

Minutes

Cabinet

Tuesday, 7 October 2025



**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

Date of publication: 23 October 2025

Call in expiry: 30 October 2025. Decisions can be implemented on 31 October 2025 (if no call-in).

The Leader: **Councillor Ashley Baxter** (Chairman)

The Deputy Leader: **Councillor Paul Stokes** (Vice Chairman)

Cabinet Members present

Councillor Rhys Baker, Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

Councillor Richard Cleaver, Cabinet Member for Property and Public Engagement

Councillor Phil Dilks, Cabinet Member for Planning

Councillor Philip Knowles, Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Licensing

Councillor Virginia Moran, Cabinet Member for Housing

Non-Cabinet Members present

Councillor Tim Harrison

Councillor Charmaine Morgan

Councillor Chris Noon

Councillor Elvis Stooke

Officers

Karen Bradford, Chief Executive

Richard Wyles, Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer

Alison Hall-Wright, Director of Housing and Projects (Deputy Monitoring Officer)

David Scott, Assistant Director of Finance and Deputy Section 151 Officer

Karen Whitfield, Assistant Director – Leisure, Culture and Place

Emma Whittaker, Assistant Director (Planning & Growth)

Kay Boasman, Head of Waste Management and Market Services

Sarah McQueen, Head of Service (Housing Options)

Claire Moses, Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer Services and Community)

James Welbourn, Democratic Services Manager

Chris Prime, Communications Manager

Patrick Astill, Communications Officer

Joshua Mann, Democratic Services Officer

44. Public Open Forum

The following announcements were made at the start of the meeting:

- The meeting stood for a minute's silence as a mark of respect for former Councillor Jacky Smith, who had passed away at the weekend. The Leader of the Council paid tribute to her.
- The Cabinet Member for Housing announced that South Kesteven District Council (SKDC) had been awarded the East Midlands Best New Small Social Housing Scheme by the Local Authority Building Control (LABC) for the development at Elizabeth Road in Stamford. The scheme would be a contender for the national final in January 2026.
- The Leader of the Council made reference to the forthcoming 'Thatcherfest'. He expressed gratitude to all community groups involved. There was a range of merchandise to accompany the event, as well as a special exhibition at the Union Street Gallery in Grantham.

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

45. Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

46. Disclosure of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

47. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2025 were agreed as a correct record.

48. Customer Experience Strategy 2025 to 2029

Purpose of report

To commit to supporting the delivery of the customer charter, priorities, and approach to customer experience across all Council services.

Decision

Cabinet approve the Customer Experience Strategy 2025-2029 to complement the Council's priority "Effective Council".

Alternative options considered and rejected

The Council had the option of not refreshing the existing Customer Experience Strategy and continuing to operate without a strategic focus on the needs of customers. However, as one of the organisation's priorities was to be an effective Council, this was not pursued.

Reasons for the decision

The Strategy was an overarching document for 2025-2029, developed by the Customer Service Management team, with the support of the Customer Experience Steering Group and engagement with customers and local stakeholders. It provided a framework, objectives and standards to further develop a consistent approach across Council services and aligned with the objectives within the Council's Corporate Plan.

The Strategy demonstrated a clear commitment to shared objectives across teams to improving the service and engagement with the Council's customers.

A steering group was established with representatives from across all Council departments to allow for a collaborative approach. The launch of the Strategy would coincide with National Customer Service Week.

Customer service was the responsibility of all staff. The Strategy itself would be scrutinised by the Rural & Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) every six months. A consultation on the Strategy had taken place.

Face to face engagement with members of the public had greatly improved, in part due to the new Customer Service Centre in Grantham. A personal service to customers would continue, in parallel with digital alternatives.

49. Contract Award for Mixed Vehicle Procurement

Purpose of report

The report sought approval to purchase vehicles including road sweepers, caged tippers, pickup vehicles, a hook lift, and panel vans. The procurement of these vehicles had been completed through a compliant process and as the vehicles would be purchased outright there was no contract length to consider. The procurement was for 54 vehicles at a combined cost of £2.6m.

