

Minutes

Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Tuesday, 13 May 2025, 10.00 am

**Council Chamber - South Kesteven
House, St. Peter's Hill, Grantham.
NG31 6PZ**

Committee Members present

Councillor Bridget Ley (Chairman)
Councillor Gareth Knight (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Ben Green
Councillor Tim Harrison
Councillor Gloria Johnson
Councillor Max Sawyer
Councillor Murray Turner
Councillor Mark Whittington

Cabinet Members present

Councillor Ashley Baxter (Leader of the Council)
Councillor Richard Cleaver (Cabinet Member for Property and Public Engagement)

Officers

Richard Wyles (Deputy Chief Executive, S151 Officer)
David Scott (Assistant Director of Finance, Deputy S151 Officer)
Emma Whittaker (Assistant Director of Planning and Growth)
Karen Whitfield (Assistant Director of Culture, Leisure and Place)
James Welbourn (Democratic Services Manager)
Mel Brown (Grantham Engagement Manager)
Jeremy Barlow (East Midlands Building Control Manager)
Amy Pryde (Democratic Services Officer)

80. Public Speaking

There were none.

81. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Phillip Knowles and Phil Dilks.

82. Disclosure of Interests

There were none.

83. Minutes from the meeting held on 18 February 2025

The minutes from the meeting held on 18 February 2025 were proposed, seconded and **AGREED**.

84. Updates from previous meeting

All actions were complete.

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

The Cabinet Member for Property and Public Engagement informed Members that the extension to Cattle Market, Stamford car park would be open by the end of May 2025.

86. Turnpike Depot Update - May 2025

The Cabinet Member for Property and Public Engagement presented the report which outlined project updates to the Committee. Works had continued to progress on schedule following commencement on site in October 2024.

The report showed the risk register had only two items which were both low and the project was running on time in line with the budget.

The Deputy Chief Executive highlighted the dashboard included the additional £500,000 which was approved by Full Council which will be wisely spent on the mobilisation and fit out from the existing site to the new site. This is due to take place in October 2025, for an operational start in November 2025.

Steels had gone up on site at the depot and the main structure was now visible. Within the next month or so, it was expected that flooring, PV panels and roofing would be installed. Utility companies were on site to undertake work on drainage.

Members of the Committee were invited to attend a site visit at Turnpike Depot prior to the next scheduled meeting of this Committee.

One Member noted that the original budget approved at Full Council for the depot was £8m and had been increased to £9.3m. An explanation was requested as to why a 16% increase of the original budget was not over-budget.

A further query was raised on 'other costs' of £158,000 and what they were.

The Deputy Chief Executive clarified that the budget had changed from the original £8m to £9.3m following the approvals of Full Council. The project would be delivered within the £9.3m budget.

An explanation was provided for the cost category labelled as 'other costs' of £158,000 which was in respect of contingencies and was standard for a project of this size in the event of any unforeseen variations within the overall allocation of the budget.

Concern was raised that the budget had been increased once from £8m to £9.3 and one Member felt the project was not on budget at present.

The Leader of the Council noted that the original figure put forward was £8m following a procurement process, where two bids were provided. One bid was significantly higher than the budget, and the other was slightly over budget but following value engineering, the contract value was reduced. The Leader of the Council was satisfied that there was sufficient budget available to meet the total costs.

A lengthy discussion took place on the term 'on-budget' used by the Cabinet Member for Property and Public Engagement during his introduction to the report. Some Members felt the project was not 'on-budget' due to the original budget being changed from £8m to £9.3m, which was approved by Full Council.

One Member praised Officers and Members working on the project for working within the timeframe and within the budget.

It was felt that Councillors could communicate with constituents the reasons behind the budget increases.

One Member noted that the Committee had not scrutinised the details of the project dashboard.

The Committee:

Noted the current progress on the construction of the new Waste Depot at Turnpike Close, Grantham

87. Updated financial position and Service update for East Midlands Building Consultancy, 2024-25

The Leader of the Council presented this report relating to the East Midlands Building Consultancy (EMBC). The EMBC was now a fully staffed local authority building control partnership between SKDC, Newark and Sherwood District Council and Rushcliffe Borough Council.

