

MINUTES

COUNCIL

MONDAY, 25 JULY 2022

1.00 PM



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

PRESENT

Councillor Helen Crawford (Chairman)
Councillor Gloria Johnson (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Ashley Baxter	Councillor Susan Sandall
Councillor David Bellamy	Councillor Ian Selby
Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing	Councillor Judy Stevens
Councillor Robert Broughton	Councillor Adam Stokes
Councillor Louise Clack	Councillor Ian Stokes
Councillor Richard Cleaver	Councillor Jill Thomas
Councillor Kelham Cooke	Councillor Rosemary Trollope-Bellew
Councillor Richard Dixon-Warren	Councillor Sarah Trotter
Councillor Barry Dobson	Councillor Dean Ward
Councillor Ben Green	Councillor Hannah Westropp
Councillor Jan Hansen	Councillor Hilary Westropp
Councillor Philip Knowles	Councillor Amanda Wheeler
Councillor Virginia Moran	Councillor Mark Whittington
Councillor Robert Reid	Councillor Sue Woolley
Councillor Kaffy Rice-Oxley	Councillor Linda Wootten
Councillor Nick Robins	Councillor Ray Wootten

OFFICERS

Karen Bradford (Chief Executive)
Richard Wyles (Chief Finance Officer)
Andrew Cotton (Director of Housing and Property)
Nicola M^cCoy-Brown (Director of Culture and Growth)
Graham Watts (Assistant Director of Governance and Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Emma Whittaker (Assistant Director of Planning)
Gary Andrew (IT Services Manager)
Chris Prime (Interim Communications Manager)
James Welbourn (Democratic Services Manager)
Shaza Brannon (Principal Planning Policy Officer)
Patrick Astill (Communications Officer)
Lucy Bonshor (Democratic Services Officer)
Jake Horton (Planning Policy Officer)
Louise Field (Executive Assistant to the Leader of the Council)
Jordan Brooks (IT Helpdesk Engineer)

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, the Chairman of the Council welcomed James Welbourn, newly appointed Democratic Services Manager, to his first meeting of the Authority.

23. Public Open Forum

No members of the public had registered to speak as part of the public open forum.

24. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Pam Bosworth, George Chivers, John Cottier, John Dawson, Phil Dilks, Paul Fellows, Breda-Rae Griffin, Graham Jeal, Rosemary Kaberry-Brown, Anna Kelly, Jane Kingman, Matthew Lee, Nikki Manterfield, Annie Mason, Penny Milnes, Charmaine Morgan, Penny Robins, Jacky Smith, Judy Smith, Lee Steptoe, Jane Wood and Paul Wood.

25. Disclosure of Interests

No interests were disclosed.

26. Minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2022 were proposed, seconded and **AGREED** as a correct record, subject to the amendment of the membership of the Finance, Economic Development and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee at minute number 9 to replace Councillor Richard Dixon-Warren with Councillor Ian Stokes.

27. Minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 14 June 2022

The minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 14 June 2022 were proposed, seconded and **AGREED** as a correct record.

28. Communications (including Chairman's Announcements)

The Council noted the Chairman's engagements which had been circulated at the meeting, for information.

The Chairman reported that she had regretfully turned down invitations to many Platinum Jubilee celebrations due to being unwell but had been able to meet some wonderful people at those events they had been able to attend.

The Chairman was extremely honoured to be invited to inspect the troops at the Pass Off Parade at the barracks in Grantham along with Colin Thackery, Chelsea Pensioner and winner of Britain's Got Talent and Geraldine Pond, Her Majesty the Queen's Chaplain.

The Chairman also attended the Commonwealth torch parade, stating that it was amazing to see so many local children taking part. The Chairman took this opportunity to thank all those people involved in coordinating the event.

29. Housing Revenue Account Revenue Budget - Earlesfield Estate Grantham Improvement Works Project

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property presented a report which provided Full Council with an opportunity to allocate an additional revenue budget to enable the delivery of the Earlesfield Estate improvement works project in Grantham.

The Cabinet Member reported this represented a significant project and impacted 152 properties on the Earlesfield Estate requiring extensive works, with 112 properties requiring full tenant or family decampment to enable the works within the estate to be undertaken. Ten properties were being held for use by those residents where decampment would be necessary.

Cabinet had awarded the contract for these works at its meeting on 31 May 2022 to a company who had submitted a comprehensive bid and provided significant assurances regarding their ability to deliver.

Subject to approval at this meeting, a draft programme of works would be developed. Tenants would then be provided with sufficient notice with the schedule of works as well as plans and timescales associated with any decampments.

