MINUTES

COUNCIL
THURSDAY, 26 SEPTEMBER 2024
2.00 PM

SOUTH KESTEVEN DISTRICT COUNCIL

PRESENT
Councillor Paul Fellows Chairman
Councillor Ian Selby Vice Chairman

Councillor Emma Baker
Councillor Rhys Baker
Councillor Ashley Baxter
Councillor David Bellamy
Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing
Councillor Pam Bosworth
Councillor Pam Byrd
Councillor Richard Cleaver
Councillor Steven Cunnington
Councillor James Denniston
Councillor Phil Dilks
Councillor Richard Dixon-Warren
Councillor Barry Dobson
Councillor Phil Gadd
Councillor Tim Harrison
Councillor Graham Jeal
Councillor Anna Kelly
Councillor Gareth Knight
Councillor Philip Knowles
Councillor Zoe Lane
Councillor Robert Leadenham
Councillor Bridget Ley
Councillor Paul Martin
Councillor Penny Milnes
Councillor Virginia Moran
Councillor Charmaine Morgan
Councillor Rhea Rayside
Councillor Nick Robins
Councillor Penny Robins
Councillor Susan Sandall
Councillor Max Sawyer
Councillor Ian Selby
Councillor Rob Shorrock
Councillor Vanessa Smith
Councillor Peter Stephens
Councillor Lee Steptoe
Councillor Ian Stokes
Councillor Paul Stokes
Councillor Elvis Stooke
Councillor Rosemary Trollope-Bellew
Councillor Sarah Trotter
Councillor Murray Turner
Councillor Jane Wood
Councillor Paul Wood
Councillor Sue Woolley

OFFICERS

Karen Bradford, Chief Executive
Richard Wyles, Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer
Alison Hall-Wright, Director of Housing
Emma Whittaker, Assistant Director of Planning
Graham Watts, Assistant Director (Governance and Public Protection) and Monitoring Officer

Claire Moses, Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits Customer and Community)
Chris Prime, Communications Manager
James Welbourn, Democratic Services Manager (Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Gary Andrew, IT Services Manager
Patrick Astill, Communications Officer
Lucy Bonshor, Democratic Officer

31. Public Open Forum

Prior to the commencement of business, Councillors held a minute's silence for former Councillor Yvonne Gibbins who had recently passed away. Councillors Lee Steptoe and Charmaine Morgan both spoke of her time in office.

There were no questions or statements from members of the public.

32. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillor Matt Bailey
Councillor Helen Crawford
Councillor Patsy Ellis
Councillor Ben Green
Councillor Gloria Johnson
Councillor Jane Kingman
Councillor Nikki Manterfield
Councillor Chris Noon
Councillor Habib Rahman
Councillor Mark Whittington

Councillors Nick Robins, Penny Robins, Susan Sandall and Max Sawyer were running late and joined later in proceedings.

33. Disclosure of Interests

Note: Councillors Nick Robins, Penny Robins and Sue Woolley joined the meeting.

The Monitoring Officer informed members that as the issue impacted on millions of people nationally, there was no need to declare an interest and leave the Council Chamber for this item if they had previously been in receipt of winter fuel payments. However, declaring an interest would always be the choice of an individual member.

Councillor Philip Knowles declared a pecuniary interest in item 40 – a motion on winter fuel payments as he had previously been in receipt of these. He would leave the Council Chamber during consideration of this item.

34. Minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2024 were proposed, seconded and agreed as a correct record.

35. Communications (including Chairman's Announcements)

The Council noted the Chairman's engagements.

Cabinet Member for Planning

The Cabinet Member for Planning highlighted comments on the Mallard Pass scheme made at the July meeting of Full Council in his absence. It was suggested at July's meeting that the decision on this scheme had been taken without government engagement; however, given the Council's role in planning process was quasi-judicial the Cabinet Member would have raised a Point of Order had he been present to protect the integrity of Full Council.

One of the Cabinet Member for Planning's first actions on taking office in 2023 (as the Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing) was to sign off an official Impact Assessment report listing the positive and negative connotations of the Mallard Pass scheme. On behalf of the Leader of the Council he had also requested an extraordinary meeting of the Planning Committee to consider the Council's position on the scheme. On 15 June 2023, the Cabinet Member personally addressed Planning Committee on who he felt was best placed to engage with the Planning Inspectorate by lodging a formal objection to Mallard Pass. The view taken at that time was that this Council should not support Mallard Pass and should therefore formally object. The Cabinet Member asked that members think about the potential damage to the reputation of this Council and individual members by voicing comments that were inaccurate.