Decision

Cabinet approved the award of the following 14 contracts for the direct purchase of vehicles at a combined cost of £2.6m:

- **Volvo – 1 x 26t Hook Lift**
- **Harris Maxus – 3 x 3.5t Caged Tippers, 6 x 3.5t Caged Tippers with Tail Lifts and 1 x 3.5t Arb Tipper**
- **Motus (Isuzu) – 2 x 3.5t Caged Tippers**
- **Motus (Fiat) – 16 x Medium Panel Vans**
- **Toyota – 7 x Small Panel Vans and 7 x Large Panel Vans**
- **Lookers Ford – 2 x 4x4 Pickups**
- **Thompson – 2 x 7.5t Tippers with Tail Lift and Removable Mesh Infilled Side Panels and 3 x 7.5t Caged Tippers**
- **Aebi Schmidt – 1 x 6t Compact Road Sweeper**

- **Karcher – 1 x 6t electric Compact Road Sweeper**
- **Bucher – 2 x 12t Truck Mounted Road Sweepers 4**

Alternative options considered and rejected

Other options considered were:

- Do not procure new vehicles – this would have resulted in an increased risk of service failure, reputational damage and a breach of statutory duties.
- Run current vehicles beyond the recommended usage period – this risked service failure due to maintenance requirements, alongside increased repair costs.

Reasons for the decision

The Council required vehicles for the delivery of statutory services. The recommended vehicle purchases would support service delivery and ensure reliability and efficiency.

All 14 contracts had been through a compliant procurement process with a fair and robust tender. All vehicles would be purchased outright.

54 vehicles would be purchased over 3 years, with 27 purchased through the Housing Revenue Account and used for Housing services. £812414 of the total amount was funded from the HRA, with the remaining funds coming from the General Fund (GF).

These purchases increased electric vehicle usage whilst maintaining existing services. The variety of vehicles demonstrated the diversity of the service offering.

The following points were highlighted during debate:

- Old vehicles would be responsibly disposed of, most likely through auction. There were strict rules about age of vehicles. Old vehicles were not routinely retained for parts as there wasn't adequate space to store them. Contingency had been built into the procurement for spare vehicles, for maintenance and emergency use. Spares were sourced through contracted suppliers. All vehicles would be supplied with warranties.
- The design of the new fleet would be uniform. However, there was the potential for having special livery on vehicles as and when desired.
- The procurement process had aimed to ensure the fleet was future proofed as far as possible.

50. ICT and Cyber Security Strategies

Purpose of report

To consider the updated ICT Strategy and the new Cyber Security Strategy.

Decision

Cabinet approve the:

- 1. Updated ICT Strategy 2025 – 2028.**
- 2. New Cyber Security Strategy 2025 - 2028.**

Authority was delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member to correct any typographical and grammatical errors.

Alternative options considered and rejected

The Council could have chosen not to have an ICT or Cyber Security Strategy, but this would not provide a robust framework within which to manage and develop ICT platforms.

Reasons for the decision

The refreshed ICT Strategy ensured the Council continued to provide modern services to residents and employees of the authority.

The ICT Strategy enabled the Council to review emerging technologies and adapt systems to ensure they were fit for purpose and future proofed.

The Cyber Security Strategy was a crucial part of the Council's duty to ensure that all systems were secure and that sensitive data held was safe. Councils must adopt proactive measures to ensure the integrity of their systems, for example:

- Two-factor authentication (2FA).
- Antivirus and endpoint protection.
- Staff training on cyber hygiene (Cyber hygiene refers to the regular practices, habits, and precautions individuals and organisations take to protect their digital systems, devices, and data from cyber threats like malware, phishing and theft).
- Regular security audits aligned with the National Cyber Security Centre's Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF)

As Councils increasingly delivered services online, they must ensure digital platforms were secure, accessible, and inclusive. A strong Cyber Security Strategy reassured residents and businesses that their data was protected, fostering trust in digital services.

The Cyber Security Policy responded to the increasing threat of cyber attacks, and robust protection of systems and data. It documented proactive investment in cyber security measures, and alignment with the cyber assessment framework, whilst building risk aware infrastructure.

