



SOUTH  
KESTEVEN  
DISTRICT  
COUNCIL

# Overview and Scrutiny Committees

Report of: The Chairs of the Overview  
and Scrutiny Committees



# Annual Report

## 2019-2020

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 During 2019/20 South Kesteven District had four Overview and Scrutiny Committees, with a membership of non-Cabinet members. From 1 October 2019, South Kesteven created a position for a dedicated Scrutiny Officer to provide dedicated support for the Scrutiny function going forward.
- 1.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Committees are responsible for discharging the functions conferred by Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 and the discharge of functions under Section 19 of the Police and Justice Act 2006 and the Crime and Disorder (Overview and Scrutiny) Regulations 2009, which require councils to put arrangements in place to designate a committee as a crime and disorder scrutiny committee.
- 1.3 Each Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for monitoring the Council's performance, considering its decisions, questioning how those decisions are made and recommending improvements. The committees may also undertake external scrutiny to examine wider issues that affect the district. The Constitution allows for any of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees to carry out crime and disorder scrutiny, however this function is normally carried out by the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

## **2. Role of Scrutiny**

- 2.1 There are four key functions of scrutiny:
  - 2.1.1 To provide a "critical friend" challenge to the Cabinet as well as external authorities and agencies:
    - Challenge by scrutiny should be constructive, robust and purposeful.
    - Scrutiny should work effectively with the Cabinet and senior management.
    - Scrutiny should provide an effective mechanism for the Cabinet to demonstrate public accountability.
  - 2.1.2 To reflect the voice and concerns of the public and its communities:
    - Scrutiny should take a community leadership role by focusing on issues of public concern.
    - Scrutiny should have a constructive relationship with the press and media.
    - Scrutiny should create the conditions for plural views and concerns to be considered.
  - 2.1.3 Scrutiny members should take the lead and own the scrutiny process on behalf of the public:
    - Scrutiny should operate with political impartiality.
    - Scrutiny should have ownership of its work programme.
    - Scrutiny members should have a worthwhile and fulfilling role.
  - 2.1.4 Scrutiny should make an impact on the delivery of public services:
    - Scrutiny should have access to timely and accurate performance information.
    - The scrutiny work programme should be balanced, well co-ordinated and integrated into corporate processes.
    - Scrutiny work should be carried out with strategic objectives in mind.

- Scrutiny should contribute to improving local public services.

### **3. Budget Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Chairman:** Councillor Graham Jeal

- 3.1 The Budget Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 14 January 2020. The Committee was given a presentation on the medium-term financial outlook and budget update, which summarised the budget report and appendices and provided the national context in which the budget had been prepared.
- 3.2 The Committee considered revenue and capital budgets associated with the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account. It also included fees and charges proposals and information on reserves and balances.
- 3.3 The Budget Overview and Scrutiny Committee's other considerations included:
- The funding settlement from the government.
  - Continuation of the Rural Services Delivery Grant for 2020/21.
  - The New Homes Bonus with an anticipated future reduction.
  - Options for setting council tax.
  - Anticipated support from Fair Funding Review and Business Rates.
  - Special Expense Area (SEA) levy exemption.
  - Stamford, Bourne and Deepings Customer Services access improvements.
  - Funding provision to InvestSK for realignment of work, with responsibility for Arts and Heritage returning to the Council responsibility.
  - Council pension reserve fund utilisation and planned return to core expenditure.
  - Measures to encourage recycling within the Budget.
  - Payment options for the Council car parks.
- 3.4 The failure to meet planned savings within the 2019/20 budget had been raised by the Committee who received assurance that these savings would be included within the budget proposals for 2020/21. Assurances were also provided, that work undertaken would include explanations as to how these savings were attained. The process was summarised to the Committee - it would include a review as part of performance monitoring by the Finance and Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee, development of a senior management structure proposal by the Leader of the Council and the new Chief Executive, and deliberation by the Employment Committee.
- 3.5 **Housing Revenue Account (HRA)**
- 3.5.1 The Committee was presented with the HRA section of the report by the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources. The Council would be adopting a refreshed Housing Strategy in the 2020/21 period including new rent increase proposals. The Disabled Facilities Grant was confirmed to remain the same being driven by demand within budgetary considerations.

### 3.6 **Capital Programme 2020/21 – 2022/23 and Reserves and Balances**

3.6.1 The Committee was informed that an anticipated capital investment programme funded through external funding was required in the short to medium term. The recommendation made was for deferral to enable the completion of business cases and feasibility studies with regard to leisure offer changes.

### 3.7 **Other Financial Considerations**

3.8 The Committee had considered and noted the content of the report and the appended documents and considered that a comprehensive review of the budget proposals for 2020/21 in respect of the General Fund (revenue and capital) and Housing Revenue Account (revenue and capital) had been undertaken. Members were informed that consideration at Cabinet and further discussions were required, the final budget would then be presented for adoption at the February meeting of Council (the date of this meeting was moved to 2 March 2020).

## 4. **Culture and Visitor Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Chairman:** Councillor Judy Stevens

**Vice-Chairman:** Councillor Hilary Westropp

During the 2019/20 municipal year, the Culture and Visitor Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on four occasions. A meeting scheduled for 7 April 2020 was cancelled due to COVID-19. A summary of the items considered by the committee is set out below.

### 4.1 **Markets**

4.1.1 The Committee had welcomed the Head of Town Centres at its meeting on 4 July 2019 to discuss markets. This was explained as a compilation of a Market Strategy that encompassed all the four main towns, emphasising a successful launch of a new market in Market Deeping on 20 April 2019. Regardless of size, markets were shown to bring in extra revenue to town centres.

4.1.2 Members heard from the Leader of the Council who provided a background to the rescue of the previous dwindling markets that were now subsidised by the Council. He explained how the subsidy was measured in relation to economic impact and other strategic retail advantages. He had further stressed the need for consistency with the right stall holders for each specific town and growth.

4.1.3 Members also discussed local markets such as Bourne, Stamford and Market Deeping. Specific attention was drawn to the benefits to the towns, standby stall allocations and the importance of location. Further discussions had centred around various types of markets, shows and younger generation involvement. The Committee felt that a Market Strategy needed to link in with all other aspects such as the Visitor Economy, town centres, the Cultural Strategy and heritage.

4.1.4 Members also received a further presentation at the Committee Meeting held on 11 February 2020 that had highlighted the benefits and challenges to traders and the hosting authority from markets. The success of Stamford market was reported while Grantham and Bourne markets had reported challenges; however, the international food market in Grantham had been successful. The Deepings market had been closed for the winter period due to poor numbers.

## 4.2 Cultural Strategy

4.2.1 The Committee received presentations from InvestSK at meetings held on 3 September 2019 and 5 November 2019. Members were provided with updates of progress to works on areas outlined below.