The Cabinet Member hoped that tenants in these properties would feel reassured by this commitment from the Council to improve their homes, reminding Members that the Corporate Plan included a priority of ensuring that it had housing which met the needs of all its residents. As a housing stockholder, the Council wanted to offer decent quality accommodation with modern facilities and this project would deliver numerous benefits to residents in refurbished and safe homes.

The Cabinet Member proposed the recommendations contained within the report, which were seconded.

The following points were made during debate of the motion:

- it was pleasing to see the Council was able to facilitate this project and make the necessary improvements to its housing stock in this area
- a question was raised regarding the likely financial impact of bringing the Council's stock up to the level required following the stock condition survey, particularly in respect of those areas which had been identified as being urgent
- a vote of thanks was extended to the Cabinet Member and Housing Team for the work they had done so far in improving the Council's housing service. As a consequence, it was becoming increasingly likely that the housing Regulatory Notice would soon be lifted from the Council

- It would be necessary to wait for the results of the stock condition survey to be returned prior to planning and budgeting for the future
- Paragraph 7.1 of the report stated that £2.442 million of the monies required were in this year's budget and represented funding from a capital perspective. The proposal before Council was seeking a revenue budget allocation of £1.364 million to fund revenue costs associated with the works
- The preliminary findings of the stock condition survey were in the process of being worked up and prioritised into those works considered as urgent, together with those scheduled to be undertaken in the short, medium and long term as part of a comprehensive programme
- A question was raised regarding provision of white goods referenced within the report. It was noted these white goods were being provided in the ten decant properties allocated for use by those decamping from their homes whilst works took place

Having been proposed and seconded, upon being put to the vote the motion was **AGREED.**

DECISION:

That Full Council approves a revenue budget allocation of £1.364 million to be funded from the Housing Revenue Account Priorities Reserve in order to deliver the one-off revenue costs associated with the Earlesfield Estate Capital Project.

30. UK Shared Prosperity Fund

The Leader of the Council presented a report which set out the proposed interventions for inclusion in the Investment Plan for submission to the Government which detailed projects which met the requirements of the funding programme and supported the growth and prosperity of the District.

The Leader outlined this proposal as a significant opportunity to secure substantial investment for the District and represented the Government's domestic replacement for the European Structural and Investment Funds programme. The aim of the fund was to support the current Government's levelling up commitment through three investment priorities of communities and place, supporting local business and people and skills. The Council had been very successful in being awarded £3.898 million, meaning it could build upon the plans and existing priorities contained within the Corporate Plan's vision to be the best district to live, work and visit. It was important this funding reached all four corners of the district, taking into account the numerous rural communities in South Kesteven.

It was now necessary to submit a Local Investment Plan to the Government by 1 August 2022. The Leader highlighted the process had consisted of a compressed and tight timeline in accordance with the guidance associated with the fund. The required consultation had been undertaken. However, it was clear to the Leader in speaking to representatives from other local authorities across the country that many

had undertaken much less consultation than South Kesteven District Council, expressing pride in what had been achieved with regard to those people who had been approached and engaged with the process. Support was also being sought from local Members of Parliament.

The Government expected the Investment Plan, at this stage, to consist of high level ambitions, identifying the outcomes the Council wished to target based on local context and the interventions the Council was seeking to prioritise. The Investment Plan was therefore not an exhaustive document containing detailed project or intervention planning, solely those headline areas of what the Council was seeking to implement and deliver.

The Leader placed on record his gratitude to the Director of Growth and Culture and Head of Economic Development for the work they had done in respect of this scheme.

As a result of the extensive consultation undertaken, five clear investment activity themes had been identified as follows:

- Communities, Health and Wellbeing
- Environment and Infrastructure
- Culture, Arts and Heritage
- Enterprise, Innovation and Growth
- Employability and Skills

At this stage the Council needed to evidence to the Government that challenges and local needs were reflected in the investment themes, with it being imperative that best value could be achieved from the funding available to ensure the money went as far as possible.

The Deputy Leader of the Council seconded the proposition and proposed an amendment to add the following paragraph to the motion:

“Council is asked to approve delegation to the Council’s Section 151 Officer in conjunction with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Leisure to amend the budget framework for the General Fund in order to incorporate the UK Shared Prosperity Fund allocations.”

The Leader of the Council, as mover of the original proposition, accepted the amendment.