The partnership was long-established and successful, it was based on a shared service agreement with SKDC delivering the service on behalf of other partners and themselves.

Building control is a statutory service which aims to ensure the safety of buildings and those who use them. Services within the function were either fee earning or non-fee earning. The split in workload was approximately 74 to 26%.

Non-fee earning work costs must be borne by the Council, whilst the service was allowed to charge fees for fee earning work on a cost recovery basis. The Council was not permitted to make a profit on these functions.

The partnership competed with registered building control approvers, formerly known as approved inspectors, for fee earning work. The service currently maintains an average of 60% of the market share, which was a significant increase on previous years, where the Council held only 50% of the market share.

There had been many legislative changes for building control, including a requirement for building control officers to demonstrate their competency.

A number of Officers had received their competency validation and trainees were progressing well. EMBC was also engaging in the future of building control with the addition of two apprentices.

Appendix 1 provided details of the provision accounts for 2024-25.

Clarification was sought around the report, it stated that the EMBC had avoided costs by not replacing roles and then further on in report stated all positions had been filled.

The Assistant Director of Planning and Growth clarified that comments on money saved were from the Assistant S151 Officer's comments about the report and were in reference to the previous financial year. The Council had savings in-year on the staffing likely due to vacancies. EMBC were fully staffed and could deliver the services required and meet expectations of customers.

Building control finances were separate to other services provided by the Council due to being fee-earning but not allowed to make a profit. The Council were also not permitted to charge fees for a proportion of work undertaken, which equated to 26% of the work and this element was funded from the General Fund.

A further query was raised on whether making profit each year would incur imbalances of income and expenditure and what happened to annual differences.

The Assistant Director of Planning and Growth confirmed it is within legislation to not make a profit but with some flexibility. It was difficult to manage the profit throughout the course of the year, meaning application fees charged for fee earning

elements of work were reviewed continually. The team would have to balance the costs of delivering the service against the income to offset that.

It was queried as to what level of qualification employees were trained to and when trained, and what obligation employees had to carry on working for the Council.

It was noted that apprentices were employed by the Local Authority Building Control for a two-year contract. If SKDC had positions available, they would look to employ the apprentices once their qualification was completed.

In terms of trainees, they came from a trades background and could use their experience and build on it through supportive learning to gain their level 4 qualification. It was hoped that once qualified, they would continue to work for the Council.

It was queried whether building control had involvement in every project undertaken by the Council and at what point building control would become involved.

Building control would become involved with a Council's project when it's controllable works, at the beginning of a construction phase. If the Council was designing a project, the building control team would engage with the property team from the outset.

The Committee:

Noted the update regarding East Midlands Building Consultancy (EMBC) and agrees to receive an update in 12 months.

88. Update on UK Shared Prosperity Fund 2022-2024

The Leader of the Council presented the report that provided information on the closure of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for 2022-24 and also provided an update on the funding position for 2025-26.

All monies received had been spent for purposes designed for and no funding was due to be given back to Government. Funding received had been spent on the majority of villages and towns across the District.

Examples of projects was outlined in Appendix 2 of the report and specifically related to energy efficiency and climate change. Other projects related to the arts, for example, a mural in Deepings St James at Jubilee Park.

Officers were ensuring the appropriate final claims and return submission were made to close down the previous scheme and were working on investment plan delivery, bidding and award process for allocating the 2025/26 funding to ensure the funding is fully allocated within the agreed MCCA timelines.

Members were pleased to see that all UKSPF funding had been spent by the deadline and congratulated Officers for their hard work.

It was requested that funding for 2025/26 and project updates would be brought back to the Committee. A query was raised on the timescale of when the plan would be finalised.

The Leader of the Council encouraged Parish Councils and organisations to manage their expectation of projects as a sense of urgency, projects would need to be in place prior to the deadline in September 2025.

It was noted that if the criteria of projects did not meet the UKSPF guidelines, other schemes such as the Community Fund were available.