4.2.2 InvestSK had provided an update to the Committee of their progress of work on the Cultural Strategy at a meeting of the Culture and Visitor Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in September 2019. Work scheduled on the Cultural Strategy was also outlined to Members which included public engagement and consultation of the draft version of the Cultural Strategy. It also considered factors raised from an earlier public consultation that included encouragement of public engagement through communication of events with cultural activities; costs of events; improved meet and share opportunities for local artists; pop-up galleries for new artists; clubs and community groups.

4.2.3 The Cultural Strategy Consultation had taken place over three months from 1 March to 31 May 2020 with respondents completing a web-based survey form. This had concluded that there was good support for visits to the cinema, theatre, heritage/museums and listening to music with strong support to physical activity, particularly walking. The completed draft version of the Cultural Strategy was planned to incorporate feedback from residents and stakeholders and then circulated to all those who had participated in the 2019 consultation.

4.2.4 At its meeting on 5 November 2019 the Committee had made three recommendations:

1. The Cultural Strategy to include a communications and promotions strategy, with the potential provision of a “cultural events portal” to be investigated.
2. Networking events for local artists, societies and community groups to be facilitated and promoted by the Council and InvestSK. Time and location were deliberated to encourage maximum community engagement.
3. Ensure that the Cultural Strategy gives consideration to rate relief and sets out the criteria by which it could be applied to for creative enterprises.

## 4.3 Community Asset Toolkit

4.3.1 It had been acknowledged that positive work and support had been offered by Local Councils, SKDC Officers and InvestSK to provide support for community initiatives, such as:

4.3.2 **Bourne Town Hall Restoration Project** – At its meeting that was held on 5 November 2019 the Committee received a presentation from Charles Housego of The Town Hall Trust who explained their aims and plans for current and future works. The project aimed to create a small community arts centre while restoring the original building. A business plan had identified that £1.8 million would be required to undertake the full scope of works, including purchase of the lease from Lincolnshire County Council to the Town Hall Trust. An expression of interest for Heritage Lottery funding was under preparation at the time.

4.3.3 Interim works had enabled a programme of events to be held. The Town Hall Trust were not providing a room hire function as it was envisaged to be primarily an arts venue. The pop-up cinema had been planned to be extended to be monthly to follow on from its success over the summer period.

4.3.4 **Deepings Youth Group** – A presentation was made to the Committee on 5 November 2019 setting out the positive collaborative work jointly with the Council and InvestSK. This

included working with youths and a local artist covering some graffiti with artwork at a nature reserve. Future joint working is planned.

4.3.5 **Stamford Arts Centre** – Members received a briefing from the Stamford Arts Centre outlining their services. The art gallery had a four-year waiting list of interested artists. Additional spaces were available for events from small community group gatherings, cinema screenings and touring theatre productions within the three buildings of the Stamford Arts Centre. Maintenance and repair issues were flagged and included a leaking roof and emergency works to the repair of a collapsed floor. A future works plan was being put in place.

#### 4.4 **Festivals**

4.4.1 The Committee on 4 June 2019 received an update following the second **Deepings Literary Festival** that ran between 23 and 26 May 2019 with the launch on 22 May 2019 being well attended. Following the positive community involvement, Members considered means for future successful replication and development in promoting literature across the district.

4.5 More literary events had been planned on the back of the Literary Festival and it was proposed that an event would happen during each season of the year.

4.5.1 Members were updated on 5 November 2019 following **The Stamford Georgian Festival**, which had taken place during September 2019 with a number of successful events and a high level of community engagement. Members observed the effectiveness of the Georgian theme and were satisfied for this theme to remain; though other parts of the District could consider alternative themes. Media coverage had been good. Future work to encourage local businesses to participate during the festival period and exploration of alternative routes with economic impact assessments would be planned.

4.5.2 At its meeting on 5 November 2019 the Committee received a briefing following **The Bourne CiCLE Festival** that had been organised jointly by InvestSK and the Council. It was held on 31 August and 1 September 2019 to bring both economic benefits to the town and build community engagement alongside the involvement of local schools.

4.5.3 The Cabinet Member for Culture and Visitor Economy explained at the meeting held on 11 February 2020, that timescales may not allow for the festival to be held in 2020. Members sought clarification as to the future of the festival to proceed in 2020. The Chair had requested a written statement in response to the Committee's recommendation "*to support the CiCLE Festival being held in 2020, subject to stronger budgetary controls and greater community and business involvement*".

4.5.4 Members heard at their meeting held on 11 February 2020 details of a suggested **Charles Worth Festival**. The concept was in response to an idea by a resident that had then been developed further by InvestSK into 'Bourne by Design'. The idea took inspiration from Charles Worth and could be piloted over two or three days as a community led event supported by Council funding. Potential events and venues were discussed, with the suggestion to concentrate the theme on fashion and design but also incorporate links with theatre and TV/cinema.

## 4.6 **Read Dating - Positive Engagement with Libraries**

4.6.1 Members were informed at their meeting held on 3 September 2019 of progress following the Deepings Literary Festival that had developed further through community libraries, utilisation of local authors and “Read Dating” (a similar principal of speed dating). Read Dating was explained as a group of people interested in a reading joined with local authors who had a set time each to discuss their work and books. The concept was hugely successful, costs were minimal and both the authors and the people who attended gave positive feedback. Equal success followed with “Pint and Poetry”.

## 4.7 **Savoy cinema opening**

4.7.1 At the Committee’s meeting held on 3 September 2019 it was agreed that the opening of the new cinema could have been a greater spectacle and was perhaps a missed opportunity to maximise community engagement. However, it was noted that the cinema initiative was a positive step for Grantham. There was confidence that the empty units in the cinema complex would be filled.

# 5. **Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Chairman:** Councillor Chris Benn

**Vice-Chairman:** Councillor John Cottier

During the 2019/20 municipal year, the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on four occasions. A meeting scheduled for 28 April 2020 was cancelled due to COVID-19. A summary of the items considered by the committee is set out below.

## 5.1 **Resources and Waste Strategy Consultations**

### 5.1.1 **Food Waste Trial**

The Committee was presented with a report on the response to the Government’s Resources and Waste Strategy for England at its meeting held on 18 June 2019. Out of four responses only one was relevant to the district. Members debated the food waste element which would enforce a separate weekly collection by 2023. Consideration was made for those new Members who had not been in place at the initial presentation with the timing of the consultation causing extensive impact.

The Government’s formal response was anticipated in September 2019. Alternative collection methodologies for collection efficiencies were investigated. Members were conscious of the cost of collection of food waste alongside the benefits from disposal.

5.1.2 The SKDC Food Waste Trial consultation results were presented to the Committee on 17 September 2019 with responses to the consultation being reported as positive.

5.1.3 Funding from Lincolnshire County Council via the Lincolnshire Waste Partnership was anticipated to help expand the scheme across the district. Members considered the additional cost of food waste collection in comparison to the financial remuneration for the disposal of the waste and the high financial implications of the food waste collection service alongside the environmental benefits.