The following points were made during debate of the motion:

- In terms of levelling up, a suggestion was made that the funding should be used where it was needed most in areas such as the Harrowby Ward and Earlesfield Ward

- With regard to the communities and place investment priority, the fund could be used to assist children in the Harrowby Ward and Earlesfield Ward with the provision of play equipment and recreational areas
- The UK Shared Prosperity Fund was the Government's replacement for the EU funding the Council had previously received, however, £3,898 million over three years was not as substantial as it appeared. Members would inevitably dispute how much of the fund would be made available to the areas they represented across the district. However, there may be insufficient money available to deliver some of the initiatives anticipated. The capital element of the fund, for example, would not be enough to provide an all-weather pitch in an area, with the remaining funding being revenue funding
- In noting that decisions regarding the allocation of funding to individual initiatives would be ultimately undertaken by delegated powers by the Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, as recently agreed at Cabinet, a question was raised as to what process would be put in place to facilitate the scrutiny of these decisions
- Reference in the report was made to projects to fight anti-social behaviour as an example intervention under the community and place investment priority. It was agreed that such an intervention needed emphasising across the district, which was becoming out of hand due to a lack of policing in some areas
- A question was raised regarding the two appendices attached to the report and why only Appendix A was being proposed for approval at this meeting
- Clarification was sought as to the decision-making delegation that had been granted by Cabinet regarding the allocation of funding
- It was hoped that CCTV and the deterrents that came with it for certain areas in the district could be introduced using this funding to address anti-social behaviour

The Leader of the Council, as part of their right of reply, made the following points:

- The delegation was in respect of the budget framework associated with the scheme to incorporate it within the Council's budget. The themes outlined in the Investment Plan would be submitted to the respective Overview and Scrutiny Committees where they could scrutinise the individual projects before any final decisions were taken
- Appendix A represented the Council's submission to the Government, whereas Appendix B outlined an example of a proposal from an external organisation seeking an allocation of the fund based on the investment activity themes set out in paragraph 2.18 of the report, which would form a later stage of the process. Appendix B would be submitted to the Finance, Economic Development and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the relevant time to ascertain whether the Committee was in support of such a proposal
- In response to reference to the Harrowby and Earlesfield Wards, it was important to ensure this fund benefited the whole of the district. Deprivation existed in all four corners of the district, including rural areas, which needed to be taken into account

- Noting the comments regarding capital and revenue, the fund would still see £3.8 million injected into the district and would go a long way to help deliver some of the Council's Corporate Plan priorities

Having been proposed and seconded, upon being taken to the vote the motion was **AGREED**.

DECISION:

That Full Council:

- 1. Approves the proposed interventions, as set out in Appendix A to the report, to form the basis of the South Kesteven UK Shared Prosperity Fund Investment Plan, with the intention of this being submitted by 1 August 2022 for Government consideration.**
- 2. Approves delegation to the Council's Section 151 Officer in conjunction with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Leisure to amend the budget framework for the General Fund in order to incorporate the UK Shared Prosperity Fund allocations.**

31. Stamford Neighbourhood Plan

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Planning Policy presented a report which sought approval for the Stamford Neighbourhood Plan to be made part of the Development Plan for South Kesteven.

Neighbourhood Plans were introduced through the Localism Act 2011 as a new way for communities to help guide and shape future development in their locality. The Stamford Neighbourhood Plan had been produced by Stamford Town Council on behalf of its community with the plan area covering the entirety of the parish of Stamford and all wards associated with the Town Council, being formally designated on 29 March 2016.

The Neighbourhood Plan contained a variety of policies which looked to add additional local context to development proposals in the Stamford area and contained a set of objectives providing social, economic and environmental aspirations the plan hoped to achieve. It also included a policy which added further detail to the allocated Stamford North site within the District Council's adopted Local Development Plan.

The document had been through a significant amount of community and public consultation, including the statutory six-week consultation period formally examined by a fully qualified independent inspector. The inspector found the Stamford Neighbourhood Plan met all legislative and procedural requirements and confirmed it could proceed to a referendum, subject to modifications.

The Cabinet Member put on record their thanks to the Planning Policy Team for their dedication and hard work in bringing this document forward on the Council's behalf,

as well as to Stamford Town Council's Neighbourhood Plan team for the work undertaken in preparing it.

Of those that voted in the Stamford Neighbourhood Plan referendum on 14 July 2022, 76.5% voted in favour of adopting the document.

The Cabinet Member proposed the recommendations contained within the report, which were seconded.