Leader of the Council

In advance of the tabled motion on winter fuel payments, the Leader had drafted a letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves MP which could be used should that motion be passed. The Council was taking measures to ensure that people were aware of their eligibility for support for fuel payments.

The Leader updated members on the installation of solar panels at Grantham Meres Leisure Centre. Concerns had been raised about the ethical background of the solar panels, and the Leader thanked Councillor David Bellamy for raising these concerns. The issue had subsequently been discussed with Alicia Kearns MP, with a focus on the sourcing of solar panels. The Council did not have a direct relationship to the manufacturer of the solar panels, Canadian Solar. However, work had taken place on finding better, more ethical alternatives through the importer of the solar panels, GO Green, and a new provider, JA Solar had been found. JA Solar had a transparent supply chain; each solar panel had a QR code to enable the purchaser to trace the origins of the panels.

The project to install the solar panels at Grantham Meres Leisure Centre remained on schedule and would ultimately reduce the Council's carbon footprint.

Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

The Council was approaching two weeks of kerbside battery collections. During the first week of collections 725kg of batteries had been removed by the Council's waste team. Further details on the scheme would be available on the Council's social media channels.

The Cabinet Member had written to colleagues in neighbouring councils with regards to maintenance of the A1 road. Three Executive Members had responded agreeing to partner with South Kesteven District Council on lobbying Highways England and the new Transport Secretary for maintenance funding. Colleagues that the Cabinet Member had spoken to had agreed that the 'status quo' for the A1 littering was unacceptable.

On 5 September the Planning Committee approved a Section 106 Agreement with Boothby Wildland, to create and manage biodiversity net gain units. Boothby Wildland was a multi-hectare restoration of grade 3 agricultural land. There were also plans to restore the West Glen River, reducing the local flood risk.

Finally, a new Tree and Woodland Officer was now in post.

Note: Councillor Susan Sandall arrived.

Cabinet Member for Property and Public Engagement

Members were reminded about how to register to receive flood alerts and text messages.

On 24 September Cabinet approved a pre-Christmas parking scheme in Council car parks, with a two- and three-hour's free car parking offering on Mondays, Tuesday and Wednesdays in the lead up to Christmas Eve.

Note: Councillor James Denniston arrived.

Head of Paid Service

The Head of Paid Service thanked members for their support and kindness over the previous two and a half months whilst she had been away from the office.

Members would all have seen a press release from Lincolnshire County Council on the subject of local devolution. The government had announced that the devolution deal for Lincolnshire was supported, and the statutory instrument would go before Parliament in December. A report would be submitted to Full Council in November

containing a Terms of Reference for a Joint Committee on the new Combined Authority. There would be mayoral elections in May 2025.

36. Proposed Amendments to the Council's Constitution

Members considered a recommendation from the Governance and Audit Committee to make amendments to the Council's Constitution.

There were three proposals, each of which changed the involvement of members and public with regard to Cabinet and Full Council. In any meeting, the person presiding had the responsibility to manage proceedings as they saw fit and this would not change. For Cabinet, the Leader of the Council (as the Chairman of that body) would have the decision as to how many questions an individual Councillor could ask.

Councillors involved in putting forward these constitutional changes to Full Council were praised.

Having been previously moved, seconded, and following a vote it was **AGREED:**

DECISION

That the Constitution and appropriate Procedure Rules under Part 4 (Rules of Procedure) be amended to include the following, as set out in the report:

a) Provision of a public open forum at meetings of Cabinet.
b) Provision of Member questions at meetings of Cabinet.
c) Provision of Member questions at the annual meeting of Full Council.

37. Members' Open Questions

Note: Councillor Ian Stokes left the Council Chamber and did not return.

<u>Question 1 – Councillor Murray Turner to Councillor Rhys Baker, Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste</u>

Councillor Turner asked the Cabinet Member for an update on the progress of the rollout of new LED street lighting in the district.

Councillor Rhys Baker highlighted the report due to be tabled at Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 7 October. 1137 streetlights had been upgraded, a completion rate so far of 51.5%. Heritage streetlights would be updated towards the end of the programme.

Question 2 – Councillor David Bellamy to Councillor Paul Stokes, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture

Councillor Bellamy asked the Deputy Leader whether he would take the opportunity to confirm the replacement of the swings at the Wild Witham play area following their removal in February, taking into account a petition signed by almost 200 residents to reinstate them?

Councillor Paul Stokes highlighted the recent report on the Play Area Strategy discussed at Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September. As part of this Strategy there was an action plan for the future. The Council had recently bid for monies from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and the swings at Wild Witham were one of the schemes being brought forward.