5.1.4 On 25 February 2020 the Committee was provided with an update on the food waste collection trial that had been funded by the Lincolnshire Waste Partnership. Members were supportive of the food waste collection trial, but were warned of the significant costs to the Council if a district-wide food waste collection service were funded independently as the disposal authority was Lincolnshire County Council. The future of food waste collection services would potentially be influenced by changes in Government legislation.

## 5.2 **Approach to Climate Change**

- 5.2.1 The Committee received a wide-ranging presentation on Climate Change at their meeting held on Tuesday 18 June 2019 including samples of work by other authorities. Committee priorities were discussed with a workshop proposed to include both officers and external expert contributors. The suggested focus was to look at technology, carbon reduction and carbon offsetting.
- 5.2.2 On 17 September 2019 a presentation was given to Committee Members following a climate change workshop held on 30 July 2019. Key messages from the workshop had included:
- Clear targeting, decision making with short-term and long-term goals.
  - Adoption of new technologies.
- 5.2.3 Further work was identified over the Council's use of utilities as well as financial benefits from solar panels. Members agreed an additional workshop on 28 October 2019.
- 5.2.4 Members received a presentation on 17 September 2019 about the draft Terms of Reference for the Chief Executive's Climate Change Action Task and Finish Group that had been agreed at the meeting of Cabinet on 10 September 2019. This was to report back on the aim of the Council to become net-zero carbon by 2050 with reductions to the organisation's carbon footprint of 30% by 2030.
- 5.2.5 The Committee received a presentation at its meeting on 25 February 2020 with an update on the priorities arising from the Chief Executive's Climate Change Action Task and Finish Group. Options included the use of LED (Light Emitting Diode) lighting and paper reduction. Members supported installation of LED lighting as standard in the offices at St Peter's Hill and South Kesteven House with consideration for inclusion of other Council owned properties. The cost of installation and the corresponding payback periods would need to be considered and Members felt that initially the priority needed to be on installation works in the identified key buildings.
- 5.2.6 Members discussed the potential for paper reduction across the Council, focusing on Members' administration tasks and the use of report papers at meetings. The Committee acknowledged that Committees had varying requirements and some use of paper was necessary with other alternatives considered.

## 5.3 **Gambling Statement of principles**

- 5.3.1 On 17 September 2019 Members considered the report by the Cabinet Member for Commercial and Operations that included the draft Statement of Principles. The Gambling Act 2005 obliged the Council to publish a Statement of Principles every three years; the current Statement was due for renewal by January 2020. A public consultation had been undertaken as part of the renewal process. No changes to the draft Statement were deemed necessary as a result of the responses. Members agreed to recommend that Cabinet present the Statement to Council for adoption.

## 5.4 **Tree Guidelines**

- 5.4.1 On 17 September 2019 Members were asked to consider the report from the Cabinet Member for Commercial and Operations following requests for the Council to formulate a clearer, more formal stance to its approach to trees and tree management. Members considered three documents 'Member Tree Notification Protocol', a 'Charter for Trees, Woods and People' and 'Tree Guidelines' aimed at creating a coherent model to guide how the Council dealt with trees.

5.4.2 Members welcomed the production of the Charter for Trees, Woods and People which had been put together with the support of the Woodland Trust. This acknowledged the requirement for the Council to balance its positive commitment to trees with its wider obligations as a public sector organisation. Members agreed to the development of a policy relating to tree replanting with the Council playing an increased contributory role.

5.4.3 Members were provided with an update at the meeting held on 25 February 2020 on steps taken by the Council to protect and promote the planting of trees. They were also provided with updates over the process for applying for a Tree Preservation Order and potential sites for rewilding.

## 5.5 **Position Statement on the Intentional Release of Sky (Chinese) Lanterns and Balloons**

5.5.1 The Committee received a report of the draft Position Statement on the Intentional Release of Sky (Chinese) Lanterns and Balloons at its meeting held on 26 November 2019. In response to national environmental concerns surrounding the release of sky lanterns, the position of the Council was that the intentional release of sky (Chinese) lanterns and balloons on its own land which is open to the public, including council owned parks or open spaces is not permitted. Seasonal traditional cultural events which did not involve the release of balloons or sky lanterns on Council land would still be permissible.

## 5.6 **Scrap Metal Dealers**

5.6.1 Members received a report at their meeting held on 26 November 2019 providing an update and explanation of the Council's responsibilities under the Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013. This Act was in response to the rising level of metal theft and required that all scrap metal dealers held a licence with local authorities that gave authority to licence scrap metal dealers in accordance with the provisions of the Act.

## 5.7 **Grounds Maintenance update**

5.7.1 The Committee received an update at its meeting held on 26 November 2019 on the ground's maintenance service provided by EnvironmentSK. Having become the Council's grounds maintenance provider earlier in the year, Members were informed that it would now be possible to review the provision specification towards budget savings or to complement the Council's other initiatives. It was noted that there had been a low level of complaints received.

5.7.2 Members also discussed and considered the disparity of grass verge maintenance around the district which was the responsibility of the Lincolnshire County Council Highways Department as well as managed biodiversity areas following success in other areas. It was recognised and noted by Members that close monitoring and management of any biodiversity sites would be required.

## 5.8 **Textile Banks/recycling**

5.8.1 An explanation over the current provision for textile recycling in the district was provided to the Committee when it met on 26 November 2019. The Council did not allow textiles to be included in recycling bins as they were not classified as domestic waste. There was a requirement for the Council to provide licences for the charity street textile collections.

5.8.2 Members also discussed the provision of charity textile banks on Council-owned land with concerns raised over overfilling and reported ethical factors. A Council-operated bag collection for textiles was also debated. Neither of these recommendations were upheld.

## 5.9 **Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy**

5.9.1 The Chair gave Members a presentation on 25 February 2020, outlining the outcomes of the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy workshop. Members supported the inclusion of a ban of e-cigarettes and vaping devices in licensed vehicles under the SKDC penalty point scheme. A draft policy under construction would be considered by the Cabinet before being put out for public consultation.

5.9.2 The role of the Council in encouraging environmental sustainability was discussed by Members including providing an increased annual vehicle licence discount for zero emissions vehicles.

## 5.10 **Performance Indicators**

5.10.1 Details of the Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy (JMWMS) were presented to the Committee on 26 November 2019 that included waste management performance indicators. The Council, as a member of the Lincolnshire Waste Partnership (LWP), was guided by the JMWMS and its associated targets. The Committee was asked to consider the additional introduction of performance indicators to measure the performance of South Kesteven District Council as a collection authority.

5.10.2 The Committee had been directed to be pragmatic in identification of targets as not all were under Council control. Members considered which performance indicators they would like to see presented at future meetings with agreement for a bi-annual report to include updates of the performance measures.

## 5.11 **Single Use plastic aspirations**

5.11.1 The Committee received a presentation by The Cabinet Member for Commercial and Operations on 25 February 2020 relating to the use of single use plastics at South Kesteven District Council. The potential to include specific reference to the use of single use plastics in procurement contracts were considered by the Committee as well as within the operational aspect of the Council's services.

