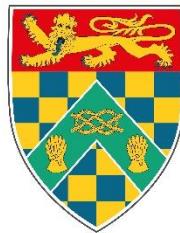


Minutes

Cabinet

Thursday, 16 January 2025



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Date of publication – 29 January 2025

Call in expiry – Decisions can be
implemented on 6 February 2025 (provided
no call-in)

The Leader: Councillor Ashley Baxter (Chairman)
The Deputy Leader: Councillor Paul Stokes (Vice Chairman)

Cabinet Members present

Councillor Rhys Baker, Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste
Councillor Richard Cleaver, Cabinet Member for Property and Public Engagement
Councillor Phil Dilks, Cabinet Member for Planning
Councillor Philip Knowles, Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Licensing
Councillor Virginia Moran, Cabinet Member for Housing

Officers

Karen Bradford, Chief Executive
Richard Wyles, Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer
Alison Hall-Wright, Director of Housing
Graham Watts, Assistant Director (Governance and Public Protection) and
Monitoring Officer
Karen Whitfield, Assistant Director – Leisure, Culture and Place
Emma Whittaker, Assistant Director of Planning
Kay Boasman, Head of Waste Management and Market Services
Nick Hibberd, Head of Economic Development and Inward Investment
Ayeisha Kirkham, Head of Public Protection
Claire Moses, Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits Customer and Community)
Chris Prime, Communications Manager
Debbie Roberts, Head of Corporate Projects, Policy and Performance
James Welbourn, Democratic Services Manager (Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Tom Amblin-Lightowler, Environmental Health Manager – Environmental Protection
& Private Sector Housing
Patrick Astill, Communications Officer
Melanie Brown, Grantham Engagement Manager
Serena Brown, Sustainability and Climate Change Manager
Carol Drury, Community Engagement & Manager

90. Public Open Forum

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, Cabinet Members made the following announcements:

- Sympathy was offered to flooded residents, particularly in Grantham, Greatford and Billingborough which had suffered significant flooding. The Leader had attended a busy meeting of Greatford Parish Council where parishioners had presented an excellent report exploring the causes of the recent flooding. There was no silver bullet for future flood responses; but communities were being resilient and putting together emergency plans. The Council would continue to support them, as would Lincolnshire County Council as the lead flood authority.
- Councillor Rhea Rayside had left the Cabinet for personal reasons. The Leader expressed gratitude for her work over nearly two years as a Cabinet Member. This had included: work on safer streets; facilitating training to make people feel more comfortable and active. With Cllr Rayside's involvement, the Youth Council had transformed from a fledgling project to a formidable body; she had also been successful in taking forward the Customer Service Centre. Councillor Rayside had been heavily involved with the CCTV operation which had recently been audited by the inspection board and was found to be in compliance with requirements.
- A letter was awaited from the Minister to detail the rules of engagement for local government reorganisation. It was important to work closely with others, in particular other Lincolnshire districts to achieve the best governance solution for residents
- On 18 December 2024, a night shelter facility was opened in Grantham in partnership with Grantham ARK to provide short-term accommodation. The facility was a 4-bedroomed flat containing 2-3 beds in each room. This was used for rough sleepers during the recent Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP). The facility saved money and was a better alternative to hotel rooms which could be on the edge of settlements. It contained a bed for the night with showers, kitchen facilities and basic food provision. As at 14 January 2025 the shelter had provided 117 bed spaces to 70 different people. Permanent homes for two rough sleepers had been secured and 3 more individuals had moved into settled accommodation.

There was no public participation under this item.

91. Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

92. Disclosure of Interests

There were no interests disclosed.

93. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2024 were confirmed as a correct record.

94. Fees and Charges Proposals 2025/26

Purpose of the report

To set out the fees and charges proposed to be introduced for the financial year 2025/2026.

Decision

That Cabinet recommends to Full Council the following fees and charges for 2025/2026:

- **Green waste bin annual collection charges:**
 - increase of £2 on the first bin to £53
 - increase of £2 on all subsequent bins to £44.
- **Bulky Waste – no increase proposed**
- **Bus Stations departure charges – no increase proposed**
- **Markets – no increase proposed**
- **All other discretionary charges to be increased in line with inflation.**

Alternative options considered and rejected

Other details of the proposed fees and charges for 2025/2026 are contained within Appendix A and section 2 of the report.

