

Minutes

Meeting of the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 16 October 2024, 2.00
pm



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Committee Members present

Councillor Nikki Manterfield (Chairman)
Councillor Pam Byrd
Councillor Richard Dixon-Warren
Councillor Tim Harrison
Councillor Robert Leadenham
Councillor Charmaine Morgan
Councillor Habibur Rahman

Other Members present

Councillor Graham Jeal

Cabinet Members

Councillor Rhea Rayside

Officers

Karen Whitfield, Assistant Director –
Leisure, Culture and Place
Fran Beckitt, Head of Service – Human
Resources and Organisational
Development
Ayeisha Kirkham, Head of Public
Protection
Claire Moses, Head of Service
(Revenues, Benefits Customer and
Community)
Carol Drury, Community Engagement &
Manager
Bethany Goodman, Leisure Officer
Joshua Mann, Democratic Services
Officer

85. Public Speaking

There were no questions or statements submitted by members of the public.

86. Apologies for absence

Councillor Vanessa Smith sent apologies and was substituted by Councillor Tim Harrison.

Councillor James Denniston sent apologies and was substituted by Councillor Charmaine Morgan.

Councillor Steven Cunnington sent apologies.

87. Disclosure of Interest

No disclosures of interests were noted.

88. Minutes from the meeting held 10 July 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2024 were proposed, seconded and **AGREED** as a correct record.

89. Updates from the previous meeting

The actions from the 10 July 2024 meeting were completed prior to the 16 October 2024 meeting. This was confirmed with the Members without further comment.

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

There were no announcements or updates from the Leader of the Council, Cabinet Members or the Head of Paid Service.

91. Prevent Update 2024

The Prevent Update 2024 was presented by the Cabinet Member for People and Communities.

The purpose of this report was to provide information on the Council's delivery of the Prevent duty and to seek the Committee's recommendation to Cabinet to approve the draft Venue Hire and External Speaker Policy.

The Council was required to ensure that publicly owned venues and resources did not provide a platform for extremists and were not used to disseminate extremist views. The Council must not allow its venues to be used by those whose views would draw people into terrorism.

One way in which the Council could reduce “permissive environments” was to introduce this policy which it is required to have under the Prevent Duty.

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. As a local authority, this responsibility applied to South Kesteven District Council (SKDC), and the report identified the steps SKDC had taken to meet the Duty. The Council provided training for both officers and elected Members to raise awareness of Prevent. Such training was undertaken either in-person or via the Home Office’s E-Learning facility. For elected Members of SKDC, this training became a mandatory annual requirement in 2024. At the time of the report’s publication, 45 of the Council’s 56 elected Members had completed the required training.

During discussions, Members commented on the following:

-What proportion of the SKDC workforce had received Prevent training. It was confirmed by the Community Engagement Manager that Prevent training was mandatory for all SKDC staff.

Following the discussion, it was proposed, seconded and AGREED to note the contents of the report and to recommend to Cabinet the approval of the Venue Hire and External Speaker Policy.

92. Draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Position Statement 2024

The Committee was presented with the Draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Position Statement for 2023/24.

This document was retrospective and was produced in accordance with the Council’s legal responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty. The Duty required the annual publication of information to show how the Council complied with the Equality Act 2010. As a local authority, SKDC was required to publish information relating to its workforce and the communities it served.

The document had been produced to provide background on the Council’s responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty and its Equality Objectives. It also provided a profile of the District and demographics – this was made up of information gathered within the 2021 national Census and Office for National Statistics Mid-Year Population Estimates and provided an insight into how the Council had continued to support its staff and customers. The Annual Position Statement outlined workforce statistics. These statistics had been used, where possible, to provide a comparison with the District’s demographic.

The document had been presented in a draft form to allow for input from the Committee.

During discussions, Members commented on the following:

-Accessibility for those without internet access or the technological skillset required to use the internet. The Member noted that there was a reliance on either the Grantham Journal or SKDC's online resources for information sharing. The Community Engagement Manager confirmed that the resources were available to members of the public in any format upon request. The Member responded that for this to effectively serve the community, they would have to already be aware of the document in order to request a printed version, which they likely wouldn't be aware of without seeing the online publication.

-A Member questioned the satisfaction felt at grassroots level regarding the implementation of the objectives in the Annual Position Statement. The Community Engagement Manager confirmed that the Community Engagement Strategy had been orchestrated to complement these objectives.