Question 3 – Councillor Paul Wood to Councillor Virginia Moran, Cabinet Member for Housing

Councillor Paul Wood asked the Cabinet Member to organise a meeting with Helping Hands, a local group dealing with homelessness, as he understood that the Council were not engaging with this group.

Councillor Moran outlined the numerous efforts made to date to engage with the group and reported that communications received in response to the Council's contact were not conducive to building a working relationship.

Question 4 – Councillor Max Sawyer to Councillor Virginia Moran, Cabinet Member for Housing

Councillor Sawyer asked for the number of additional traders that had been added to an internal 'approved' list since the Council had decided to expand it, in the hope of getting housing voids repaired?

Councillor Moran confirmed that no additional traders had been added to date as the local framework was not yet in place. A workshop to which all Councillors had received an invite to on this subject had taken place.

Question 5 – Councillor Charmaine Morgan to Councillor Rhea Rayside, Cabinet Member for People and Communities

Councillor Morgan asked the Cabinet Member to clarify what support the Council was planning to offer pensioners affected by the governmental changes to the winter fuel payments?

Councillor Rayside had emailed all Councillors regarding the winter fuel payment update. A process for reaching those eligible for payment needed to be put in place and then subsequently reviewed, as it was not an option to have some individuals not receiving payment. Councillor Rayside advised any Councillors that were concerned about this issue and wanted assistance to contact her directly.

Question 6 – Councillor Paul Martin to Councillor Phil Dilks, Cabinet Member for Planning

The South Kesteven Local Plan review from October 2020 referred to allocations of new housing and recommended a minimum of 50% growth in housing developments for Grantham. Revised allocations under the new government, using this calculation would mean 912 new homes per annum for the town.

Should the update to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) be carried forward by government in December, would the Council consider a review of the 50% uplift in new housing for Grantham?

Councillor Dilks had reported to Cabinet on 24 September the government's manifesto commitment to speed up housing delivery across the country. The work to update the Local Plan was at an advanced stage; however, nothing would change until the final NPPF was published.

The government consultation ended on 24 September; the Cabinet Member paid tribute to the Assistant Director of Planning & Growth and her team for putting together a comprehensive response to the consultation. This would now be considered by government, along with many other responses from across the country.

Grantham had been identified as a 'growth' area for housing. Both the national Conservative and Labour parties had been committed to accelerating house building. It would be a huge challenge to deliver the number of new houses promised.

Question 7 – Councillor Steven Cunnington to Councillor Paul Stokes, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture

Councillor Cunnington asked the Deputy Leader whether there had been any public feedback on the works that had taken place on the roof and roof lighting for Bourne Leisure Centre?

Councillor Paul Stokes highlighted the Bourne Leisure Centre project as an efficient way in which the property team worked together with the operational team. The project had been worth approximately £800,000, but it had been completed with very little interruption. LeisureSK Limited and the property team should take credit for the completion of the project.

Customers were very happy with the outcome and it had provided a perfect solution.

Question 8 – Councillor Rob Shorrock to Councillor Ashley Baxter, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance, HR and Economic Development

Councillor Shorrock asked the Leader what authority he had used when drafting a response letter in advance of the winter fuel motion later on in the agenda?

Councillor Baxter confirmed he had drafted a letter concerning a review of winter fuel payment to the Chancellor in advance of the winter fuel motion from Councillor Graham Jeal, requesting an urgent review of Parliament's decision. The letter would only be submitted if there was confidence from the Council to do so – Councillor Baxter had not made any comments regarding abolishing winter fuel payments. This letter was not posted in advance of Full Council as there was a motion on this subject on the agenda.

Councillor Baxter wanted all pensioners to feel supported by all Councillors; no-one wanted to see pensioners struggle through the winter through lack of finances or fuel.

Question 9 – Councillor Zoe Lane to Councillor Rhys Baker, Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

Councillor Lane asked whether internal issues related to the grounds maintenance contract would be resolved immediately?

Councillor Rhys Baker agreed to seek an immediate update and would feedback to Councillors when in receipt of further information.

Question 10 – Councillor Tim Harrison to Councillor Paul Stokes, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture

Councillor Harrison requested up to date attendance figures for the Guildhall Arts Centre, Grantham.

Councillor Paul Stokes highlighted the hard work of officers at all of the Council's arts venues. Attendance figures at the Guildhall Arts Centre were on the increase. September 2022 to September 2023 had previously seen 11,000 visitors, but from September 2023 to September 2024 there had been 19,000 visitors.