The following points were highlighted during debate:

- Services requiring servers were increasingly moving to cloud-based solutions as opposed to on site server infrastructure. SKDC had robust off-site backup, with less reliance on physical servers. Most systems were now remote.
- Cyber-attacks were the Council's single biggest risk. SKDC had signed up to the Cyber Prevention Network and systems were frequently tested for resilience. Backups occurred every 15 minutes and offsite backup plans were in place.
- Service recovery times depended on the incident, but recovery times were routinely tested.
- The depot was used as a backup location to give resilience to the authority. Each service area had a Business Continuity Plan.

51. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Findings Report

Purpose of report

To consider the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) Findings Report which provided details of a complaint raised about the Council which was upheld and fault and injustice found.

Decision

That Cabinet had confidence that officers always dealt with homelessness issues with compassion, care and justice. It had seen no evidence that officers had acted inappropriately in this case or that their judgment was flawed.

Having considered the report presented by the Ombudsman and the evidence presented by officers, Cabinet resolved that no further action be taken and they endorsed the considerations with regard to the complaint.

Alternative options considered and rejected

There were no other options available as Cabinet was required to discuss the findings and recommendations of the LGO

Reasons for the decision

Through this homelessness complaint the Ombudsman found fault and injustice on the part of the Council. SKDC did not agree with all findings/ recommendations, which were:

1. Apologise to Mr B for the lack of accommodation and the distress this caused him in early 2024;
2. Pay Mr B £875 to recognise the lack of that accommodation;
3. Pay Mr B a further £300 to recognise the added distress caused by him being avoidably street homeless during that time.
4. Remind its homelessness staff of the correct test and threshold for the interim accommodation duty, in particular that the threshold for this is a low one;

5. Review its standard homelessness letters to ensure these comply with the requirements of the Housing Act 1996, in particular about explanations of review and appeal rights; and
6. Remind its homelessness staff of the requirements for homelessness decisions including when these should be made and what such decisions must contain.

The Council had actioned recommendations 5 and 6. However, it had not taken action on recommendations 1- 4 because it believed the correct test had in fact been applied. The team understood the threshold for interim duty accommodation was low, but a review of the information provided as part of the homelessness application determined the criteria for the provision of temporary accommodation was not met.

As the Council had not accepted all LGO recommendations, the LGO had now issued a report under section 30 of the Local Government Act 1974 which required the Council to:

1. Share the draft report with the Council's Chief Executive or equivalent, and relevant members or officers;
2. Place two public announcements in local newspapers and/or newspaper websites;
3. Make the report available free of charge at one or more of its offices;
4. Discuss the findings and recommendations at a high decision-making level, such as Full Council or Cabinet, after the publication of the report; and
5. Formally report back to the LGO the Council's intended course of action.

The Council had satisfied points 1 – 3. Presenting this report satisfied point 4 as Cabinet were asked to discuss the findings and recommendations of the Ombudsman and to direct officers regarding any actions to be taken.

The financial implications of accepting the findings of the LGO were very small; however, any precedent set would be more important.

The following points were highlighted during debate:

- When Mr B first contacted the Council, he would have been given an extensive vulnerability questionnaire. This contained a multitude of questions, with topics covering management of medical needs and independence, mobility issues, medical treatments, washing and dressing etc. This enabled officers to decide whether there was 'priority need'.
- The Homelessness Code of Guidance required housing authorities to provide temporary accommodation if they had reason to believe the applicant may:
 - a. Be homelessness
 - b. Be eligible for assistance; and,
 - c. Have a priority need.

It was decided Mr B did not satisfy the third criteria. Under the Code an officer had to assess whether the person was significantly more vulnerable than an 'ordinary' person. Mr B had a mild mental health issue, managed by medication. He also had

digestive issue dealt with through diet. As such, these issues did not make him any more vulnerable than other people registering as homeless.