Reasons for the decision

Fees and charges were an integral part of the budget setting process and were reviewed on an annual basis. They had been discussed by Cabinet members, and certain fees and charges had been discussed by Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Budget Joint Overview and Scrutiny meeting held on 14 January 2025 had discussed the entire report.

The following points were highlighted during debate:

- Fees and charges were a key towards raising approximately £8 million towards the delivery of services. Government grants previously in place had reduced over a number of years.
- The Fees and Charges Policy was due to be reviewed during 2025.
- Fees and charges were split between those statutory charges set by government, and discretionary charges which were set by the Council. The

majority of discretionary charges were proposed to increase in line with inflation.

- There was no intention to change the fee for bulky waste. However, there was a proposal to improve the bulky waste collection service by providing an extra collection vehicle in order to reduce waiting times.
- Green waste charges were proposed to increase by £2 on the first bin to £53, and by £2 on all subsequent bins to £44. This was to recover more of the costs on the service caused by inflation and delivering services.
- Membership fees for leisure centres would remain static at their current level, as would bus departure charges at Council owned bus stations.
- From 8am Monday 20 January some car parks in South Kesteven would allow one, and in some cases two hours' free parking to encourage town centre footfall. These changes to car parking restrictions and fees, along with details of parking apps and other instructions would be displayed signage boards.

95. Revisions and Amendments to Planning Applications and Extensions of Time Procedure for Planning Applications

Purpose of the report

To seek authority to adopt the “Revisions and Amendments to Planning Applications and Extensions of Time” procedure.

Decision

That Cabinet adopts the proposed “Revisions and Amendments to Planning Applications and Extensions of Time” procedure.

Alternative options considered and rejected

The Council could have chosen not to adopt the process and continue with the current arrangements. However, this approach was unlikely to reduce the use of Extensions of Time and would prolong the decision-making process for applicants. This could have also led to inconsistencies when processing amendments. This approach was therefore discounted.

Reasons for the decision

The adoption of an approach to accepting revisions and amendments to planning applications and the use of extensions of time would provide clarity for applicants and officers. It would create consistency across the planning team about processing amendments and would improve case management which, in turn, would speed up decision-making. In the event of any complaints about refusal to accept amendments to an application, applicants could be referred to the procedure which would be published on the Council’s website.

Encouraging the use of the pre-application advice service would provide applicants with guidance which should improve the quality of planning applications. At the pre-application stage, concerns with any proposal would be identified along with guidance on which other stakeholders to consult and the documents required to be

submitted with an application. It would also generate income to support the resourcing of the planning team.

National government wished to accelerate the delivery of house building and associated infrastructure. The Council had the ability to negotiate extensions of time to the statutory time limits which are set out in existing legislation.

South Kesteven were far more reliant on extensions of time than other Lincolnshire authorities. The planning team were reliant on these extensions for a range of reasons, including the negotiation of amendments to applications and section 106 agreements. The Council had no obligation to accept amendments to planning applications. They could be requested by officers or submitted by applicants.

Case management of planning applications was to be improved to speed up decision making.

96. Localised Council Tax Support Scheme 2025/26

Purpose of the report

This report reviewed the responses to the public consultation of the Council's Local Council Tax Support Scheme (the Scheme) for 2025/26, along with the recommendations from the meeting of the Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 26 November 2024.

Decision

Cabinet recommended to Full Council the introduction of the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2025/26 based on the same overarching criteria as the existing scheme as detailed in paragraphs 2.16 to 2.34 of the report.

Alternative options considered and rejected

All options for consultation were detailed in Appendix One of this report.

Not undertaking any consultation was not an option. Consultation as to the administrative and financial impact of a change/new scheme was a legal requirement. This scheme must be reviewed, consulted upon, and approved on an annual basis.

