

MINUTES

COUNCIL

THURSDAY, 30 JANUARY 2025

2.00 PM



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

PRESENT

Councillor Paul Fellows Chairman
Councillor Ian Selby Vice-Chairman

Councillor Matthew Bailey
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 Helen Crawford
Councillor Steven Cunningham
Councillor James Denniston
Councillor Phil Dilks
Councillor Richard Dixon-Warren
Councillor Barry Dobson
Councillor Patsy Ellis
Councillor Phil Gadd
Councillor Ben Green
Councillor Tim Harrison
Councillor Graham Jeal
Councillor Gloria Johnson
Councillor Anna Kelly
Councillor Jane Kingman
Councillor Gareth Knight
Councillor Philip Knowles
Councillor Zoe Lane
Councillor Robert Leadenham

Councillor Bridget Ley
Councillor Nikki Manterfield
Councillor Paul Martin
Councillor Penny Milnes
Councillor Virginia Moran
Councillor Charmaine Morgan
Councillor Chris Noon
Councillor Habibur Rahman
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 Paul Stokes
Councillor Elvis Stooke
Councillor Rosemary Trollope-Bellew
Councillor Murray Turner
Councillor Mark Whittington
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 and Projects
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
Chris Prime, Communications Manager
Debbie Roberts, Head of Corporate Projects, Policy and Performance
James Welbourn, Democratic Services Manager (Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Patrick Astill, Communications Officer
Lucy Bonshor, Democratic Officer

54. Public Open Forum

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

55. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ian Stokes and Sarah Trotter.

Councillor Rob Shorrock was unable to attend the start of the meeting and would join proceedings when he was able to do so.

56. Disclosure of Interests

No interests were disclosed.

57. Minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2024 were proposed, seconded and agreed as a correct record.

58. Communications (including Chairman's Announcements)

The Council noted the Chairman's engagements.

The Chairman of the Council had seen several engagements cancelled due to inclement weather. Congratulations were offered to officers and members who contributed to the effort to combat flooding during that period.

Thanks were also offered to Fred Mann who had served as one of the Council's Independent Persons for many years.

Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council made the following announcements:

- The draft programme of meetings for 2025/2026 had been circulated to all Councillors. Councillors were advised to respond to Democratic Services with any comments as soon as they could.
- Local government re-organisation - the Leader of Lincolnshire County Council Councillor Martin Hill sent a letter to government to say that if they were to postpone the upcoming County Council elections in May 2025, he wouldn't object. An answer from government on this issue was expected imminently.
- The terms of engagement for local government reorganisation would be learned soon. A reply from government was expected by 31 January 2025 and would be shared with all Councillors.

Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

The Cabinet Member made the following announcements:

- Progress on A1 and litter. Officers were working closely with National Highways and their contractor to ensure a safe and effective approach to clearing litter from the A1. On site operation should begin in week commencing 10 February, but it was noted the Council did not control this start date. Local stakeholders and MPs had been informed.
- New bins for laybys have been staked in place on the A1. Dedicated team will service A1 laybys three times a week with a caged wagon. Commuters would see bins emptied regularly with appropriate capacity for waste disposal on that road. Those that littered the road were condemned.
- Two teams of staff had been engaged to work in designated areas behind the roadworks – this had been coordinated with National Highways and their contractor. These works would only be on the offside verge and not in the central reservation as there must be by law a gap of 1.2 metres between an operative and the carriageway. All staff would receive specialist PPE and additional lighting. All vehicles had been upgraded to comply with Chapter 8 standard.
- Thanks to StreetScene team who worked additional shifts in unsocial hours and dangerous conditions. Further thanks were offered to the leadership team and the Assistant Director (Leisure, Culture and Place).

Cabinet Member for Planning

The Cabinet Member made the following announcements:

- This year saw the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II. VE Day would be on 8 May 2025, and VJ Day on 15 August 2025. Informal discussions about events to be tied in with these dates were taking place with appropriate officers and the Armed Forces Champion.