5.11.2 Members suggested promotion of publicly available water refill stations and publicity of the Council's water dispenser in the Customer Services area for the use of refillable bottles. Single use plastics, including a report considering potential areas for reduction and suggested alternatives, were agreed to be considered again at a future meeting.

## 6. **Finance, Economic Development and Corporate Services Overview Scrutiny Committee**

**Chairman:** Councillor Graham Jeal

**Vice-Chairman:** Councillor Mark Whittington

During the 2019/20 municipal year, the Finance, Economic Development and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on seven occasions. A meeting scheduled for 30 April 2020 was cancelled due to COVID-19. A summary of the items considered by the committee is set out below.

### 6.1 **Proposed development at Stamford North**

6.1.1 At its meeting held on 4 June 2019, the Committee was provided with the context of the report of the Cabinet Member for Planning on the Statement of Common Ground for the proposed development at Stamford North. The report had arisen out of SKDC's Local Plan,

which was approved by Council in May 2018. As part of this process the Council had to evidence how it worked with neighbouring authorities under the duty to co-operate.

- 6.1.2 Details of the land boundaries were explained. A Statement of Common Ground would set out the principles of how the relevant local authorities (South Kesteven District Council, Rutland County Council and Lincolnshire County Council) would work together.
- 6.1.3 Members established that this document was the first part of a three-stage process in developing the site with the second phase being the formation of a development brief for the site and the third phase would be the submission and determination of planning applications. An infrastructure delivery plan would be included to consider the impact of allocations so that sufficient infrastructure provision was in place to accommodate the planned growth. Members were further informed that there would be capacity for an allocation of 1350 properties, while the Quarry Farm part of the site, which was in Rutland, had capacity for 650 properties.
- 6.1.4 Members raised a number of questions to the report which included the legal agreements required for the three landowners; procedure for any legal dispute or judicial review; capacity of the site in comparison to existing development density in Stamford; Section 106 Agreements; risk management and governance and health provision.
- 6.1.5 Members were notified on 16 July 2019 that the draft Statement of Common Ground was agreed for adoption by Cabinet on 11 June 2019, subject to minor amendments and decisions by Rutland County Council and Lincolnshire County Council.

## 6.2 **Invest to Save Reserve**

- 6.2.1 On 14 June 2019 Members had debated the Invest to Save Reserve having flagged up concerns over lack of detail, grouping of items and the status of Publitas. These were discussed by the Committee in turn:
- 6.2.2 **Financial Services Review** was presented by the Assistant Director for Resources who provided an overview of the Financial Services Review. He explained that it was part of the budget preparation process for 2019/20. The Council was continuing its transformation programme, one element of which was service reviews. The consultant had spent time with each member of the Financial Services Team and then produced an action plan ensuring needs of the authority aligned with resources aimed at making savings through the identification of commercial opportunities to raise income.
- 6.2.3 Several questions were asked with Members concerned over the additional demand on Council resources and staffing. Other services would also be subject to a similar review process to establish whether they were value for money and fit for purpose. In addition to the identification of savings and opportunities for income generation, the review also included the development of a comprehensive action plan to help the team become more efficient and better support the wider organisation.
- 6.2.4 The decision as to whether the review should be funded from the Invest to Save Reserve was for this Committee to consider, which raised further questions from Members. Members were concerned over the reporting of savings, early notification and the origins of the Invest to Save Reserve which had £1m of agreed finance. Concerns were also expressed over the review process, particularly the process that had been followed in setting objectives and how it was funded.

- 6.2.5 **Internet of Things project** was being worked on by Digital Catapult who support local authorities to use innovation and technology to deliver enhanced digital solutions. Digital Catapult was working on a project to do with the development of intelligent streetlights that incorporated sensors to capture additional information, such as data from footfall, air pollution and noise pollution. Ownership of the rights would be shared between the Council and the developer.
- 6.2.6 Members questioned why consultation with Lincolnshire County Council had not been undertaken at this stage and that the sample size of 15 to 20 lamps was insufficient for meaningful data analysis. Funding concerns were also raised as well as security measures to protect collected data. Members were assured of Digital Catapult's experience in working with local authorities. It was anticipated that the 3-month testing of any prototype device would begin in approximately 7 months. It was expected that data would be available very quickly for analysis.
- 6.2.7 **The Advertising and sponsorship initiative**, which was already an existing venture with Publitas, had completed an audit of advertising income received by the Council and the potential extent of the opportunity within the local market. Additional funding was requested due to the conclusions of the audit which had highlighted opportunities to make better use of the Council's assets to generate additional advertising income.
- 6.2.8 Members questioned the validity of Publitas LLP as it was no longer trading in that name and raised concerns over the level of due diligence when appointing the company. Some concern was expressed on whether Publitas was sufficiently resourced to fulfil the contract.
- 6.3 Reassurance was sought by the Committee that prior to any space being sold, there would be consultation with the relevant parish or town council. The Committee recommended that applications for funding from the Invest to Save Reserve should include as much information as possible. The Committee concluded at their meeting held on 14 June 2019 that future reports needed to be more informative when requesting funding from the Invest to Save Reserve and should include business cases.
- 6.3.1 The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee reported back to Members on 16 July 2019 with their findings after a review of the process for the awarding of the contract of the advertising and sponsorship initiative. The process of the review was explained to Members with the conclusion that a logical process had been followed in awarding the contract and that Publitas had a lot of experience producing good results for other local authorities with other concerns expressed by Members being satisfied.
- 6.4 **2018/19 Outturn**
- 6.4.1 The Committee received a report at its meeting held on 16 July 2019 setting out the budget outturn position at the end of 2018/19. In summary the Cabinet Member for Finance informed Members that the total budget had increased to £19.502m. This figure included benefits from the 100% business rate pilot scheme with Housing Revenue Account surplus transferred to reserves to provide additional internal funding for the HRA Capital Programme. Members were also provided with an updated position on the Capital Programme and the Local Priorities Reserve, which was funded by the New Homes Bonus, and a new crowd funding reserve that had recently been created.
- 6.4.2 Members raised several questions and identified a potential ongoing issue with the spending of disabled facilities grant provision. On 5 September 2019 Members were advised by The

Cabinet Member for Communities, Health and Wellbeing that the Council had spent a significant figure on disabled adaptations on its housing stock. This could not be included in the expenditure figure, as Disabled Facilities Grants were not available for the Council to use on its own properties. Funding was distributed via Lincolnshire County Council.

6.4.3 On 19 November 2019 the Committee requested the final account of the Bourne CiCLE festival. It was confirmed that this information would be available at a workshop open to all Councillors organised by the Culture and Visitor Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

6.4.4 The workshop relating to the new Performance Framework had been held on 7 October 2019. The feedback received from Councillors would be taken into consideration when developing the performance dashboards that the Committee had requested.

## 6.5 **Performance Reporting**

6.5.1 On 16 July 2019 the Committee was presented for consideration a report by the Deputy Leader of the Council, setting out performance information for quarters 3 and 4 of 2018/19. Members were advised that in both quarters 3 and 4 the number of apprenticeships was slightly below target; a plan had been put in place to help the Council achieve this target. At the end of quarter 4 rent collection from council homes was also slightly below target.