The following points were made during debate of the motion:

- Votes of thanks were expressed to Councillor David Taylor of Stamford Town Council and the Town Council's Members who were involved in the creation of this plan, which had comprised a significant amount of work over a number of years
- Some concerns and comments from residents had not been reflected in the final Plan for procedural reasons, however, once adopted the process of updating and improving it could commence
- The Plan still fell short in some areas, particularly with regard to some green spaces in Stamford and environmental concerns that a few residents had expressed

Having been proposed, seconded and voted upon, the recommendations contained within the report were **AGREED**.

DECISION:

That Full Council:

- 1. 'Makes' (adopts) the Stamford Neighbourhood Plan (Referendum version) so that it becomes part of the statutory development plan, and a material consideration for determining planning applications in the Stamford Neighbourhood Area.**
- 2. Approves the publication of the Decision Statement at Appendix 1 as part of the making of the Stamford Neighbourhood Plan.**
- 3. Gives delegated authority to the Assistant Director of Planning, to make minor non-material consequential changes to the plan, as necessary, and exercise all the Council's functions and responsibilities in relation to making the Stamford Neighbourhood Plan.**

32. Amendments to the Constitution

The Chairman of the Constitution Committee presented a report which provided Full Council with an opportunity to consider proposed revisions to the Council's Constitution.

Several amendments to the Council's Constitution were raised by Councillors Richard Cleaver and Ashley Baxter during debate at the Annual Meeting of the Council held on 26 May 2022 which they agreed to withdraw so they could be considered by the Constitution Committee. The Constitution Committee met on 18 July 2022 to consider these amendments, together with other constitutional matters which had been highlighted prior to the meeting.

The Chairman of the Constitution Committee explained the basis for each recommendation of the Committee contained within the report and it was agreed these should be debated separately.

Recommendation 1

It was proposed and seconded the term 'Chairman' be amended to 'Person Presiding' in respect of the Council's Committees throughout the Constitution.

This matter had been raised at a recent development session for Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen where the question was raised as to whether the term 'Chairman' was appropriate from a gender-neutral perspective.

The following points were noted during debate of the motion:

- The term 'Person Presiding' gave the impression of someone acting as a judge
- It was universally known the person chairing a meeting was a Chairman. It should, however, be up to the individual Chairman at the meeting as to how they wish to be addressed based on their personal preference
- If the Council worried more about the future than it did regarding the policing of language it would be much further ahead
- It was problematic to retain 'Chairman' as a default and the default terminology should represent more universal language
- In response to a comment made during discussion of this item which referred to this matter as 'woke nonsense', the term was commonly used when frightened of change and was a phrase that could easily have been used previously to resist any progress towards equality
- The proposal should be supported on the basis that each person presiding would be able to express how they personally wished to be addressed at meetings
- The term 'Chairman' did not demean anybody and there was nothing to be ashamed about when being referred to as a Chairman
- The term 'Person Presiding' would not make it clear who the appointed or elected Chairman was and could relate to anyone presiding a meeting rather than the person who had been elected or appointed into the position

Having been proposed and seconded, upon being put to the vote the motion was lost.

Recommendation 2

It was proposed and seconded that Paragraph 7 of the Council Procedure Rules be renamed 'Notice and Summons to Meetings and Cancellation, Postponement or Rescheduling of Meetings and that Paragraphs 7.4 and 7.5 of the Council Procedure Rules be amended to include the words 'cancel or reschedule' along with the existing word 'postpone'.

The proposed wording sought to add more clarity regarding the Chairman's discretion to vary the date of a meeting.

The following points were noted during debate of the motion:

- This amendment was proposed following an issue regarding the recent rescheduling of a meeting of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with the revised date being set before the originally agreed date. The ability to do this had been challenged as the Constitution only made provision for postponements under the Chairman's discretion

Having been proposed and seconded, upon being put to the vote the motion was **AGREED**.

Recommendation 3

It was proposed and seconded that a new paragraph be added under section 6 of the Planning Procedure Rules as follows:

"The relevant Ward Councillor is defined as a Councillor representing those wards which fall inside or adjacent to the planning application".

This proposal related to the definition of 'relevant Ward Councillor' in respect of those Councillors entitled to speak during consideration of a planning application at the Planning Committee.

The following points were noted during debate of the motion:

- Clarity was sought regarding the proposed wording and whether under the proposition a Councillor from an adjoining electoral ward to that of the site of an application would be entitled to speak as a relevant Ward Councillor. This was confirmed as being correct.
- Clarification was provided that the proposal related solely to the public speaking element of consideration of a planning application at the Planning Committee and was separate to the provision set out elsewhere in the Constitution regarding a Ward Councillor's right to 'call-in' an application to the Planning Committee
- Any Councillor had the right to request to speak at the Planning Committee through Chairman's discretion

A procedural motion to defer this motion to the Constitution Committee was proposed and seconded. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Planning Committee would be invited to attend the meeting and the proposed wording could be re-considered in the context of the content of the Local Code of Practice for the Planning Committee. Upon being put to the vote the procedural motion was **AGREED**.