Reasons for the decision

Each year the Scheme must be reviewed to ensure it was fit for purpose. When it came into effect in April 2013, there was 80% entitlement for working age claimants. There had always been an element of cost incurred by the Council over which it had no influence.

The Scheme was implemented locally by the Council, and precepting authorities such as Lincolnshire County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner, key stakeholders and residents were consulted on a 'no change' scheme. Finance and

Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 26 November 2024 recommended to Cabinet a 'no change' Scheme.

The introduction of a Second Home Premium from 1 April 2025 was a measure to allow councils the ability to charge a council tax premium of up to 100% for any property left empty for more than 72 days a year. The regulations were laid before Parliament on 8 October 2024 which set out the exceptions to council tax premiums on second homes. These regulations came into effect from 1 April 2025 and set out mandatory exceptions to the Second Home Premiums.

As part of the consultation and approval process for the 2024/25 Scheme, Full Council approved the introduction of the premium from 1 April 2025 at its meeting on 25 January 2024. In November 2024, letters were issued to all owners of second homes (359), making them aware of the exceptions. An exception application form was included with the letter, asking the owner to complete and return this if they believed the second property was eligible for an exception to the premium. The form requested a reason and evidence for the exception. Of the 359 letters issued, 119 had responded. Of those, 100 respondents advised which exception they believed their property should have applied to it, with the remaining 19 providing no details.

Officers were currently reviewing the responses and evidence provided and would determine whether the property was applicable for the exception. Therefore, of the 359 second properties, 100 were potentially eligible for the exemption and 251 would have the premium applied to the Council Tax account as part of the annual billing process in March 2025, increasing Council Tax annual liability by £520,308 per annum. If this was paid in full, South Kesteven's share of this additional income would be £46,828 (9%).

The Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community) was thanked for their work on this report.

97. Venue Hire and External Speaker Policy

Purpose of the report

The purpose of this report was to seek the approval by Cabinet of the draft Venue Hire and External Speaker policy. The introduction of this policy would ensure the Council's continued compliance with the Prevent Duty.

Decision

That Cabinet approves the draft Venue Hire and External Speaker Policy for use across its public venues.

Alternative options considered and rejected

The Council must meet statutory responsibilities under the Prevent Duty. Therefore, the do-nothing option was discounted.

Reasons for the decision

The approval of the Venue Hire and External Speaker Policy was made to ensure the Council met the requirements placed upon it by the Prevent Duty 2023.

The Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 created a statutory duty to have due regard to the need to prevent people being drawn into terrorism. This duty applied to all public bodies (local authorities, police, the National Health Service (NHS), schools, further and higher education providers, probation, prisons and youth offending services).

Under the Prevent Duty, local authorities were expected to ensure appropriate frontline staff, including those of its contractors, had a good understanding of Prevent, were trained to recognise where a person might be susceptible to becoming radicalised into terrorism, and were aware of available programmes to provide support.

The Policy was to be reviewed in December 2025. Thanks were given to the Community Engagement Manager for her work on the Policy.

98. Fleet Strategy

Purpose of the report

The draft Green Fleet Strategy 2025-2028 had been designed as an enabling strategy to transform the way SKDC considered the environmental impact of its fleet of vehicles. The 'Strategy' had been designed to enable a flexible approach to the way the Council procured and operated its operational fleet.

Decision

That Cabinet approves the Green Fleet Strategy 2025-2028.

Alternative options considered and rejected

To omit the 'green' element and pursue a strategy without the focus on environmental improvements – this option would contradict the Council's commitment to improving the environmental impact of its operations and therefore was discounted.

Only to use alternative fuels without the focus on electric vehicles – the Council had a limited number of electric charging points, and the vehicles were expensive to purchase. Electric vehicles provided an excellent, environmentally friendly alternative to diesel vehicles and therefore they had been included to the level allowed by infrastructure constraints.

Reasons for the decision

The Strategy had been recommended by the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held in December 2024 and provided a framework to operate

within. The Strategy had also been discussed by the Budget Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 14 January 2025.

The Strategy set out the Council's ambitions for reducing fleet emissions and how these would be achieved. The new document provided essential support to the Council's environmental commitments.