The increase for the same period from Stamford Arts Centre was a leap from 37,000 to 39,500. Bourne's arts figures had also improved. All of these increases had led to an increase in enquiries about tickets for events.

Question 11 – Councillor Robert Leadenham to Councillor Ashley Baxter, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance, HR and Economic Development

Note: The question was addressed to the Cabinet Member for Housing but it was not appropriate for her to respond due to her involvement as the Chairman of the Deepings Community Interest Company (CIC)

Councillor Leadenham asked for the latest update on the Deepings Leisure Centre.

Councillor Baxter highlighted the £850,000 that the Council had set aside for the Deepings Leisure Centre, with a similar amount accepted from Lincolnshire County Council. A bid had been submitted to the Community Ownership Fund; there had been progress with this and then the General Election was called and progress

halted. The new government had not yet expressed an opinion but the Autumn Statement may give a further steer.

Discussions were ongoing between the community groups, Lincolnshire County Council and South Kesteven District Council.

Question 12 – Councillor Anna Kelly to Councillor Phil Dilks, Cabinet Member for Planning

Councillor Kelly asked whether specific reference had been made to almshouses as part of the Council's submission on the National Planning Policy Framework and requested that almshouses have their own specific category?

Councillor Dilks did not recall any specific mention of almshouses but was very happy to look at this issue in detail with Councillor Kelly and officers.

Question 13 – Councillor Peter Stephens to Councillor Paul Stokes, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture

Councillor Stephens asked when the maintenance on the wave machine at Bourne Leisure Centre would be completed?

The Deputy Leader understood that the repairs to the wave machine at Bourne had been carried out.

Question 14 – Councillor Gareth Knight to Councillor Paul Stokes, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture

Councillor Knight highlighted the opportunities to access funds available through combined mayoral authorities, and asked the Deputy Leader whether a submission would be prepared alongside a backup plan for swimming in the Deepings?

Councillor Stokes assured Full Council that he was prepared to look at any funding opportunities for the District when they arose.

Question 15 – Councillor Graham Jeal to Councillor Lee Steptoe, Chairman of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Jeal asked Councillor Steptoe to join him in sending Sir Keir Starmer MP a gift of finest Lincolnshire sausages; this offer was declined.

38. Notices of Motion

39. Councillor Ben Green

Councillor Ben Green's motion was **DEFERRED** until the next ordinary meeting of Full Council as he had given apologies for this meeting.

40. Councillor Graham Jeal

Note: Councillor Philip Knowles left the Council Chamber for this item and did not take part in the debate or vote.

Councillor Graham Jeal proposed the following motion:

This Council regrets the decision by the Labour Government to end universal winter fuel payments which could push tens of thousands of people in our district into fuel poverty.

We call on the Leader of the Council to write to the Chancellor urging a review of the decision to restrict eligibility to those in receipt of pension credits and other benefits. This is to ensure vulnerable pensioners, particularly those that do not claim pension credits, are protected from financial hardship.

Council notes that many pensioners eligible for credits do not apply for them and will lose winter fuel payments as a result. Therefore, we resolve to undertake an awareness campaign to encourage residents in South Kesteven to check their eligibility. This includes the use of social media, promotion in the local press and other media partners.

The motion was seconded.

The following views were raised during the introduction to, and debate on the motion:

- This motion had been presented to approximately 80 Councils across the country. Local MPs had led opposition within Parliament, and there had been cross-party work on this motion.
- One member's view was that whilst the policy around winter fuel payments was in need of reform, to remove it from all did not feel right.
- There was a massive backlog in pension credit applications, which was worrying as winter approached.
- Another member's view was that the Labour government had inherited a budget gap between national spending and actual resources, and therefore difficult decisions would have to be taken.
- There were millions of pensioners that did not require financial assistance with winter fuel payments. However, there remained a large number of pensioners that did require assistance and therefore raising awareness of pension credits was key. British state pensions were around the lowest in Europe.
- In times of austerity it might not be appropriate to handing out a universal winter fuel payment.
- The Council had a social media campaign to ensure as many pensioners as possible were signed up for pension credit.