6.5.2 Changes to the collection and reporting of performance data was explained to the Committee. In response to the Members request for public access, they were advised that this was primarily an internal resource but useful information would be made available to members of the public through dashboard information snapshots. It was anticipated that the Council would not be in a position to publish performance data for the public to view until the end of the year. Members were assured by the level of security measures in place to protect the Council's data.

6.5.3 A further report was presented to the Committee on 5 September 2019 following questions raised by Members with reference to the performance report for quarters 3 and 4 of 2018/19. The report also included an update on the progress of the Microsoft Power BI development as a new approach to performance reporting. Members were provided an update on areas that had not achieved their target at the end of quarter 1.

6.5.4 The roll out of Universal credit had impacted on rent collection in the quarter 1 period impounded by unrecoverable debts relating to deceased tenants and evictions though this did not represent a significant concern at this stage. Apprenticeship numbers and waste, recycling and composting were also areas of concern. The Committee recommended that the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting, including the level of contamination of silver bins to support the work being undertaken by Lincolnshire County Council and within the Council's own service area for Waste and Recycling.

6.5.5 Members also heard of those areas that were meeting or exceeding their targets at the end of the first quarter with clean streets performing highly.

6.5.6 A further presentation to Members followed, detailing the new Performance Reporting Framework using Microsoft Power BI software that was intended to provide a greater level of insight and detail than current information allowed. Members asked questions, provided recommendations and concluded that a workshop would be needed to clarify which performance indicators would provide most value to each of the Committees.

## 6.6 **Quarter 2 Performance**

6.6.1 The Committee heard from the Strategic Director, Transformation and Change at their meeting on 19 November 2019 that most of the key performance indicators were meeting targets, with three achieving marginally below their targets for quarter 2 of 2019/20.

6.6.2 Members were informed that an increase in Universal Credit claims had impacted on the collection of Council Tax in the District, an explanation was received on how this was assessed and processed. An increased number of rate payers had opted to pay over twelve months for Non-domestic Rates which had caused a red status indicator for the end of quarter 2. A reduction of households on the top four priority bands of the Housing Register was queried by Members which was explained as fluctuation caused by allocation of a property or a change of circumstance.

6.6.3 Measures to encourage new business into Grantham town centre was to be included in the Committee's future work programme.

## 6.7 **Quarter 3 Performance**

6.7.1 At its meeting held on 4 February 2020 the Committee received a performance report for quarter 3 of 2019/20. Members were provided with an update of the performance dashboard progression with seven having been produced. A number of action points were requested to feed into the continued development of the performance dashboards moving forward.

6.7.2 Further work would be undertaken before live performance dashboards were available for public view.

## 6.8 **Funding Update**

6.8.1 The Committee meeting held on 16 July 2019 received an overview of the national funding context as a backdrop to its financial review and budgeting work, highlighting the challenges that the Council would face in the short to medium term. The overall reduction in funding was reported as being in real terms just under 29%.

6.8.2 Members heard of the loss of the revenue support grant, fixed level for council tax increase and the review by the Government on business rates as well as a fair funding review. Details of the baseline level (the amount each council needed to deliver core services) were also explained. The Committee expressed concerns over the possible financial impact to the Council from the fair funding review. years.

## 6.9 **Contract Tendering Process Review**

6.9.1 On 16 July 2019 Members considered the growing commercial income opportunities as a Council. Comparisons on how the Council pursued commercial opportunities were considered. The Committee was warned about the possible impact of CIPFA adjusting the prudential code which might prevent a council from developing commercial income.

## 6.10 Finance Update Report – 2019/20 Quarter 1

On 5 September 2019 Members considered a report outlining the Council's forecast 2019/20 financial position as at the end of quarter 1. At the end of quarter 1, the Revenue budget stood at £19.796m and a forecast overspend of £461k. One of the most significant variances to the Revenue Budget General Fund was the forecast underachievement of the workforce efficiency target (vacancy factor).

6.10.1 Members heard that a small proportion of the budgeted savings and income generation were on target to be achieved. Variances to the Housing Revenue Account, General Fund Programme and HRA Capital Programme budgets were also highlighted. It was anticipated that a clearer understanding of the Council's financial position in relation to budgets would be known at the end of quarter 2.

6.10.2 In response to Members' questions it was felt that the budget variance in the Housing Revenue Account budget could be as a result of dwelling rents following an increase in the number of right to buys over the 2018/19 period impacting on rent collection. The income from carparking would also be considered.

## 6.11 Finance Update Report – 2019/20 Quarter 2

6.11.1 The Committee received a presentation on 19 November 2019 from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources outlining the Council's forecast financial position as at the end of quarter 2 of 2019/20. The report provided information regarding the current 2019/20 budget and the forecast variances for the Revenue Budget General Fund, the Housing Revenue Account, the General Fund Capital Programme and the HRA Capital Programme.

6.11.2 Members discussed a number of points from the current budget status. They requested an explanation of the shortfall in corporate procurement savings and were informed that the anticipated savings had been impacted by a new Procurement Officer whose role had been to review current arrangements and contracts and putting into place updated procurement processes. It was noted that achieving further procurement savings would be a gradual process.

6.11.3 Members also sought assurances that arrangements were being put into place to rectify the areas not meeting their budgets, and lessons being learnt. It was explained that although there were significant variances, the Council was on track to meet the majority of the budgetary targets. The Committee received assurance that the 2020/21 budget proposals would be undertaken with a more realistic approach and show the final budgets aligning more closely with the reality of which savings and targets could be achieved in the next financial year. Staffing arrangements were raised by Members who were informed of a review of the pay structure due to be completed in December 2019.

6.11.4 The Committee supported the principle of incorporating more realistic targets and savings in the 2020/21 budget setting process though requested more in-depth explanation of unmet targets at the end of quarter 3.

## 6.12 Finance Update Report – 2019/20 Quarter 3

6.12.1 On 4 February 2020 the Committee received a report providing an update on the forecast 2019/20 outturn positions for Revenue, Savings and Income Generation and Capital. The quarter 3 figure forecast a positive reduction in the outturn position. Significant variances in

the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account budgets and their corresponding Capital Programmes were brought to the Committee's attention.

- 6.12.2 Members expressed concern that it had not been anticipated during the 2019/20 budget setting process that the budgeted savings could not be achieved. Members sought reassurance that the 2020/21 budgeted savings were realistic and asked what lessons had been learned. Assurance was provided that significant work had been undertaken throughout the 2020/21 budget setting process to ensure that targets were realistic and achievable. Adherence to the final budget was stressed.
- 6.12.3 The Committee raised the significant variances in relation to the transformation and procurement budgeted savings that were being addressed through the appointment of a Procurement Officer in September 2019. The General Fund Capital Budget was also indicating significant variances in relation to the commercial investment and regeneration scheme which was explained as having been impacted by the leisure centre business cases not being completed.
- 6.12.4 Members also received a further update on the budgeted transformation savings for the automation project and questioned why these had not been met. The Chair requested a review to establish how effectively budget profiling was being managed by Service Managers.
- 6.12.5 Officers were thanked by the Committee for their hard work to reduce the variance in the forecast position of the budget from the previous meeting. Members requested the use of plain English (where possible) in future finance update reports to enable a clearer understanding of the Council's budget position.