- At that point officers did not feel there was a priority need. Mr B was in full-time employment and could manage his affairs, so it was judged that the impact of medical issues did not equate to priority need.
- There was a responsibility to Mr B to ensure he was treated fairly, but also a public duty to the other 147,000 residents of South Kesteven to make sure their money was used wisely.
- The LGO seemed to have accepted the assertions of the complainant without evidence. At a hospital stay he claimed he was told his health was being affected by sleeping in his car. However, hospital records appeared to indicate he had not been admitted to hospital – there was no mention that the hospital had reported that sleeping in a car had affected his health.
- Mr B's 'hospital stay' was less than 3 hours. During that time he had various tests and left hospital without treatment or medication, and no follow up was required. The hospital record provided to the Council made no mention of ill-health caused by being homeless.
- SKDC had never argued or gone against an LGO report in recent memory. This report did not seem to have taken account of evidence produced and could set a precedent of admitting fault when the Council believed there was none. If SKDC followed all the LGO recommendations, they could end up having to treat everyone as priority need which was not possible.
- Very few housing cases were referred to the LGO, a record of which the Council was proud.
- LGO recommendations could not be enforced. The LGO could issue their report again and SKDC could be asked to put an article relating to the case in a local newspaper.
- Mr B was offered a referral to hostel accommodation in Grantham, which he declined. He was also offered advice and guidance on the Council's rent deposit scheme and was sent details of affordable private rented accommodation in his preferred areas. He declined to consider shared accommodation even though this had been assessed as a suitable and affordable option for him. He was supported to apply to the Housing Register and encouraged to bid on as many suitable properties as he could. He limited requirements to a small, high demand area and a specific type of property.
- When the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) was implemented in January 2024, SKDC offered Mr B 4 nights' accommodation at its night shelter. Night patrols went to the location where he said his car was parked but never found him.
- This wasn't a decision that officers took lightly. It had been reviewed by multiple officers. The Head of Service (Housing) and Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Manager had discussed this with neighbouring authorities who all agreed with the decision taken at the time.
- Officers were not mental health or medical professionals and were not pretending to be. They tried to assess the impact that a person's condition had on their ability to fend for themselves, all the time balancing moral obligations and the public purse against relevant legislation.

- Mr B was no longer homeless and was housed in private rented accommodation.
- Where additional accommodation was available to those persons who were not deemed priority need it would be offered to them.

52. Corporate Asset Management Strategy Review

Purpose of report

To review and consider adopting the Corporate Asset Management Strategy 2025-2030, whilst ensuring the strategy was in accordance with SKDC current priorities and objectives.

Decision

Cabinet approve the adoption of the updated Corporate Asset Management Strategy 2025-2030.

Alternative options considered and rejected

Consideration had been given to not updating the existing strategy and relying on the existing outdated Asset Management Strategy 2022-2027. This option was considered inappropriate, as the existing Strategy outlined need for a mid-term review and there had been significant change since the Strategy's initial implementation. This may also have resulted in a missed opportunity to support the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan.

Manage the portfolio on a purely responsive basis – this was not pursued as this tended to be more costly than a strategic approach to management of the portfolio and could have impacted on the delivery of services.

Reasons for the decision

This was a medium-term strategy to manage corporate property within the GF set within the context of the Corporate Plan.

There were 11 key actions within the Strategy:

1. Service Planning and Asset Appraisal
2. Asset Information
3. Compliance
4. Maintenance and Investment
5. Current Major Projects
6. Regeneration
7. Equalities
8. Investment Portfolio
9. Working with Partners
10. Energy Efficiency
11. Value for Money

The Strategy had been submitted to Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee who had recommended no edits to the Strategy.

Much importance was attached to properly maintaining assets. The Council invested in a new Asset Management System approximately two years ago. The Strategy was clear that the Council was trying to plan rather than reactively spend. This was difficult due to many years of backlog, but it was slowly being turned around.

Condition surveys drove investment plans. Officers were focussing on desirable and long-term repairs. Officers looked at reactive repairs in terms of planned maintenance. If repairs were failing at a car park then investigations would take place to find out whether there was any planned maintenance. If the repair was urgent it would be dealt with there and then; the central database was updated alongside this.

A ratio of 70:30 in favour of planned maintenance was aimed for; currently it was the other way around.

There was an asset disposal strategy. Criteria were followed before investing in assets. There was a delegation in place for senior officers in consultation with the Cabinet Members for Property and Public Engagement and Finance to dispose of GF assets up to a value of £2 million.

53. Cabinet Forward Plan

The Forward Plan was noted.

54. Open Questions from Councillors

There were no questions from Councillors.

The meeting closed at 5:20pm.