A request was made that a recorded vote on the motion be taken, as in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 15.5 any ten or more Councillors present at the meeting of Full Council could request this. The results of the recorded vote were as follows:

For: Councillors Emma Baker, Rhys Baker, David Bellamy, Harrish Bisnauthsing, Pam Bosworth, Pam Byrd, Richard Cleaver, Phil Dilks, Richard Dixon-Warren, Barry Dobson, Graham Jeal, Gareth Knight, Zoe Lane, Robert Leadenham, Bridget Ley, Paul Martin, Penny Milnes, Virginia Moran, Charmaine Morgan, Rhea Rayside, Nick Robins, Penny Robins, Susan Sandall, Peter Stephens, Rosemary Trollope-Bellew, Sarah Trotter, Murray Turner, Jane Wood, Paul Wood, Sue Woolley. (30)

Against: Councillors Steven Cunnington, Phil Gadd, Tim Harrison, Anna Kelly, Rob Shorrock, Lee Steptoe. (6).

Abstain: Councillors Ashley Baxter, James Denniston, Paul Fellows, Max Sawyer, Ian Selby, Vanessa Smith, Paul Stokes, Elvis Stooke. (8).

Therefore, the motion was **AGREED**.

41. Councillor Zoe Lane

Note: Councillor Philip Knowles returned to the Council Chamber. Councillor Rosemary Trollope-Bellew left the Council Chamber and did not return.

Councillor Zoe Lane proposed the following motion:

Motion on Suicide Awareness in the District

This Council recognises:

- *That every suicide is preventable, and that prevention is everyone's responsibility.*
- *That the rate of suicides in South Kesteven is one of the lowest in the county of Lincolnshire at an average of 14 deaths per year[1][1]; but also, that this number should and could be 0.*
- *That it is a partner in the Lincolnshire Suicide Prevention Strategy and should be doing everything possible to support Lincolnshire County Council in building on its excellent work to save lives.*

This Council resolves forthwith to:

- *Encourage and support all councillors, along with SKDC officers and frontline contractors in undertaking suicide awareness training from the Zero Suicide Alliance.*
    - *This training is free, short, and available online.[2][2]*

[1][1] https://lhih.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Lincolnshire-Suicide-Audit-2023.pdf p. 12
[2][2] https://www.zerosuicidealliance.com/suicide-awareness-training

    - *It is designed to enable people to recognise signs that someone may be suicidal, and to know how and where to signpost them. It is not supposed to make anyone an expert in suicide prevention.*
- *Ensure all councillors and officers are familiar with the Samaritans' guidelines on media reporting of suicides.*[3][3]
    - *Evidence shows that excessive and detailed reporting of suicides can lead to copycat cases.*
    - *Councillors are in a position as local leaders to encourage discretion and sensitivity, especially on social media.*
- *Engage fully with the annual World Suicide Prevention Day, which falls on 10th September every year.*
    - *SKDC's engagement on Facebook in 2023 was a single post about lighting a candle in memory of those who have died by suicide. The message was drowned out by day-to-day information shared on the same day.*
    - *The Samaritans use the day to reduce the stigma of talking about suicide and encourage others to do the same. Memorials are nice but we can do both.*
- *Monitor the state of the District annually in the Rural & Communities Committee via data from LCC.*
    - *This data from the annual suicide audit is readily available and renewed every year. It will give both councillors and officers a clear view of whether the county-wide strategy is having an effect in SKDC.*
- *Host a councillor workshop for further discussions.*
    - *We all have different experiences of approaching the subject in personal and professional capacities, as well as of local support services. Sharing these will help to build a picture of what we would like to feed back into the conversation and develop our own understanding.*
    - *Having the confidence to talk about suicide can help to break the stigma of having difficult conversations.*

The motion was seconded.

The following views were raised during the introduction to, and debate on the motion

- Fewer than a third of those that end their own life were known to mental health services. If your web search mentioned suicide then you would receive the telephone number for the Samaritans.
- Suicide prevention services fell within the jurisdiction of Lincolnshire County Council; however, everyone had a part to play in saving lives. The motion above would be an extension of what South Kesteven officers already do.
- Any training being provided would be free of charge, with any expenses being very low.
- One of the aims of the motion was to encourage sensitivity within communities whilst supporting others to build confidence on speaking about the topic. Councillors and officers at South Kesteven needed to further understand what

[3][3] https://www.samaritans.org/wales/about-samaritans/media-guidelines/

was happening in the District as a whole, as partners in the overarching strategy.

The mover of the motion wished to amend the first line of the motion from:

This Council recognises:

- *That every suicide is preventable, and that prevention is everyone's responsibility.*

to:

This Council recognises:

- *That no suicide is inevitable, and that prevention is everyone's responsibility.*

Full Council **ACCEPTED** this change to the motion.

After having been moved and seconded, following a vote the motion was **AGREED**.

42. Close of meeting

The meeting closed at 3:45pm.