-The Member also questioned the extent to which the public were aware of the work being done by SKDC in line with the Position Statement. At a recent Bourne town forum the Member reported that only 25-30 members of the public attended. The Community Engagement Manager confirmed that SKDC would continue to try and raise public awareness of this document but efforts were already being made to include local Town and Parish Council's within the consultations.

-Building on the point of public engagement, one Member stated that it was the responsibility of Members to create interest and raise awareness within their wards and the wider district.

Following the discussions, it was proposed, seconded and AGREED to note the contents of the draft 2023/24 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Position Statement and to recommend publication of the statement to the Cabinet Member for People and Communities.

93. Health and Wellbeing Action Plan Update

The Health and Wellbeing Action Plan Update – October 2024 was presented by the Cabinet Member for People and Communities.

The purpose of the report was to provide an update on the progress and delivery of the South Kesteven Health and Wellbeing Action Plan. The recommendation of the report was to note the information provided and suggest any enhancements to the extent and clarity of the information produced for the next six-monthly update report.

The Action Plan was aimed at achieving improved health and wellbeing outcomes for the residents of South Kesteven, and supported the Lincolnshire

District Councils' Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which was structured around five lever areas:

- Housing and Homelessness,
- Activity and Wellbeing,
- Environment and Climate,
- Economic Inclusion,
- Working with Communities.

During discussions, Members commented on the following:

-The collaborative working with other Local Authorities. The Health and Wellbeing Lead confirmed that a strong rapport had been built between authorities and was being maintained through regular co-operation and communication, primarily through monthly meetings.

-Whether there had been engagement with the NHS to explore additional funding opportunities. The Health and Wellbeing Lead confirmed that this had been explored particularly through the guise of Social Prescribing. The result of which was exemplified at the Wyndham Park Visitors Centre.

-Clarification was sought on the extent to which mental health support had been incorporated within the action plan. The Health and Wellbeing Lead confirmed that SKDC had been engaged in mental health partnership groups where different providers of mental health support had been pooling and coordinating their support.

-It was noted by Members that they wished to keep the actions undertaken by the Health and Wellbeing Action Plan under further review despite actions being marked as completed.

The matter was NOTED by the Committee.

94. Cost of Living Update

The Cost-of-Living Update was presented by the Cabinet Member for People and Communities.

The purpose of the report was to provide the Committee with an update regarding the activities undertaken by the Cost-of-Living Team, along with details of the financial support received (facilitated by the Cost-of-Living Team) for South Kesteven residents during 2023/24 and 2024/25. The report also provided an update regarding the support being provided to pensioners affected by the changes in the eligibility criteria for the Winter Fuel Allowance.

The Cost-of-Living Team was formed in June 2023. This was the second report to be presented to this Committee, with the first report being presented on 1 February 2024.

During the discussions, Members commented on the following:

The Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community) confirmed that the figure of 13,720 at section 2.18 of the report was the total number of vouchers issued and therefore included multiple vouchers for the same individuals.

- An indication was requested of the Cost-of-Living Team's future following the expiry of the Cost-of-Living Team's funding in March 2025. The Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community) stated that SKDC has a reserve of £95,000 worth of re-useable vouchers that were being allocated for the new financial year.

- The Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community) confirmed that that SKDC had made significant efforts to raise awareness of available support not just with digital output but also by identifying individuals known to council services as requiring support. Furthermore, the Cost-of-Living Team had conducted visits across the district. A Member praised these efforts and the hard work done by officers in the Cost-of-Living Team. However, the Member was sceptical of the extent to which efforts to raise awareness of the support had been successful. The suggestion was made for Housing Officers to be more proactive in raising awareness of the Cost-of-Living Team within their capacity. The Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community) acknowledged that awareness of the support needed to continue to increase. However, they did clarify their apprehensiveness about intruding on the remit of Tenancy Services by escalating the involvement of Housing Officers. A Member noted that raising awareness of support was also a responsibility of Members across the district.

- It was noted by a Member that a barrier to some individuals accessing such support was the pride of individuals to be self-sufficient. The Member remarked that this was particularly the case with the older generation who were being directly impacted by the changes to the Winter Fuel Allowance. It was requested that resources for raising awareness were arranged in a physical printed format that could be handed to individuals or posted through doors for those unlikely to learn of the support online. The Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community) confirmed that 900 letters had been posted to SK pensioner tenants regarding support available in light of the changes to the Winter Fuel Allowance. Despite these 900 letters, only 15 responses were received to date. Despite this lack of engagement by residents, SKDC were arranging for leaflets to be made available in relevant locations such as libraries, community centres, etc.