Recommendation 4

It was proposed and seconded a new paragraph be added under Council Procedure Rules and Overview and Scrutiny Committee Procedure Rules relating to public speaking, as follows:

“A public speaker who has put a question in person may also put one supplementary question without notice to the Councillor who has replied to their original question. A supplementary question must arise directly out of the original question or the reply”.

This proposal sought to re-introduce the ability for members of the public to ask a supplementary question at meetings of the Council and Overview and Scrutiny Committees having registered their original question.

The following points were noted during debate of the motion:

- It was already difficult enough for people to engage with and participate in the Council’s meetings and the least the Council should offer was a supplementary question, as was previously the case
- Sometimes questions were not answered sufficiently or were misunderstood, with supplementary questions in the past having been used to seek further clarity regarding an answer provided
- If a supplementary question was too difficult to answer at the time of the meeting, the Councillor answering the question could commit to providing an answer outside of the meeting
- The Chairman would have the ability to rule a supplementary question out of order should it not be relevant

Having been proposed and seconded, upon being put to the vote the motion was lost.

Recommendation 5

It was proposed and seconded to add the words ‘between meetings, changes to ...’ at the beginning of paragraph 4.4 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

The proposed wording sought to add more clarity regarding the management of the work programme for Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Having been proposed and seconded, upon being put to the vote the motion was **AGREED**.

Clarification was sought regarding the constitutional amendments considered by the Constitution Committee which it did not agree to put forward as formal recommendations to Full Council in respect of whether any explanation would be provided to Councillors as to the reasons why they were not supported. The Chairman of the Constitution Committee stated that the draft minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 18 July 2022 would be published shortly and would outline the issues raised during discussion of each suggested amendment.

DECISION:

That Full Council:

- 1. Approves the renaming of Paragraph 7 of the Council Procedure Rules to 'Notice and Summons to Meetings and Cancellation, Postponement or Rescheduling of Meetings and the amendment of Paragraphs 7.4 and 7.5 of the Council Procedure Rules to include the words 'cancel or reschedule' along with the existing word 'postpone'.**
- 2. Defers consideration of the definition of relevant Ward Councillor in respect of Section 6 of the Planning Procedure Rules to the Constitution Committee.**
- 3. Approves the addition of the words 'between meetings, changes to ...' at the beginning of paragraph 4.4 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.**

33. Political Balance and Allocation of Committee Seats

A report of the Chief Executive was considered which reported the revised political balance of the Council and allocation of seats to committees following the establishment of a new political group at the Council.

The Leader of the Council reported that he had gifted the Conservative Group's allocation of seats to Independent Group Councillors, as follows:

- Employment Committee (Councillor Paul Wood in place of Councillor Rosemary Trollope-Bellew)
- Cultural and Visitor Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Councillor Paul Fellows in place of Councillor Nikki Manterfield)

The Leader of the Alliance SK Group sought clarification as to whether it was a requirement to confirm their Group's membership on Committees at this meeting. It was reported that it was normal practice for appointments to be made at Full Council whenever vacancies occurred, however, there was no requirement for the Group to confirm nominations at this meeting. Alliance SK vacancies on respective Committees could be filled on a meeting-by-meeting basis using the substitute system. The Leader of the Alliance SK Group confirmed that he would bring back their Group's nominations to the next meeting of Full Council.

Confirmation of the Independent Group's membership on Committees was noted as follows:

- Companies Committee (Councillor Philip Knowles)
- Constitution Committee (Councillor Paul Fellows)
- Culture and Visitor Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Councillor Amanda Wheeler, plus the gifted seat to Councillor Paul Fellows)
- Employment Committee (Councillor Anna Kelly, plus the gifted seat to Councillor Paul Wood)
- Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Councillor Penny Milnes)
- Finance, Economic Development and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Councillors Philip Knowles and Paul Wood)
- Governance and Audit Committee (Councillor Paul Wood)
- Licensing Committee (Councillors Paul Fellows and Philip Knowles)
- Planning Committee (Councillors Harish Bisnauthsing, Penny Milnes and Paul Wood)
- Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Councillor Richard Cleaver)
- Chief Executive's Appeals Panel (Councillor Jane Wood)

Taking into account the nominations from respective Political Group Leaders, upon being put to the vote the appointments were **AGREED**.

