. The outcomes of this audit shall then provide assurance to the Regulator on our current performance and governance structures. The audit commenced in mid-December and was currently ongoing, due to be complete by end of February 2023. The Committee was to be updated on its findings in due course.

The Acting Director of Housing informed Members of the main regulatory compliance figures:

- Legionella – 100% compliant, having evidenced consistent and proactive management of this compliance element.
- Gas – 99.29% achieved in December, slightly down from the excellent result of 100% of properties with an up-to-date gas certificate in April. Of the forty properties without, all have appropriate actions up to date, including obtaining warrants to be served to gain access. A verbal update would be provided to Members with the outcome of those Court Hearings.
- Electrical testing showed the position in relation to properties (both dwellings and communal areas) with an up-to-date electrical certificate, with the current position being 87.56% with a current satisfactory certificate.
- Asbestos showed 100% compliance in terms of asbestos inspections.
- Fire Risk Assessments showed all communal blocks assessed as “higher risk” have been inspected, and corrective actions were being programmed and completed, consistent with the Council’s Fire Safety Management Plan.
- Lift inspections – all properties were currently compliant.
- Smoke and CO showed the position for all the alarms within all our properties being 99.47% compliant. This was a recently introduced Regulatory requirement which came into force on the 1st of October 2022. Those properties that were non-compliant totalling thirty-nine are all being dealt with through due process.
- Damp and mould showed 99.56% compliance and the appointments for CAT1 and CAT2 properties had been made.

Leadership Compliance Meetings:

Chaired by Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning and attended by the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive, and the Acting Director of Housing, these meetings had been a continued feature of the more detailed compliance review process being undertaken. Members of this group ensured specific responses to the changing compliance review process and manage tenant and communication responses to actions associated with key service and regulatory responses such as agreeing the scope and nature of key issues to be covered in the December 2022 SKyline magazine publication, Appendix 3.

Regular Reports to Committees and Cabinet:

The necessary reporting to appropriate committees was to continue. Members were invited to comment on this report content and confirm their views and observations relating to the detail contained within this report.

During discussion Members raised the following points:

- While there was more work to do, Members acknowledged the hard work undertaken by Officers to ensure the progress clearly made so far.

- 95% Gas Compliance was shown as red. This was questioned as surely progress was substantial.
- Did the Council have advice and guidance available to tenants of private rented accommodation who had issues with mould in their properties?
- What was the reason for the sudden reduction in completed Gas Compliance figures?
- Future reports needed to reflect the good and the negative information.
- Housing workshops with Members were useful.

The Acting Director of Housing informed Members that the colour-coded system used to show compliance figures had been agreed internally. The Officers believed there was further success able to be made with Gas Compliance in particular as 100% was briefly reached. Best Practice was ultimately 100% and that was the ultimate aim. Being unable to gain access to a number of properties to carry out inspections was the reason for the reduction in compliance figures. Tenants have a responsibility to allow access, it was a condition within their tenancy agreements. The Officer clarified that tenants in private accommodation could receive guidance from the Council's Environment Team on any issues with mould and damp. Skyline magazine contained further guidance also.

A Member raised a query over the recent lift breakdown at Meadow Court in Bourne. The lift was broken for 7-8 weeks, including the period of Christmas 2022. The Member informed the Committee that this was extremely distressing for residents especially those confined to accommodation on higher floors. The contractor was changed during this time yet the issue was not mentioned within the report. While the issue was ultimately resolved, it should have been heard before a Scrutiny and Overview Committee.

The Acting Director of Housing confirmed that the manufacturer of the lift in the Bourne Housing complex had gone out of business and this had substantially delayed the Council's ability to obtain some parts required. Alternative accommodation was offered in some cases and it was understood that the situation was extremely distressing for the residents. Although the report on Meadow Court, Bourne was not readily available – it was held within the Asset Management System, the Officer confirmed he will establish whether there was a need to publicly display the information. The next Housing workshop was scheduled for 28 February 2023.

It was **AGREED:**

That Committee:

- Noted the latest compliance position following the ongoing meetings with the Regulator of Social Housing.**

- b) **Noted comments made and agreed to receive a further update report at its next scheduled meeting**

50. Best Kept Village

The Council's Corporate Plan 2020 to 2023 contained the key priorities of ensuring that the district is a clean and pleasant place to live and managing our finances and assets effectively. The Best Kept Village competition gave a sense of pride of local residents by maintaining and showcasing the areas in which they live. Prior to 2019, Countryside Charity, formally known as the Council for the Preservation of Rural England and the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE), acted as agents for the Council in the organisation of a district wide annual Best Kept Village competition.