### 6.13 **Local Plan – Proposed Main Modifications**

- 6.13.1 Members were provided with an update on 5 September 2019 on the development of the Local Plan to date, including a general outline of the proposed Main Modifications of the report. The Main Modifications had been recommended in consultation by the independent Inspector. This was a requirement for the Local Plan to be assessed as sound by the Inspector and then adopted by the Council.
- 6.13.2 Members had discussed areas of concerns, particularly over future development numbers and content, they were anxious over a conflict with the wellbeing of residents (such as reduction in green spaces and increase in traffic) within the need for increased growth. The Committee's comments were circulated for reference before they were presented to the Cabinet for consideration.

### 6.14 **Deepings Special Expense Area**

- 6.14.1 On 5 September 2019 Members considered the report on the review of the Deepings Special Expense Area (SEA) that were to be considered as part of the budget proposals for 2020/21. Members were provided with an explanation of the levy to avoid double taxation and were informed that the only cost currently included in the SEA was the grounds maintenance for the Linchfield Road playing field.
- 6.14.2 Members debated whether the SEA was an effective means of collecting the tax levy for the relevant areas, its use, availability and nearby amenities.

- 6.14.3 The Committee requested further information detailing the facilities provided by each of the Special Expense Areas, the Cabinet Member for Finance was to consult with Parish Councillors in the Deepings area as well as the Finance team, to gather further information.
- 6.15 **Fees and Charges - Charging Policy**
- 6.15.1 The Committee was presented with a report on the Council's Charging Policy on 19 November 2019 with key principles for consideration during the fees and charges process. Along with Council Tax and Non-domestic rates revenue, fees and charges were an important element in securing Council funding as Government funding continued to decrease, and the Council was required to become increasingly self-sustained. Members heard of the importance of charging keeping pace with market trends and the demands with this policy to meet the need for clear visibility and understanding for future annual budget cycles.
- 6.15.2 Members were reassured that there was scope within the policy for subsidised services to be provided as appropriate, with each case considered in its own merit in order for the Council to continue to provide a financially viable service whilst also achieving its Strategic Objectives. The policy was being introduced now to be a key part of the Council's funding mechanism moving forward.
- 6.15.3 The Committee recommended that the Charging Policy be presented to Cabinet for consideration, that evidence supporting the 30% overhead rate figure be provided to the Committee, and that consideration be made on whether the policy could be expanded upon to provide specific guidance and that further information be provided outlining which services were currently subsidised.
- 6.16 **Future Leisure Management Options**
- 6.16.1 An additional Committee Meeting had been organised for 27 November 2019 to consider the report 'Enhancing Leisure Opportunities for Everyone'. The Committee was asked to consider short-term arrangements for the management of leisure services in advance of a long-term plan to procure a new contract arrangement guided by a Procurement Strategy.
- 6.16.2 Members were informed that the current contract with 1life would expire in January 2021. Members discussed advantages of recommending the option to extend this contract and stressed the importance of ensuring that an adequate level of service continue, should the recommendation be approved. An extension to the contract with 1life would enable sufficient time for feasibility work to be undertaken and development of a Procurement Strategy.
- 6.16.3 **Grantham Meres Leisure Centre** - The Committee received assurance that all Grantham Councillors would be consulted in regard to the Grantham Meres Leisure Centre. Members were assured that all options within the report were being considered and any decisions made would be subject to consultation and a business case to ensure financial viability.
- 6.16.4 **Deepings Leisure Centre** – Members felt there was a lack of clarity as to ownership of the facility and considered the facilities provided to be inadequate. In developing the new centre existing arrangements would cease. Local Councillors would be consulted during decision making processes for the future of the Deepings Leisure Centre.
- 6.16.5 Long-term funding concerns were observed by Members who had noted that the report referred to the challenges of the medium-term financial outlook. Officers confirmed that a

scheme of borrowing was being investigated along with the potential for the Council to generate income from any long-term management option.

6.16.6 The Committee recommended approval by Cabinet to an extension to the Council's current leisure management contract arrangement for a term of 15 months with no reduction in the service level provided, with the extension to end on 3 April 2022. It also recommended that Cabinet approve the proposal to produce a new contract arrangement and that a Procurement Strategy, to determine the optimum length of contract and ideal route to market, should be developed.

#### 6.17 **ICT Infrastructure Transformation**

6.17.1 On 4 February 2020 the Committee was provided with a report following a review of the server and storage infrastructure that supported all of the Council's software. Weaknesses had been identified with regards to the age and reliability of the current provision. Members heard of the need of investment to ensure that the ICT infrastructure could efficiently support requirements as service needs changed over time. A project was currently underway to ensure that the existing ICT infrastructure was compliant with standards by the end of the 2019/20 period.

6.17.2 The Committee questioned the financial implications of these works and were assured that the project had been funded through the ICT reserve. Members were also reassured that works were on schedule. Staffing levels within the ICT department were under constant review. The positive progress of the ICT infrastructure works was noted by the Committee who also thanked Officers on the progress of the project. A broader update, including financial information, on Transformation was recommended to be considered at a future meeting of the Committee.

#### 6.18 **Asset Management Strategy**

6.18.1 A report on the Asset Management Strategy which linked to the Corporate Strategy and set out a clear vision for the Council's General Fund assets was presented to the Committee on 4 February 2020. The Strategy was intended to be a high-level guidance document, and as such, did not include an inventory of the Council's assets and their associated management plans.

6.19 Members sought explanation as to how decisions were reached regarding the disposal of assets and how these decisions were authorised and were reassured that any decisions regarding the disposal of assets were carefully aligned with the Asset Management Strategy and would follow the usual governance processes for decision making, as set out in the Council's Constitution. The Corporate Strategy was confirmed as the overarching document which identified the Council's key themes and priorities.

6.20 Officers were requested by the Committee to consider including an explanation detailing how strategies support and relate to the Council's Corporate Strategy when reviewing existing and developing new strategies moving forward. The Committee concluded that the draft Asset Management Strategy had been considered sufficiently and welcomed the principle of the Strategy.

## 7. **Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Chairman:** Councillor Ray Wootten

**Vice-Chairman:** Councillor Sarah Trotter

During the 2019/20 municipal year, the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on five occasions. Two meetings scheduled for 19 March 2020 and 23 April 2020 were cancelled due to COVID-19. A summary of the items considered by the committee is set out below.

## 7.1 **Consideration of the Remit and Work Programme of the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

7.1.1 The Committee was presented with a list that showed the remit of the Cabinet Member for Communities, Health and Wellbeing and the Cabinet Member for Housing on 13 June 2019.