It was noted that the age of a vehicle was not an accurate indicator of its health, as other factors such as mileage and maintenance were equally important.

99. Air Quality Action Plan 2024

Purpose of the report

For Cabinet to decide whether to approve the Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) 2024-2029.

Decision

That Cabinet approves the Air Quality Action Plan 2024-2029 for implementation.

Alternative options considered and rejected

Cabinet could have suggested alterations to the AQAP but felt it was sufficient as presented.

Reasons for the decision

The AQAP published in 2016 was out of date and had to be updated in accordance with statutory requirements.

Since 2013, Grantham had been subject to an AQAP; this was because SKDC declared an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) encompassing the main roads in the town centre. SKDC was required to update their AQAP every five years; however, in the future if NO₂ levels dropped the AQMA could be revoked. This would be possible only after three consecutive years of levels well below the national air quality objective. There was an annual status report on this issue.

The plan had been subject to consultation and had been accepted by DEFRA on 16 January 2025. Cabinet approval resulted in the statutory obligations of the plan being met.

NO₂ levels were measured in other parts of the District but did not reach the level at which an AQMA was required.

100. Grantham Town Centre Action Plan

Purpose of the report

To update Cabinet on progress towards the production of a Grantham Town Centre Action Plan.

Decision

That Cabinet:

- 1. Note the content of this report.**
- 2. Approve the Grantham Town Centre Action Plan.**
- 3. Agree to receive a further report on progress against the action plan in six months' time.**

Alternative options considered and rejected

An alternative option would be to “do nothing” and decide not to adopt an Action Plan, but this would fall short of the commitment forming part of the original Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) bid. Therefore, this option was discounted.

Further work was being undertaken to identify additional activities or actions for the longer-term Town Centre Action Plan and this work would be reported to Cabinet in six months' time.

Reasons for the decision

Delivery of the Grantham Town Centre Action Plan would ensure a collaborative and coordinated approach to sustaining interest and activities in the town centre to grow Grantham and attract visitors. The development of the Action Plan provided a strategic framework to ensure activities were targeted to ensure that the economic, social and environmental benefits identified in the Future High Street Fund Business Case were delivered and further benefits were derived in the years to come.

Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee discussed this item on 16 January 2025 and discussed issues such as the collection of mobile phone data to capture footfall.

Recent events held in Grantham town centre in the lead up to, and over the Christmas period were reasons to be cheerful and it was important to keep making positive steps.

The Council was equally committed to Bourne, Market Deeping and Stamford; however, Grantham had been a focus due to the work on the FHSF.

101. Waste Policy Update

Purpose of the report

The Council's waste collection service had undergone several changes since the Policy was last reviewed and updated. These included the introduction of twin stream recycling and battery collections. These service changes had been incorporated into the updated Waste Policy.

Decision

That Cabinet approves the updated version of the Waste Policy.

Alternative options considered and rejected

The other option considered was to delay the update of the policy until after the introduction of weekly food waste collections in 2026. However, this would have risked creating ambiguity around policies for waste collection and therefore an earlier update was preferred.

Reasons for the decision

The updated policy was considered and then recommended by Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting in December 2024.

The policy would be accessible alongside the Council's other policies on its website.

Slight changes had been made to the policy to bring it up to date with changes that had occurred in the last 18 months – these changes included:

- Missed bin/sack collections
- Battery collections
- Clinical sharps collections

102. Draft Budget Proposals for 2025/2026 and Indicative Budgets for 2026/2027 and 2027/2028

Purpose of the report

To present the draft Budget proposals and estimates for 2025/26 for both the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Accounts.

Decision

That Cabinet:

1. Noted the budget proposals for 2025/2026 in respect of:

- General Fund – Revenue and Capital
- Housing Revenue Account – Revenue and Capital

- 2. Propose a rent setting increase of 2.7% for 2025/2026 for the Housing Revenue Account.**
- 3. Propose an increase of 1.7% for garage rents and service charges for the Housing Revenue Account.**
- 4. Approve consultation in respect of Council Tax setting for 2025/2026 in accordance with the requirements of Section 65 of the Local Government Act 1992 for the period 20 January to 3 February 2025. A preference for a 3% Council Tax rise rather than £5 was approved for consultation.**

Alternative options considered and rejected

The Council was legally required to set a balanced budget each financial year, therefore there were no other options.