DECISION:

That the appointments to Committees, as outlined above, be approved.

34. Dispensation for Councillor Attendance

A report of the Monitoring Officer was considered which provided the Council with an opportunity to grant a dispensation under the Local Government Act 1972 to excuse the non-attendance of Councillors Rosemary Kaberry-Brown and Judy Smith at a meeting of the Council within a six-month period.

The Leader of the Council proposed the dispensation be granted, highlighting the two Councillors were long-standing and well-respected Members of the Council. He took this opportunity to wish them well and, in speaking to them both, reported they were looking forward to being able to return soon.

The proposal was seconded.

The following points were noted during debate of the motion:

- Members took the opportunity to wish Councillors Kaberry-Brown and Judy Smith well with their health
- They were well-respected and honourable Councillors who had served on the Authority for approximately 20 years

- Regrettably, given that a previous dispensation for a six-month absence had been granted, it would appear that, sadly, the Councillors were unable to perform the role to which they were elected
- A post had been placed on social media by a Member to undertake a survey in the Deepings and 88% of people thought the Councillors should not be granted a further six months by way of a dispensation
- Residents in the Councillors' respective wards were not being sufficiently represented
- There were financial implications for the Council associated with being a Councillor
- The dispensation should not be supported on this occasion, but the two Councillors should be conferred with the status of Honourable Alderwomen
- If the Councillors were still able to undertake case work in their wards a compromise could be that they be temporarily replaced on Committees with other Members who may be better placed to attend the meetings until they were able to return
- Both Councillors were still undertaking ward work for the areas they represented and continued to work closely with their fellow Councillors in their respective wards
- To assume that a Councillor was not undertaking their role effectively due to being physically unable to attend meetings at the Council was nonsensical
- Social media was not an appropriate forum for this matter
- Financial implications should not come into consideration of this matter. However, if two vacancies arose as a result of not granting a dispensation the preceding by-elections would cost the district a great deal more than the cost of their basic allowance
- The report stated that the two Councillors in question 'had been prevented from undertaking normal duties' and there was no reference within the report to confirm that they had in fact been continuing with their casework
- This Council would stand by and support an employee in the same circumstances regarding their health and the granting of this dispensation sought to do the same for the two Councillors
- It was disappointing this debate had been held, discussing the personal circumstances of the two Councillors named in the report, when the motion should have just been voted on as had traditionally been the case

Having been proposed and seconded, upon being put to the vote the motion was **AGREED.**

DECISION:

That a dispensation be approved for Councillors Rosemary Kaberry-Brown and Judy Smith from attending meetings to avoid disqualification as Members of South Kesteven District Council under Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972.

The meeting temporarily adjourned at this stage of the meeting for a period of fifteen minutes.

35. Members' Open Questions

Question 1 – Councillor Virginia Moran to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Leisure

Councillor Moran asked for an update on the current position regarding the lease at the Deepings Leisure Centre. The fire escape issued seemed to have been resolved but clarification was sought as to what other issues were preventing the lease from being signed and what, or who, was delaying these matters being settled. Councillor Moran also asked, once the lease was signed, what the estimated timescale would be for the lease to be submitted to the Department for Education.

The Chairman of the Council clarified there was provision for one question per Councillor as part of the Members' open questions item.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Leisure reported that negotiations were continuing between the Council and the School Trust. There were two issues currently unresolved, and the Council was working with the School with regard to the number of car parking spaces being made available on the site as well as confirmation of the demolition costs associated with any future works which may occur, the details of which needed to be included within the lease. Things were progressing and moving forward. The Council was still in discussions and it was hoped these would be resolved as soon as possible.

Question 2 – Councillor Ray Wootten to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Property

Councillor Wootten had recently visited the Riverside complex in Grantham with the Council's Housing Team where it was made clear there had been complaints of drug dealing, vehicle crime and anti-social behaviour in and around the area which had previously been reported. Councillor Wootten asked the Cabinet Member whether they had considered applying for a grant from the Safer Streets Fund which enabled neighbourhood crime to be dealt with by extending the use of CCTV.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property sympathised with some of the residents at the Riverside who were enduring this anti-social behaviour. Residents who witnessed anti-social behaviour were encouraged to report any suspicious activities in their locality to the Police, who had provided additional support through their attendance at meetings. The recording of incidents would assist in securing CCTV in the area which was not necessarily the answer but would act as a good deterrent.

The Cabinet Member confirmed that the Council, as a landlord, would not hesitate to take appropriate action against any breaches of tenancy and would manage this in association with the Police and other agencies.