- The new government had now published the amended National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which would increase the number of houses the Council would be expected to give consent to. Thanks were given to Planning Officers for their work in this area. A report would be considered by Cabinet giving details of the impact of changes on the Local Plan review and how the Council could meet them.

Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Licensing

The Cabinet Member made the following announcements:

- Councillor personal development plans had been raised in the past and had been unanimously accepted as being desirable to have. Development of members must be a step forward in the quality of representation seen by residents.
- How Councillors understood problems and managed people, whilst improving quality of performance benefitted SKDC.
- Response so far had been mixed – Member Development Group was being led by the Monitoring Officer and Group Leaders. It was important to treat the Personal Development Plan seriously and try to accommodate requirements of members. Even a nil return for training needs was preferable to no return at all.

Head of Paid Service

The Head of Paid Service informed all of a temporary change to a polling station for the upcoming elections in May 2025. Stamford Rugby Club was the usual venue for Stamford All Saints' and Stamford St. John's wards. However, the Head of Paid Service had exercised her delegated authority to change this to Stamford and District Bowls Club for this next round of elections as the Rugby Club was unavailable.

59. Fees and Charges Proposals 2025/2026

The Leader of the Council introduced a report on the proposed fees and charges for the financial year 2025/2026, which if agreed, would raise approximately £8 million towards the delivery of Council services.

The principles and criteria within the Fees and Charges Policy would be reviewed during 2025; the current Policy was attached as an appendix to the report.

There were both statutory and discretionary charges. Statutory charges were set by the government whereas discretionary charges were set by the local authority. There was the opportunity to review statutory charges on an annual basis. Agreed fees and charges would come into effect from the beginning of the civic year.

Many of the charges within the report remained unchanged from 2024/2025, these fee freezes included:

- Bus station departure charges
- Market stall charges
- Bulky waste fees (despite the addition of an additional vehicle)

Building control fees were not yet published and could not be included within the reports pack as they were commercially sensitive due to building control being a competitive service. If agreed, delegated authority would be granted to the Deputy Chief Executive in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning to decide these fees.

One charge that was proposed to change was the annual charge for the green waste bin. The proposal was £2 increase on the first bin, with a £2 increase on all subsequent bins.

An amendment in relation to Grantham Cemetery burial fees was moved and seconded, with the objective of removing discrimination against or in favour of Muslims in the cemetery fee structure and lowering the overall fees for infant burials to match what had been proposed for Muslims. The additional proposed recommendations were:

1. Remove all separate fees related to Muslim interments and incorporate all Muslim-specific fees into the standard fee structure.
2. Add a new fee for exclusive right of burial for infants under 2 of £165.

Debate ensued on the amendment. In the previous five years there had been four Muslim burials in the Cemetery. The increased cost of a Muslim burial was due to the timeframe associated with such a burial; often for these types of burial a contractor was required. On investigation, the Council was not charging exclusive rights of burial, so a Muslim burial was cheaper than other burials. The financial impact of the additional recommendation 1 being agreed was minimal due to the low levels of this type of burial.

There were very few burials of infants under 2 but these fees were claimed back from the government. Therefore, reducing the fee would be counter intuitive.

A motion without notice was moved to refer this amendment to the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 11 February 2025 where an officer note could be received. Having been seconded this motion was voted on and **AGREED**.

A second addition to the recommendations was moved and seconded, in relation to food trucks whilst also encouraging the registration of existing businesses given the low current registration rate. The additional recommendations were to:

1. Add a new fee for Mobile Trader Consent (first 12 months) of £1.

2. Add a new fee for Mobile Trader Consent (next renewal of consent for businesses registered as of 31/01/2025) of £1.

Debate ensued on the amendment – the following points were highlighted:

- The Council had issued two trader consents in the past year. This amendment sent out the message to these two traders that they were not being punished for doing what other traders should have done.
- All members were reminded that there was a lengthy process to scrutinise fees and charges which all were involved in.
- With the fee to register being proposed at the low level of £1, the idea was to encourage more people to register so the sector could be properly monitored.

It was **AGREED** that this second amendment be directed to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration during 2025/2026.