Reasons for the decision

A Budget Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting was held on 14 January 2025 which covered matters relating to the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and capital spending.

The government had announced the New Homes Bonus funding would not continue and that the Rural Services Delivery Grant had been removed without notice or consultation. Both funds had been received annually by SKDC. The Council would not be fully reimbursed for the upcoming national insurance impact as a result.

A balanced budget for 2025/2026 had been presented with a prediction of a deficit in the following year as things stand – a way to bridge that gap would be explored in the coming months.

Public consultation on Council Tax options for 2025/2026 would begin after the January meeting of Cabinet. Consultation feedback would then be considered by Cabinet at their meeting on 11 February 2025.

There was a one-off reserve increase of £4 million; £3 million was earmarked for the Local Priorities Reserve and the remaining £1 million was to go to the Budget Stabilisation Reserve. A Markets Reserve of £50,000 was proposed, and there was also a proposal to increase the Climate Change Reserve to £500,000. More money had been set aside for community projects, leisure and community buildings.

A windfall was to be received from the Extended Producer Responsibility which would be allocated to reserves to help mitigate the requirements of the Environment Act 2021 which mandated the collection of domestic food waste across the district.

Whilst the intention in 2025/2026 was not to increase the cost of the waste collection rounds, it was likely that the day of collection would change for some residents. Clear communications would be sent out from the Council informing residents of any changes.

The Autumn Budget had two main impacts on the Housing Revenue Account. The first was the confirmation of a five-year rent settlement of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) plus 1% for social housing providers. This was certainly a significant improvement on year-on-year settlements and would help in the planning and forecasting for the future. In addition, it was announced that Right to Buy (RTB) discounts would be reduced and councils would be able to retain the full receipts of RTB sales. Whilst the retention of full receipts would provide further resources to support the building of new homes, the reduction in the discount could reduce the level of receipts as RTB's became less affordable.

Budgeted income would increase as a result of the proposed 2.7% rent increase. This would equate to an average weekly rent increase of £2.65.

Void rent assumptions of 2.0% had been built into the budgets. Whilst this figure was lower than current performance levels, the direction of travel had improved, and it was suggested the 2.0% would be achievable from April 2025.

The government had presented two options for council tax to consult on; a rise of £5, or a rise of 3% on a Band D property. In South Kesteven a rise of 3% would be a greater return. The Leader's preference, and that of the Budget Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee was to consult on a rise of 3%; the public should be invited to comment on this proposal so that the Cabinet meeting of 11 February 2025 could make an informed decision. The question to the public of whether they wanted to see a rise in council tax needed to be considered against outside financial pressures.

One Cabinet member highlighted the stable financial situation for 2025/2026 without the need to draw down from reserves, which was an achievement in the current financial climate. Within that financial framework was an additional £1 million to address a backlog of maintenance in council owned buildings. If the decline in council owned buildings had continued it would have posed an existential threat to services.

103. Key and Non-Key Decisions taken under Delegated Powers

The Key and Non-Key decisions taken under delegated powers were noted.

Cabinet were reminded of the decision taken by the Deputy Chief Executive using emergency powers entitled 'Procurement of Food Waste Caddies' on 16 December 2024. This involved the procurement of food waste caddies for every household in the district. It was taken as an urgent decision as there was a time limit attached to the procurement which could not have waited until the January Cabinet meeting. As part of the Lincolnshire Waste Partnership procurement with other Lincolnshire authorities, a significant discount on the procurement had been available.

The procurement had been taken due to the inevitable impact of the Environment Act 2021 which mandated the collection of food waste.

This would involve the use of an additional receptacle for households rather than an additional large waste bin.

104. Cabinet Forward Plan

The Cabinet Forward Plan was noted.

105. Open Questions from Councillors

There were no questions from Councillors.

The meeting closed at 3:10pm.