Participation in the competition was funded by the Council at an annual cost in the region of £3,500. Villages who were successfully judged as being the best kept had opportunity to participate in the national Best Kept Village competition. This arrangement came to an end in 2019 due to lack of resource in the Lincolnshire branch of CPRE. Since 2019, the Best Kept Village competition was delivered in-house by the Council under the brief that villages with a population of less than 5,000 were to be automatically enrolled in the competition and judged. Villages with a population of over 5,000 were excluded from the competition.

The costs for the current financial year equated to £5,973 which was made up of the cash prize fund, gold litter bins, framed certificates, Officer time and mileage expense. The current cost of living crisis and the impact this was having upon many organisations (including the Council), presented an opportunity to explore how the competition was delivered going forward to improve the service provided and reduce the financial commitment of the Council.

One Member queried as to why communities were not consulted on the idea of incorporating the competition into the Council's Annual SK Community Awards scheme to allow more of a democratic weight to the decision made.

It was confirmed that the Best Kept Village Awards was currently in place and was being incorporated, which allowed the competition to be open to all villages rather than restricted.

One Member suggested awarding further recognition of a best kept village with a plaque in the grounds for a permanent display.

It was highlighted that not all parts of the District were within villages. It was requested as to whether urban communities could be included.

Concern was raised on the verification process of submitted photographs for the application of the best kept village.

The panel would consider all applications/photographs submitted and shortlist certain villages. The judges would then visit the short-listed villages in person to identify the winning village.

One Member emphasised on the involvement of the Parish Councils to recognize the possible achievements.

It was highlighted that Bourne were not qualified for best kept villiage due to the population size. However, Bourne received an award for 'Britain in Bloom' area in East Midlands.

It was proposed, seconded and AGREED that:

A change to the parameters of the SK Volunteer Awards to incorporate the Best Kept Village competition into the awards from financial year 2023/2024 rebranded as the Best Kept Village Community Award.

51. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Position Statement

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities presented the draft report.

The Member informed the Committee that while the report was slightly delayed, figures from the Census 2021 were able to be included as a result.

It was the responsibility of all Officers and Elected Members to implement the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion. The aim of these principals was to inform decision-making at every level within the Council, reflecting an ongoing commitment to the Public Sector Equality Duty, Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 placed a duty on public sector organisations when exercising public functions to have due regard to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advance opportunities for people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't share it
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't share it.

Two further specific duties are placed on public sector organisations, which are to:

- Publish information to show compliance with the Equality Duty, at least annually, and
- Set and publish equality objectives, at least every four years.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:

- The draft report was welcomed, allowing Members advanced notice to comment ahead of the confirmed report.
- Staff demographics were welcomed. It was suggested that Councillors demographics could be included.
- Was it possible for tribunal case numbers or Police figures on hate crimes to be reported?

The Community Engagement Officer informed Members that any figures they requested could be included in future reports. The draft statement included all that was required in legislation.

The Chairman confirmed that a member of the police force would be present at the next Committee meeting on the 16 March 2023.

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities requested that the statement be published as soon as possible. The statement would be reviewed in September 2023, the Committee would be invited to further develop the statement.

One Member queried what the budget allocation was for the Disabled Facilities Grant and how long a tenant would typically wait for a facility to be fitted.

ACTION: For the Community Engagement Manager to provide the Committee with information on the Disabled Facilities Grant budget allocation and the timeframe on a facility to be fitted.

A proposal had been agreed at Cabinet into the use of contracts which covered Lincolnshire in regard to the delivery of some of the specific adaptations in particular ramps and low-level interventions within people's homes.

The Council had secured £160,000 of government funding for the provision of four changing places in 2021. It was noted that there were no changing places in South Kesteven as of yet.

The Community Engagement Manager highlighted that the report was a snapshot in time. The funding secured did not need to be spent in the year it was awarded, it was a programme over a period of years to locate four Changing Places Facilities in the District. Work had already been carried out on viability studies relating to the locations identified. Updated information would be included in relation to Changing Places within the next Annual Position Statement.