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

DECISION

1. That Full Council approves:

- **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**
 - **Bus Stations departure charges – no increase**
 - **Markets – no increase**
 - **Building Control – Delegate authority to Deputy Chief Executive and s151 Officer in consultation with Cabinet Member for Planning to set these commercial charges.**
 - **All other discretionary charges to be increased in line with inflation.**
2. **That the fees and charges associated with Muslim burials be referred to the meeting of Cabinet scheduled to be held on 11 February 2025.**
 3. **That no changes be made to the fees and charges associated with mobile trader consent, but that this matter be referred to a future meeting of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**

60. Localised Council Tax Support Scheme 2025/2026

Members reviewed responses to the public consultation of the Council's Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTSS or 'the Scheme') 2025/26, along with recommendations from the meetings of the Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 26 November 2024 and the Cabinet meeting held on 16 January 2025.

Note: Councillor Rob Shorrock arrived at the meeting.

The Scheme was reported as a 'no change' scheme for 2025/2026.

The introduction of the Second Home Premium was included in the Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill, 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 force on 1 November 2024 and would be effective 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 LCTS scheme, 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 the owner to provide the 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%).

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

DECISION

That Full Council approves the Localised Council Tax Support Scheme for the financial year 2025/2026 based on the same criteria as the existing scheme as detailed within the report.

61. Pay Policy Statement 2025/2026

Members considered the Pay Policy Statement for 2025-2026. It was a requirement of the Localism Act 2011 that the Council produced an Annual Pay Policy Statement. This summarised current policies and arrangements in place related to pay. The Pay Policy Statement was approved each year by Council as part of the budget setting and approval process. The Employment Committee had recommended approval of the Pay Policy Statement to Council for 2025-26.

The following sections of the report were highlighted:

- There were a number of additional posts that were now covered by the Pay Policy, and these had been included in the new Statement.
- There had been changes seen to National Living Wage and National Minimum Wage rates.
- Information related to the remuneration of chief officers and the lowest paid officers was included.
- Pay details for the Council's apprentices was included, as was details on the re-engagement of employees.
- The Employment Committee held on 15 January 2025 considered the gender pay gap. There were more women than men in senior positions in the authority. The median gender pay gap was 0.80% this year.

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

DECISION

That Full Council approves the Pay Policy Statement 2025-2026.

62. Proposed Amendments to the Council's Constitution

Members considered amendments to the Council's Constitution as recommended by the Governance and Audit Committee meeting of 22 January 2025.

There were three proposed changes to the Constitution, which were debated and voted on separately.

The following points were highlighted during the introduction to the report and the debate:

- Currently the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules within the Constitution stated that any member of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) or any five members of the Council were entitled to give notice to the Chief Executive that an item be included for the next available meeting of an OSC.
- An Overview and Scrutiny Chairman had some discretion in adding an item to a work programme before it had been to other bodies.
- The recommendation within the report would have the effect of asking that any member wishing to add an item to an OSC work programme research background information and consult relevant officers and councillors before the report was accepted.
- It was suggested that any decisions on the Local Plan be brought in line with the budget and therefore be subjected to a recorded vote.

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

DECISION

That Full Council approves the following amendments:

1. **Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules at Part 4 (Rules of Procedure), as set out in paragraph 3.6 of the report.**
2. **Council Procedure Rules at Part 4 (Rules of Procedure), as set out in paragraph 3.7 of the report.**
3. **Part 3(c) (Responsibility for Functions – Delegated Powers to Officers) under section 26 (Property, including land), as set out in paragraph 3.11 of the report.**

Note: The meeting adjourned at 3:15pm and reconvened at 3:31pm.

63. Members' Open Questions

Question 1 – Councillor Max Sawyer to Councillor Ashley Baxter, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance, HR and Economic Development

Councillor Sawyer asked the Leader whether £40,000 for two brown signs was the best possible use of UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) monies.

The Leader of the Council highlighted the need to work alongside National Highways and the fact they had rules that needed to be followed. UKSPF monies were time limited. Debate took place at the latest meeting of the UKSPF Board where this and other issues were discussed, and those Councillors present decided to move forward with the procurement of the signs. If the signs brought increased footfall into the district then the spend was worth it.