The Council had a strong record for applying for and receiving grant funding to support the delivery of its services and the Cabinet Member was pleased to confirm that Officers were exploring the initiative referred to in Councillor Wootten's question, as well as through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Question 3 – Councillor Ian Selby to the Leader of the Council

The print room at the Council had been a marvellous in-house asset for many years. Councillor Selby asked what would happen to the printing equipment when the Council moved into the offices above the new cinema complex and what the future held for this in-house service.

The Leader of the Council confirmed the Council did currently host print room facilities in its existing accommodation, however, some of the equipment was now old and had been well used over the years. As the Council moved towards a paperless way of working the use of the in-house facility would continue to reduce. Some of the equipment would be moved to the new office accommodation with an in-house function being retained. However, it may be more cost effective in some cases to support local businesses in the supply of printing and related consumables.

Question 4 – Councillor Amanda Wheeler to the Leader of the Council

Councillor Wheeler placed on record her congratulations to the Council's Waste and Recycling Team for continuing with collection rounds and the Housing Team for their support to rough sleepers during the record temperatures experienced recently.

Councillor Wheeler was interested in the impact the recent high temperatures had on South Kesteven's towns and villages and how many acres of field were burnt across the district. With extreme temperatures becoming more frequent, she asked whether the Council was looking at producing climate risk assessments for the district in the same way that flood and fire risk assessments were undertaken. She also asked whether there were any plans to increase the £20,000 allocated in this year's budget for climate change.

The Leader of the Council explained the allocation of £20,000 in the budget was to be used to facilitate the Climate Change Working Group in reviewing what the Council did itself both within the organisation and across the district. The Group could then submit bids into the Council which would come before Members for debate prior to allocating any further funding towards climate change initiatives.

The Leader had been dealing with some of the fires that had broken out in his ward, as other Members had, and agreed the Council needed to do more, recognising the climate emergency was still in place.

The Chairman of the Council clarified there was provision for one question per Councillor as part of the Members' open questions item and was satisfied that the answer provided was sufficient.

Question 5 – Councillor Barry Dobson to the Cabinet Member for Planning and Planning Policy

Councillor Dobson asked for an update on the application for the solar farm at Mallard Pass.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Planning Policy reported the statutory consultation in relation to the application concluded on 4 August 2022. A draft statement of common ground would subsequently be drawn up and this would identify those matters agreed between the Local Authority and the developer together with those which would be the subject of further negotiation.

In Spring 2023 the preparation and submission of a local impact report would be undertaken. This would provide details of the likely impact of the development on the district and be used as a means of the Local Authority being able to draw upon its local knowledge and evidence which would be reported to the Planning Inspectorate.

Written representation would also take place in Spring 2023 and this would be the most appropriate document for a Local Authority to register its views on the application, particularly in respect of whether it supported or objected to the application.

The developer was currently consulting on the technical information contained within the environmental information report, representing the preliminary findings of the Environmental Impact Assessment.

By responding and providing comments to the Environmental Impact Assessment the Council was not committing to any future position it wished to take regarding supporting or objecting to the proposed development. The Cabinet Member provided assurance that an application as major and important as Mallard Pass would be debated and deliberated by all Members of the Council.

Question 6 – Councillor Hannah Westropp to the Leader of the Council

Councillor Westropp asked for an update on St Martin's Park at Stamford.

The Leader of the Council had been onsite two weeks ago to observe the demolition works which were well underway and on track for delivery within the targeted timescales. Fantastic progress was being made and this would regenerate and support business growth in the south of the district.

Question 7 – Councillor Ben Green to the Leader of the Council

Councillor Green asked, with the importance of food security and in representing a rural ward himself, whether the Leader agreed with him that it was vital for residents to respond to the Mallard Pass Solar Farm consultation.

The Leader of the Council agreed and took this opportunity to pay tribute to Sue Holloway and her team on the Mallard Pass Action Group. He strongly encouraged anyone to respond and recognised there was significant community objection to this application.

Question 8 – Councillor Jan Hansen to the Leader of the Council

Councillor Hansen expressed difficulties experienced in obtaining important information and asked for an update regarding Toll Cottage.

The Leader of the Council was aware of the issue at Toll Cottage which represented a decision taken by the Council's Planning Committee a number of years ago. The Leader had seen email exchanges between senior officers of the Council and Councillor Hansen and would welcome the opportunity to meet with the Councillor and Officers to discuss the matter further.

It was reported the Council was waiting for court dates and there had been exceptional challenges with the court system in dealing with Toll Cottage and the disposal of that asset.