One Member shared the success of Hive FM radio station, which had the potential to reach over 80,000 people as a result of UKSPF funding.

One Member noted that money had been saved on funding energy efficient projects and questioned how long it would take to see the financial benefit of those projects.

The Leader of the Council confirmed the general payback of solar PV was around 8–10 years but varied on the price of solar energy.

It was noted that the Council were able to deploy up to 4% of the total allocation towards monitoring and administration. Concern was raised that a postponed board meeting in March 2025 meant that organisations may have missed out on opportunities to receive the funding at a late stage.

The Chairman highlighted the board meeting in March 2025 was postponed due to no applications being put forward.

UKSPF had been created to replace the funding lost via the European Social Fund. The Government was placed under political pressure to replace the funding after the decision to leave the European Union. UKSPF funding would be distributed through the Mayor and the Combined Mayoral Authority, and the September 2025 deadline had been imposed by them.

The Leader of the Council felt that good administration of distribution of funding enabled the money to go further and be spent in the correct manner in conjunction with the deadline.

Some projects may not receive a visible financial payback. However, certain projects such as Destination Lincolnshire working on tourism trails and ways to encourage footfall in towns would bring a benefit to the town.

The Assistant Director of Finance clarified the 4% spent on administration was a maximum amount allocated and a figure that could be claimed back through the

fund. It was felt the Council had spent more than 4% of time on UKSPF as a whole, however, the Council could only claim back the maximum amount of 4%.

One Member outlined certain lessons learnt in relation to publicity of the programmes, a suggestion was made that workshops take place for Members to understand criteria. It was felt the criteria of schemes could be stricter in future.

The Assistant Director of Planning and Growth raised concern on the timescale of completing applications, however, the idea of Member workshops would be considered.

MHCLG provided guidance around UKSPF funding on outcomes and outputs. The Council were not responsible for selecting the options of criteria for projects, due to Government administering the funding.

It was confirmed the Council would be seeking expressions of interest initially by the end of May 2025 to understand projects prior to applications.

The Chairman highlighted a typographical figure on page 16 of the report and requested it to be rectified.

The Committee:

Noted the contents of this report

89. Grantham Town Centre Events

The Leader of the Council presented the report and updated the Committee with progress made on the Grantham Town Centre events programme which was funded by the Future High Streets Fund.

The events programme was being developed and kept under review by the Future High Street Board and the Grantham Town Team.

The programme contained a diverse range of events with the aim of driving footfall into the town centre, supporting retailers and economic activity.

The role of the Grantham Engagement Manager had been extended to March 2026, to support the roll out of the programme. The post had been transferred to the Culture, Leisure and Place service area to provide opportunities for collaboration with Officers involved in arts and cultural events.

The first event was due to take place in upcoming days and featured 'The Whale', which had been well received when hosted in Bourne, Stamford and the Deepings in March 2025. The tickets over the weekend for this event had sold out, however, other complimentary activities were due to take place around the town.

Appendix 1 provided estimated costs of events.

It was queried as to why the programme of events ended in November 2025.

The Assistant Director of Culture, Leisure and Place clarified that the events programme would be supplemented by other events organised by the Council. The Council would host the Christmas Lights 'switch on' and market, which was planned for 30 November 2025. It was difficult to arrange outdoor events in winter months, due to the weather.

One Member suggested whether the Future High Street Fund would fall under the remit of Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that UKSPF and Future High Street Fund in terms of allocation, distribution and monitoring sat with the Finance Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The emphasis of this report was to provide reassurance the allocation of funds was being utilised to good use.

ACTION: For the Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee to note the Grantham Town Centre Events report at their next meeting.

One Member provided an update on positive feedback received from traders and members of the public in Grantham. Officers were congratulated for their hard work on the project.

It was queried why Lincolnshire Day celebrations was not being celebrated on 1 October 2025 and was being celebrated on 4 October 2025 instead.

One Member highlighted that 13 October 2025 would have been Margaret Thatcher's 100th birthday. The events programme did not show any provision of celebration for centenary.