7.1.2 Members requested a paper on turnaround of properties for a future meeting of the Committee; the reduction in Post Offices in rural areas as well as the lack of cashpoints and bus routes and housing management. The Chairman and the Assistant Chief Executive, Housing Delivery provided a draft work programme for Members on 12 September 2019.

## 7.2 **Crowdfunding**

7.2.1 On 13 June 2019 the Deputy Leader of the Council gave a report on Crowdfunding, which was aimed primarily at small business start-ups rather than civic initiatives however there was now an opportunity to utilise this funding approach for community ventures. This had been very successful in other urban areas.

7.2.2 The Committee was told that the Crowd Funding was a different initiative to that currently administered by Lincolnshire Community and Voluntary Service (CVS) but would complement the Community Fund. It was noted that a review of the Community Fund should be included as a future work programme item for the Committee.

7.2.3 Members received an operational explanation of the online platform called Spacehive that provided Crowd Funding services to civic and community initiatives. The Committee was requested to recommend to the Governance and Audit Committee to make an allocation of £30k from year end balances to fund the Spacehive platform and that a further allocation of £70k be made from year end balances to contribute towards community interest ventures through the Spacehive platform. Clarity on the legalities would be looked at before any contract was entered into.

7.2.4 Success rates were then discussed, and it was confirmed that Spacehive did have a proven track record working with Local Authorities. Further discussion followed in relation to examples of initiatives, the contract timeframe and targeting. It was stressed that if Members decided to go down the route of Spacehive then the review would look at the types of initiatives put forward for funding. The Committee recommended approval of the report.

## 7.3 **Update from cabinet**

7.3.1 The Committee heard on 12 September 2019 from The Cabinet Member for Communities, Health and Wellbeing details of a meeting with the Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer to discuss social cohesion across the spectrum and this included loneliness. There was no budget for this issue, so he was proposing to ask for a small amount of money to be able to contact and interact with the many communities within the district.

7.3.2 The Cabinet Member for Housing gave a brief update to the Committee. He provided an update on the continued improvements that were happening within the housing service and the funding in relation to Disabled Facilities Grants.

#### 7.4 **Update on condensate pipes**

7.4.1 On Thursday 12 September 2019 The Assistant Director Housing informed the Committee that the severe weather in early 2018 had resulted in the failure of 215 gas boilers in Council homes due to condensate pipes freezing. The frozen pipes had all been dealt with within three days. Several affected properties had been inspected by a technical advisor to the manufacturer who confirmed that the installations met the design requirements of the manufacturer but due to the excessively low temperatures additional measures could be taken to reduce the risk of further failures. An inspection of the 215 properties had taken place, with work to modify and safeguard against condensate pipes freezing completed in 145 of them. Work also needed to be completed on a further 115 properties. Mitigation measures recommended by the supplier and design changes on future new installations had been adopted. Further inspections of external condensate pipes were to be undertaken as part of the annual gas servicing and testing programme by the Liberty Group, on other Council owned properties.

7.4.2 Members discussed access concerns to properties as well as monitoring and quality of works by the Liberty Group. A further update provided to the Committee on 16 January 2020 explained that 53 properties were outstanding for inspection however appointments had been rearranged. An update received on 20 February 2020 informed the Committee that out of the remaining 37 properties, 14 appointments had been arranged. A protocol was also being put together in relation to the use of backup heating systems and hot water.

#### 7.5 **Modernising Housing Services**

7.5.1 The Committee was presented with a report by The Assistant Director Housing on 12 September 2019 with a further report on voids presented at the next meeting of the Committee. Members were briefed on the role and focus of Housing Services that covered existing tenants and prospective tenants as well as tenancy management, housing allocations and options, homelessness and temporary accommodation. Due to many policies and practices having become outdated and inefficient a comprehensive review and restructure of the Housing service had begun in January 2019.

7.5.2 The aims of the review and restructure were explained to Members who were informed that the review should be completed within four to five months with consultations having taken place with staff and tenants.

#### 7.6 **Equalities Annual Position Statement**

7.6.1 The Committee received a presentation on 12 September 2019 of a report to deal with the Equality and Diversity Annual Position Statement 2019 which the Council had a duty to produce under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. The three aims of the general Equality Duty were explained to the Committee. The Committee was also advised about the information the Council had to publish showing compliance with the Equality Duty and demonstrating that the Council had due regard to those requirements in relation to both the workforce and the people who the Council served.

- 7.6.2 Members requested a link be provided to the document for all Members. The Committee heard of the work of the Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer, including translation of Council documentation into a different language or for the visually impaired.
- 7.6.3 The Cabinet Member confirmed his intention to request a small budget for community group work that could be used across the district to help get more interaction between communities and address areas such as loneliness. This small budget was confirmed on 16 January 2020.
- 7.6.4 The Equality and Diversity Annual Position Statement was approved by the Committee.
- 7.7 **Turnaround on Void Properties**
- 7.7.1 Members received a presentation on 21 November 2019 from the Head of Repairs and Improvements over the turnaround on void properties following a request by the Committee at its previous meeting. A review on voids had been undertaken as the turnaround time impacted on rental income with the main issues surrounding voids identified as excessive turnaround times with reoccurring bottlenecks and low take up of stock in areas with limited sustainability. Members were provided details of the number of voids and the level of rental loss as well as possible cause for the current void turnaround time which could be the void process itself, the method of prioritising voids and the condition of the housing stock.
- 7.7.2 Progress work and actions were outlined to the Committee that included training to enable cross team working and decision making, a new void re-let standard, Choice Based Lettings and hard to let properties would have robust assessments carried out to see whether they were unsustainable. A new housing system (Northgate Housing System) would also be implemented which would improve linkage between assets and housing management. Going forward it was hoped that properties would be advertised on a portal to which all tenants would have access via a password. By undertaking these measures, a reduction in turnaround for void properties was anticipated.
- 7.7.3 Members raised concerns and questions over property conditions, reasons for refusal, charging and future improvements.
- 7.8 **Tenancy Agreement**
- 7.8.1 The report on the proposed Tenancy Agreement for tenants was presented to the Committee on 21 November 2019. The Council's current Tenancy Agreements format had been in place for 17 years with statutory changes and good practice being made over time. The current documents no longer reflected the current needs of the housing services or the context in which social housing operated.
- 7.8.2 Joint tenancies had been clarified and the responsibilities of joint tenants with issues such as rent payments. Other changes included the tightening of requirements for allowing access to properties, including carrying out gas servicing or health and safety checks. Damage and improvements to the property were clarified with great emphasis over the tenants' responsibilities regarding minor repairs. More flexible rules around conditions in relation to animals and pets were provided.
- 7.8.3 Members raised a number of points and questions to the report and while proposing the document for adoption by the Cabinet, the Committee requested further clarification was provided on three areas within the document and that the Committee be sent the number, types and causes of evictions that had taken place. The Committee agreed this proposal.