Question 9 – Councillor Richard Cleaver to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Property

Councillor Richard Cleaver referred to a very serious fire on Edward Road in Stamford last week involving eight cars. He asked the Cabinet Member to provide an update on the effects this incident had on tenants, their homes and any progress to date in respect of any necessary repairs.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property invited the Director of Housing and Property to provide an update.

The Director of Housing and Property reported that a fire had occurred close to Council-owned properties on Edward Road in Stamford. Officers attended the site as soon as they had been made aware, however, could not immediately access the properties due to the initial ongoing fire investigation. Once Officers were allowed to enter properties the Housing Team engaged with all residents who were present and offered advice and assistance. No decampments were required and there were no injuries. The Council's Technical Services Team were also onsite to assess the damage and undertake any immediate repairs required, as well as make the properties safe and secure.

The Council did need to go through a process in terms of reviewing the insurance claim in respect of some of the damage that had been caused, particularly to the tarmacked area which would require extensive works. These works had been assessed and could be ordered and progressed.

Question 10 – Councillor Philip Knowles to the Cabinet Member for Waste and Climate Change

Councillor Knowles referred to the procurement of the Council's Grounds Maintenance contract. Councillor Knowles asked whether the separate functions of the works included as part of the existing contract could be reviewed and potentially procured separately, as well as there being a regional consideration to the works given the different makeup of rural villages and urban towns.

The Cabinet Member for Waste and Climate Change reported the Council had recently undertaken an audit of the areas included as part of the current grounds maintenance contract. There were over 2,600 individual pieces of grassland across the district the Council was responsible for. Each had been accurately measured with all the data inputted into a geographic information system. As a result, a new specification for the contract, based on the information collated as part of the audit, had been developed.

It was on the basis of this new specification that a report was presented to a joint meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee which reviewed the options available for procuring a new contract for the Council's grounds maintenance contract. Three options were set out in the report for the future delivery of the contract:

- EnvironmentSK Limited be invited to bid to continue delivery of the contract in accordance with the revised specification
- The revised specification goes out to the market with external providers being invited to bid for the contract
- The contract be delivered in-house

The Cabinet Member reported this process had provided an opportunity to review the specification of the contract, including some of the rounds undertaken. Corby Glen was cited as an example whereby the current contract consisted of 24 visits a year, fourteen times to cut parts of the grass in the village to the Housing Revenue Account standard and an additional ten times to cut the remaining grass to the General Fund standard, which were different. This was a duplication of work. As part of the process a route review had been undertaken to establish the most efficient routes, together with a standardisation of the service provided.

The points raised as part of the question would be considered as part of the work that was being undertaken around looking at which of the options would be taken forward.

Question 11 – Councillor Ashley Baxter to the Chairman of the Companies Committee

Councillor Baxter referred to the ongoing loss-making facing EnvironmentSK Limited and Gravitas Limited, together with the winding up of InvestSK Limited with very little scrutiny of the £3 million investment over the last three years. The Chairman of the

Companies Committee was asked why, without consultation, they had decided to cancel rather than postpone the July meeting of the Companies Committee.

A Point of Order was raised as the Chairman of the Companies Committee was not on the list of those Councillors to whom questions could be put during the Members' open question item. The Chairman of the Council ruled the question out of order on that basis.

Question 12 – Councillor Kaffy Rice-Oxley to the Cabinet Member for Planning and Planning Policy

Councillor Rice-Oxley thanked the Cabinet Member for Planning and Planning Policy and Planning Officers for their assistance regarding some issues relating to Poplar Farm in the Arnoldfield Ward and asked for an update on the completion of the play area as it was now many months overdue.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Planning Policy reported there needed to be some finishing touches to the equipment and the groundworks, including completing the turf and grass matting prior to it being opened. The Council would continue to pursue the developer to address this issue as soon as possible and the Council's Enforcement Team would be visiting the site on 26 July.

Question 13 – Councillor Kelham Cooke to the Leader of the Alliance SK Group

Councillor Cooke referred to the Local Government Association's recent 'Debate Not Hate' campaign, highlighting that debating and disagreeing with one another was a healthy part of democracy but abuse and intimidation crossed the line into dangerous territory.

The Leader of the Alliance SK Group was asked whether they would be willing to join the Leader of the Council and the Leader of the Opposition in signing this public statement.

Councillor Baxter asked Councillor Cooke to send him the relevant information which he would read and consider in due course, emphasising that he was against hate and intimidation having been a victim of it in the past.

36. Close of meeting

The meeting closed at 15:36.