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

Councillor Morgan asked for an update on the works to Dysart Park, Grantham, in particular the flooded area.

Councillor Stokes advised that significant drainage works had been undertaken. Phase 1 was now complete, and testing had shown the work to date had been very successful. Phase 2 was underway and would be completed – Councillor Stokes was confident that the works would be successful in tackling the drainage problems.

Significant works in Dysart Park had taken place, including the installation of play equipment, using funding from UKSPF and the Rotary Club of Grantham.

Question 3 – Councillor Zoe Lane to Councillor Virginia Moran, Cabinet Member for Housing

Councillor Lane asked whether the Cabinet Member would meet with her to discuss new social housing for Bourne.

Councillor Moran was more than happy to discuss the Housing Revenue Account budget and where it could be spent.

Question 4 – Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing to Councillor Virginia Moran, Cabinet Member for Housing

Councillor Bisnauthsing asked for an update on the number of council houses acquired.

Councillor Moran listed 98 council houses that had been purchased; 20 new units at Swinegate, Grantham, 11 units in Market Deeping, 6 at Gorse Rise, Grantham, 36 at Corby Glen, 12 1 bed units at St. Peter's House in Grantham, 5 units purchased using Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) money, and 6 properties purchased back from tenants who bought under right-to-buy. The Council was still looking for a bungalow and a 6 bedroomed property.

Question 5 – Councillor Elvis Stooke to Councillor Richard Cleaver, Cabinet Member for Property and Public Engagement

Councillor Stooke wished to know whether Grantham Hospital's Accident and Emergency provision would be reconsidered.

Councillor Cleaver agreed that the provision should always be under constant review, particularly with an ageing population. The Integrated Care Board and NHS Lincolnshire was undertaking a full stakeholder review with Stamford residents regarding health services in Stamford. There would be pressure to review all towns around the county, and this would include Grantham.

Question 6– Councillor Rosemary Trollope-Bellew to Councillor Ashley Baxter, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance, HR and Economic Development

Councillor Trollope-Bellew asked the Leader to contact the Leader of Lincolnshire County Council to expedite the use of cameras to look for flooding problems in drains. This was to help alleviate the problems with flooding that had been seen in parishes in Casewick ward.

Councillor Baxter highlighted the flooding in Greatford for the second year in a row, and paid tribute to the Deputy Leader and officers in co-ordinating the flooding response across the district. He attended a recent meeting of Greatford Parish Council and was grateful to the parish for putting together a useful flooding presentation.

The day after this meeting the presentation was shared with representatives from Lincolnshire County Council to include what had happened at Greatford Hall and the Greatford Cut. As the County Councillor for the ward that included Greatford Councillor Baxter had taken the CCTV camera issue to the Flood and Water Management Scrutiny Committee at Lincolnshire County Council and was hopeful that a survey would be undertaken in the near future.

Question 7 – Councillor Graham Jeal to Councillor Richard Cleaver, Cabinet Member for Property and Public Engagement

Councillor Jeal asked the Cabinet Member to join him in wishing a Happy New Year to those celebrating Lunar New Year and a passage to the year of the Snake in South Kesteven.

Councillor Cleaver was happy to join Councillor Jeal in celebrating Lunar New Year.

Question 9 – Councillor Peter Stephens

Councillor Stephens asked for an update on the A52 bypass around Grantham.

Councillor Stephens was advised that Lincolnshire County Council were the appropriate authority to ask for a progress update. The Executive Member there had informed a local councillor that the County Council were ready to complete the road but were waiting for the rail authority.