## 7.9 **Healthy Conversation Consultation**

7.9.1 The Committee welcomed the Chief Officer Lincolnshire Clinical Commissioning Groups to their meeting held on 16 January 2020 to introduce the Healthy Conversation item which looked at health throughout the district and Lincolnshire.

7.9.2 He highlighted current key issues nationally that included recruitment and ongoing financial challenges with specific issues around the size of areas covered in Lincolnshire as well as population dispersal and significant areas of deprivation. The Chief Officer covered several areas including:

- The publication of a long-term plan for Lincolnshire outlining collaborative work with partners was anticipated and would be consistent with the national plan.
- Details of The Healthy Conversation that took place during 2019.
- Options relating to Grantham Hospital.
- Further use of digital technology to improve outcomes.
- The findings from the Healthy Conversation would be available in a public document on completion.

## 7.10 **Housing Strategy refresh**

7.10.1 On 16 January 2020 the Committee was presented with a report that dealt with the refresh of the Housing Strategy adopted in April 2018 following a midterm review of the Strategy that had identified areas which needed to be changed although the key themes were still relevant and up to date. Members were provided a briefing of those areas needing updating:

- Supporting Housing Independence for older people and other vulnerable groups.
- Provide the conditions for Tenant Involvement.
- Improve Housing Services and Options.
- Regenerate Priority Neighbourhoods.
- Energy Efficiency – Tackling Fuel Poverty/Climate Change in new developments and current Housing.

7.10.2 Another area that had been enhanced in the Strategy was the development of new housing across all tenures to prioritise a balanced housing market as there was a clear housing shortage and need. Members heard that the Strategy was an ongoing document and part of a toolkit used in housing delivery. The Cabinet Member for Communities and HR reported that his portfolio would cover both Planning and Housing.

7.10.3 Members received clarification over differences between the former and proposed Strategy documents. They also proposed amendments to the new Strategy. The Committee agreed and recommended the Strategy to Cabinet subjected to the amendments highlighted during the Committee.

## 7.11 **Customer Experience Strategy**

7.11.1 At its meeting held on 16 January 2020, the Committee considered proposals to modernise and make changes to ensure that the customer service delivery was fit for purpose. The Strategic Director, Transformation and Change provided an overview of how customer access had changed significantly over the last few years, explaining that customers were increasingly using mobile phones to access services. A modern service was needed, offering flexible customer experience with choice and delivery which was convenient to all customers, businesses and visitors.

7.11.2 The Customer Experience Strategy was split into four key themes:

- Theme one The Operating Model which covered accessibility and sustainability.
- Theme two Technology, integration of operating systems to unify services.
- Theme three Customer Ethos.
- Theme four The measurement and management of the customers voice and using information to continue to modernise customers experience.

7.11.3 In response to concerns raised by Members, the Cabinet Member indicated that there would always be a level of face to face interaction within the service.

7.11.4 The Committee noted the development and progress to the Customer Experience Strategy, comments by Members and the recommendation to Cabinet that the Strategy be adopted.

## 7.12 **Debt Collection – Stop the Knock**

7.12.1 On 16 January 2019 the Committee received a presentation on the Stop the Knock with a briefing given on the current practices of the Council with respect to the use of civil enforcement agents and to inform the scope of any further work to be commissioned by the overview and scrutiny committee if deemed necessary. Members were provided with the background of the initiative by the Money Advice Trust charity with a recommended six steps for lower tier authorities to implement in order to improve debt collection practices. These were outlined to the Committee and followed by a discussion over each element.

7.12.2 Following a lengthy debate the Committee agreed that of the six initiatives before Members the Committee proposed, that Cabinet made a clear public commitment to reduce the Council's use of bailiffs over time, that a formal policy covering residents in vulnerable circumstances was put in place and that a local Council Tax Protocol be developed with other local agencies such as Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and adopted.

7.12.3 On 20 February 2020 the Committee was asked to approve a way forward to develop the policy/protocol looking at best practice policies and agree a format to work towards recommendations being put before the Cabinet at its meeting scheduled for April.

7.12.4 The Chairman stated that following a very long discussion at the last meeting of the Committee, the recommendations put forward had been unanimously supported. He was happy to recommend that Officers continue to put together a policy/protocol based on work that was currently undertaken and the comments made at the last meeting of the Committee. It was agreed by the Committee that Officers were requested to develop an appropriate written policy/protocol on debt collection taking account of the comments made at the January meeting of the Committee. The final policy/protocol would then be presented to Cabinet in April 2020 and once adopted a six-month review would be undertaken by the Committee.

## 7.13 **Safeguarding Policy**

- 7.13.1 At its meeting held on 20 February 2020 the Committee was introduced to the Safeguarding Policy by Cabinet Member for Communities, which concerned the development of a joint Safeguarding Policy that had been designed to be relevant to all seven district councils across Lincolnshire. The policy included a new requirement for Members to complete an e-learning module relating to Safeguarding within their first year in office with extra modules to be completed during their term of office.
- 7.13.2 The policy details were explained to Committee Members as well as outlining the safeguarding responsibilities of local authorities. The policy covered a three-year period between 2020-2023 and would be reviewed on a three-yearly basis unless legislation or statutory guidance required the policy to be updated in the interim. Members were directed by the Chairman that they needed to be aware of the policy in their role as elected Members, but stressed that they were not safeguarding officers. They needed to know who the front-line officers were and what they needed to do if they found a safeguarding issue.
- 7.13.3 A brief overview was provided of each chapter on which Members were given the opportunity to comment. It was stated that the Safeguarding Policy complemented the Homelessness Policy; The Homelessness Strategy was due to be reviewed by the Committee at its next meeting and this included the Council's homelessness prevention duty. All Members of the Council received the safeguarding credit cards following the meeting.
- 7.13.4 The Committee was asked by the Cabinet Member for Communities to consider adopting the policy before them together with the requirement for Members to undertake the e-learning module in their first year of office which was agreed.

## 7.14 **Tenancy Strategy**

- 7.14.1 The Tenancy Strategy was introduced to the Committee on 20 February 2020 by the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning who explained its aim to make the best use of stock provision to meet the housing needs of communities and set clear guidance to other registered providers so that all housing in the district was used to its best ability. The Strategy was to guide social landlords using best practice. Private registered providers were required to publish their own tenancy policies but needed to take account of the Local Authority's Tenancy Strategy.
- 7.14.2 Details of the Strategy were provided to Members by the Interim Strategic Director. A consultation had taken place with all 25 private registered providers of social housing across South Kesteven with overall supportive responses for fixed term tenancies.
- 7.14.3 Members discussed the Strategy raising comments and questions. Updates in relation to the impact of changes made to the Strategy were discussed and Members agreed to receive any updates by e-mail. The Committee agreed to recommend to Cabinet that it approved the amendment to the Tenancy Strategy, the rewording of 4.1 and reduction of acronyms, with the Committee receiving annual updates on impacts of changes to the Strategy.