It was proposed, seconded and AGREED that the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- Recommends to Cabinet that the 2022 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Position Statement is published at the earliest opportunity. Enhancements suggested by the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee to improve the extent and clarity of information would be taken into consideration when preparing next year's statement.**

52. Lincolnshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities presented the report.

As part of the Council's response to Covid-19, the seven Lincolnshire Districts developed a culture of working closely together to identify and address challenges. Since then, the Districts had continued to imbed the collective approach with a particular focus on the role of the District Council's in addressing health inequalities across our communities.

The Lincolnshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy was first developed in May 2021 and was structured around 5 key areas: housing and homelessness, activity and wellbeing, environment and climate, economic inclusion, and community engagement.

The District's developed a collaborative working group with the lead for each of the lever areas. This provided the basis for engagement and action with other colleagues in the health system. As a working group that leads to meet regularly and work together in developing high-level action plans, acting as a framework to enable individual Districts to create their local action plan, specific to their unique situation and needs.

South Kesteven District Council, along with other District Council's across Lincolnshire, were eager to mechanising and harnessing the role in influencing the health outcomes of our population. This could be done through the many key roles the Council plays in service delivery, utilising assets and facilities, working with communities and relationships with partners influencing and driving change in our local places.

It was confirmed that there were no current financial implications at this stage.

One Member queried the budget allocation if the strategy was adopted and how it would be incorporated with the Council's work.

The Corporate Project Officer confirmed that the purpose of the strategy was to imbed the overall framework into the Council's existing services. The Council had met with the Lincolnshire County Council NHS Lincs Integrated Care Board and Lincs Partnership NHS Trust to receive their input and to work collaboratively in the future.

The high-level action plan was detailed in developing the bespoke local plan, focus areas would be around those achievable and deliverable.

Members commended all Officer's involved.

One Member queried as to whether the recommending to Cabinet that the Lincolnshire District Councils' Health and Wellbeing Strategy is adopted to provide

a framework for improving health and wellbeing across the County was beyond the remit of the Committee.

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities noted that the adoption of the strategy was across the partnership of the whole seven Districts.

Recommendation 1 was due to be recommended for adoption at all seven District Council's.

One Member suggested that as part of the strategy, Officers identify gaps that cannot be controlled or actioned due to the lack of power over the seven Districts.

It was proposed, seconded and AGREED that the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to Cabinet:

- 1. The Lincolnshire District Councils' Health and Wellbeing Strategy is adopted to provide a framework for improving health and wellbeing across the County working in partnership with other District Council's.**
- 2. The Council commits to continuing to work with district partners to deliver the high-level action plan which has been developed to accompany the Lincolnshire District Councils' Health and Wellbeing Strategy. 95 Agenda Item 12**
- 3. A bespoke local action plan, specific to the South Kesteven District, is developed to maximise the impact of the Lincolnshire District Councils' Health and Wellbeing Strategy on health and wellbeing outcomes at a local level.**

53. Work Programme 2022-2023

The Committee noted the Work Programme 2022-2023.

One Member requested the following items to be scheduled on the Work Programme:

- A specific update from Officers on the work in relation to comments made by the Chief Inspector last time about E-Sins and use of all legal powers.
- Effectiveness of affordable housing.

The Acting Director of Housing confirmed that a Crime Disorder update was scheduled for the next meeting and the Police would be attending.

There had been previous criticism on the use of E-Sins from the Police in relation to the housing directorate and their consistent use of the software. The in-house neighborhoods team had been more proactive in the use of E-Sins.

Following a meeting between the Police and the housing team in August 2022, a specific housing and Police tactical working group was initiated to meet on a

monthly basis where emerging and ongoing anti-social behavior cases involving tenants were discussed alongside their impact on the Police.

A strategic meeting also took place on a quarterly basis with senior police representatives, the feedback had been positive.

The Acting Director of Housing reminded the Committee that the action sheet within the agenda pack provided information on affordable housing.

One Member queried the perception of affordable housing in relation to the housing market.

The Director of Growth and Culture requested that the Committee collate their queries in relation to effectiveness of affordable housing for the relevant Officer to respond.

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

There were none.

55. Close of meeting

The Chairman closed the meeting at 16:15.