64. Notices of Motion

65. Councillor Graham Jeal

Councillor Graham Jeal proposed the following motion:

In September 2022 and in response to a series of code of conduct violations, group leaders from South Kesteven district council signed the Local Government Association campaign statement on Debate not Hate. This is reprinted in full below:

"The intimidation and abuse of councillors, in person or otherwise, undermines democracy; it can prevent elected members from representing the communities they serve, deter individuals from standing for election, and undermine public trust in democratic processes. Seven in 10 councillors reported experiencing abuse and intimidation over the last 12 months and councillors reported feeling that abuse is becoming more common and increasing in severity. Debating and disagreeing with one another has always been, and will continue to be, a healthy part of democracy. However, the right engagement matters and abuse and intimidation crosses the line into dangerous territory and has no place in politics."

This Council reaffirms the principles of the LGA "Debate Not Hate" campaign.

In moving the motion Councillor Jeal highlighted the diligent handling of Councillor Code of Conduct complaints, where there had been breaches of the Code found against two Councillors.

An amendment to the motion was moved and seconded and accepted by the mover of the original motion. It therefore formed part of the substantive motion:

In September 2022 and in response to a series of code of conduct violations, group leaders from South Kesteven district council signed the Local Government Association campaign statement on Debate not Hate. This is reprinted in full below:

"The intimidation and abuse of councillors, in person or otherwise, undermines democracy; it can prevent elected members from representing the communities they serve, deter individuals from standing for election, and undermine public trust in democratic processes. Seven in 10 councillors reported experiencing abuse and intimidation over the last 12 months and councillors reported feeling that abuse is becoming more common and increasing in severity. Debating and disagreeing with one another has always been, and will continue to be, a healthy part of democracy. However, the right engagement matters and abuse and intimidation crosses the line into dangerous territory and has no place in politics."

Since the election of the leader of the council in early 2024, there has been a significant increase in the number of code of conduct complaints – many of which have been deemed so serious to merit external investigation and hearings. With bullying, intimidation and widespread abuse at unprecedented levels in South Kesteven District council, the leader of the council has failed to uphold the principles of the LGA Debate not Hate campaign which he signed as a group leader in 2022. For these reasons, this motion proposes the removal of the leader of South Kesteven District Council until such time as a new leader can be elected by full council.

A point of order was raised regarding the validity of the motion. The Monitoring Officer advised that in his view the amendment was linked to the original motion and therefore could be accepted.

An attempt to move an amendment which removed the additional text was ruled out as it would negate the substantive motion.

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

- If the amendment passed the SKDC coalition group would not seek to put forward a candidate to replace the Leader of the Council.
- The Leader of the Opposition commented that the amendment had not been moved for political gain.
- No breaches of the Councillor Code of Conduct were found in respect of 'bullying'.
- In the view of one Councillor all Councillors were tainted in the way Councillor Code of Conduct complaints were handled by the Leader of the Council. The

Leader had to be held accountable as these complaints occurred during his tenure.

- Another Councillor expressed the view that the Leader had offered the opportunity to both sides of the Council Chamber to sit down and talk amicably about differences. Behavioural standards within both sides of the Council Chamber had fallen short of where they should have been.
- It was not believed that there was collective hatred towards any Councillor. Many current Councillors and prospective candidates would think twice about standing for office having viewed comments on social media.
- None of the five Code of Conduct Hearing Review Panel held recently had found any guilt on behalf of the Leader of the Council, who had tried to tackle Code of Conduct issues prior to them getting to the Hearing stage.
- A separate motion on notice to remove the Leader of the Council may have been a better way to express this view.
- The response that the recent Hearing Review Panels had attracted was universally negative. The reputation of the Council had been damaged, and there needed to be a positive conversation about moving forward and dealing with this issue.
- The administration was midway through a second balanced budget and had invested in services.
- If due process was not followed with Code of Conduct complaints, then it would lead to no checks and balances. The outcome of the Hearing Review Panels' proceedings should be respected.
- The Hearings that had taken place were almost a year on from when the complaints had originally been lodged. This did not necessarily reflect present behaviours from Councillors.

An amendment was accepted by the mover of the original motion to replace the wording of the substantive motion with the following:

This Council reaffirms the principles of the LGA "Debate Not Hate" campaign.

It therefore became the substantive motion.

Having been moved and seconded, following a vote the substantive motion was **AGREED**.

66. Close of meeting

The meeting closed at 4:41pm.