The Leader of the Council confirmed conversations were taking place with local businesses and schools in order to celebrate the centenary of Margaret Thatcher.

The Assistant Director of Culture, Leisure and Place outlined the commemoration would be a significant event for Grantham. The Council were aiming to collate a group of stakeholders to work in a coordinated approach. The Council hoped to promote the events under a 'festival banner' to add value to the anniversary.

It was confirmed Lincolnshire Day celebrations would coincide with the Saturday market on 4 October 2025.

It was highlighted that 2027 would mark the 300-year anniversary of Sir Isaac Newton's death and The Kings School Grantham would be celebrating the milestone.

The Leader of the Council informed the Committee a meeting with The Kings School Grantham had taken place to discuss a series of events for the anniversary in 2027.

The Kings School Grantham were also due to celebrate the 500th year anniversary of the re founding of the school in 2028.

It was suggested that lectures take place to celebrate the anniversaries to educate people within the District.

Grantham Museum were exploring a series of lectures and talks to take place on the anniversaries.

As part of the Margaret Thatcher centenary, the Leader of the Council raised the idea of providing themed beers or pump clips which related to the Margaret Thatcher experience.

One Member noted that three independent breweries in Grantham may be interested in themed beers in support of the anniversaries.

Councillor Matt Bailey submitted the following question:

'I would like some clarity on the funding for the Whale project. Funding was initially granted to a Grantham event under UKSPF SK2204, when the project was to be delivered in one of the Grantham parks. We have now allocated a further £10,600 of funding to this project from the Future High Street Fund budget to host it in the marketplace.

Whilst I am very supportive of the Whale project, I question why this was moved from one of our award winning public parks to the marketplace. We have had to close the marketplace for three days to traffic at a cost of £2,103 and also added security at £1,200. Closing the marketplace cause significant traffic disruption across Grantham and has proved to have a negative impact on local businesses in the area.

- 1) *Is funding from both UKSPF as allocated and Future High Street Funds being used for this event?*
- 2) *What was the justification to move the event and incur significantly more costs and increased disruption?*

The Leader of the Council highlighted that this event was originally earmarked for UKSPF funding in 2024, however the money had to be spent by 31 March 2024. The Whale project is a national touring exhibition and was therefore restricted to the months of availability, which is why the funding source had been moved from one to the other.

It was felt that the closure of roads around the marketplace for the Whale project would bring people into Grantham and a higher footfall for local businesses. The location of the Whale had moved in hope to attract people to the town centre.

One Member felt the positives of the Whale project in the marketplace would far outweigh the negatives.

The Council had liaised with local businesses and retailers in the Town Centre who had provided positive feedback that the Whale would be featuring in the Marketplace.

One Member queried a bike night which was due to take place in August 2025 and why the estimated costs were £12,400.

The Assistant Director of Culture, Leisure and Place clarified it would not be a traditional bike meet up. The money was being spent on a road closure, staging and musicians, alongside power to the marketplace. It was hoped this event would attract a wider audience

The Committee noted the report.

90. Work Programme 2024-25

The Committee noted the Work Programme 2024-25.

The following items would be added to the Work Programme for the July meeting:

- Six monthly update on Marketplace Footfall
- Local Council Tax Support Scheme Proposals 2026/27
- Discretionary Council Tax Payment Policy 2026/27
- Discretionary Housing Payment Policy 2026/27

The following item would be added to the Work Programme for the September meeting:

- UKSPF September 25/26 allocation

It was queried whether the Maintenance Strategy report could be brought to the July meeting. It was confirmed that an updated position in relation to the Action Plan would be brought to the September meeting.

91. Any other business, which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstance decides is urgent

One Member raised a query on the expenditure list and most recent list having several parts redacted due to personal data.

It was confirmed that if an individual was being paid for their service rather than a Ltd company, their details would be redacted for GDPR reasons.

The Deputy Chief Executive requested any questions on the expenditure list be sent via email for a full response to be provided.

92. Close of meeting

The Chairman closed the meeting at 11:42.