- A Member suggested engaging with Parish Churches, stating that they were often aware of specific individuals in need.

- It was identified by a Member that tackling the stigma of accessing support and simplifying the process of attaining the support should be prioritised, particularly given the link between suicide rates and those living in poverty.

- The Cabinet Member for People and Communities praised the hard work of the individuals in the Cost-of-Living Team.

The Cost-of-Living Update was NOTED by the Committee.

95. Customer Service update

The Customer Service Update was presented by the Cabinet Member for People and Communities.

The purpose of this report was to provide the Committee with an update regarding customer interactions within the Customer Service team and high contact service areas for Q1 2024/25 and call handling up to 31 August 2024.

In the first quarter of 2024/25, there were 50,572 interactions recorded with customers. There were also 388,346 digital interactions via email/website visits. For context, website visits equated for 84.59% of customer interactions in this period.

It was anticipated the relocation of the Customer Service Centre to The Picture House would improve the customer service experience. The Centre had a dedicated self-service area and an increased presence of officers from high contact services.

There was also a Customer Service Centre in Bourne which remained open later in the day. The opening of further Customer Service Centres within the district was under consideration.

During the discussions, Members commented on the following:

- Whether the opening days of the Bourne Customer Service Centre could be amended to coincide with the Bourne Market; the aim being that this could allow the Market to gain casual consumers who were going to the Customer Service Centre. The Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community) confirmed that this would require consultation with Lincolnshire County Council as the Libraries services were contracted out to SKDC and consideration would need to be given to any potential additional resource and cost. However, it was noted that only 3% of individuals visiting the library building were attending as an SKDC visitor for the Customer Service Centre. Given that relatively few individuals visit the Grantham Office from Bourne, this suggested a lack of demand from Bourne residents.

- Clarification regarding the nature of 'abandoned calls' outlined within the report. The Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community)

confirmed this was a reference to any call to SKDC that did not reach an officer. There was a range of reasons why a call may have been abandoned, such as opting to use the online services as prompted by the automated system.

- The suitability of the Customer Service Centre within Bourne Library was raised in the context of the ability to have sensitive conversations without being overheard by library users. The Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community) confirmed that there was a confidential area within the Bourne Customer Service Centre which could be used as a safe-space for sensitive conversations.

- Also queried was the level of residents from the Deepings that travelled to the Bourne Customer Service Centre. The Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community) confirmed that between 1st April 2023 to 30th September 2024, 30 individuals from a Deepings postcode visited the Centre, out of the 7215 total visitors.

- Accessibility of disabled parking was queried for the Grantham Customer Service Centre. It was stated that Blue Badge parking was available on the adjacent St. Catherine's Road, Grantham.

The report was NOTED by the Committee.

96. Youth Council

The Youth Council Update was presented by the Cabinet Member for People and Communities.

The purpose of the report was to update the members of the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the progress and activities of the Youth Council of SKDC. The Committee was recommended to note the contents of the report.

The Youth Council was formed in July 2023 and consisted of Members between the ages of 11 and 19. The three priorities identified by Members of the Youth Council were:

- Mental Health & support available,
- Climate change/sustainability,
- Entrepreneurship of young people.

It was noted that the Youth Council were currently recruiting for more Members via social media and engagement with local schools.

Members of the Rural and Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee were encouraged to attend the Youth Council and it was noted that the 'Cost of

Living' was being debated at the upcoming November meeting of the Youth Council.

During the discussions, Members commented on the following:

- Members praised the work done by the Members of the Youth Council.
- It was queried where the Youth Council meetings were held and when they were. It was confirmed that the meetings were held in the Council Chamber in SK House and Members were encouraged to contact the HR Manager or the Cabinet Member for People and Communities in order to learn the time/dates of upcoming meetings.

The Youth Council report was NOTED by the Committee.

97. Work Programme 2024 - 2025

The Work Programme was NOTED.

98. Any other business which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstances, decides is urgent

A Member asked whether the day of Bourne Market could be moved to coincide with the opening days of the Bourne Customer Service Centre, if it was not possible to amend the opening days of the Customer Service Centre. It was noted that evaluation of this suggestion would lie within the remit of the Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The meeting closed at 3:10pm.