



**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

Governance and Audit Committee

21 July 2021

Report of: Councillor Nick Robins
Cabinet Member for Planning and
Planning Policy



Planning Service Review – Progress Report

This report outlines the progression made following an external review of the Planning Service commissioned by South Kesteven District Council.

Report Author

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Corporate Priority:	Decision type:	Wards:
Administrative	Administrative	All Wards

Reviewed by:	Ken Lyon, Assistant Chief Executive	5 July 2021
Approved by:	Nicola M ^c Coy-Brown, Director of Growth and Culture	7 July 2021
Signed off by:	Nick Robins, Cabinet Member for Planning and Planning Policy	13 July 2021

Recommendations to the decision makers

In noting the receipt of the Planning Service Review and work progressed to date, it is recommended that the Governance and Audit Committee:

1. Endorses the action plan.
2. Notes the planned engagement with Members ahead of any formal reports to relevant Committees.

1 The Background to the Report

- 1.1 A key theme in the Corporate Plan (2020-2023) is the provision of housing that meets the needs of all residents. High quality housing is essential for all, and the Council is committed to working with partners to provide this. A main action has been to undertake a planning review to improve performance and support local sustainable, high quality growth.
- 1.2 The Planning Service Review was instructed in May 2020. Cratus, a public sector advisory company with significant council and planning expertise, were duly appointed. Cratus thereafter conducted a total of 26 interviews with staff, Members, and key external stakeholders. Written representations were received to supplement the process. Due to the impact of COVID-19 restrictions, the Planning Service Review was conducted remotely.
- 1.3 The received Planning Service Review was originally on 30 November 2020 Governance and Audit Committee agenda. However, the item was subsequently removed at the Chairman's request.
- 1.4 The remainder of this report considers the items included in the Planning Service Review, progress against actions, proposed next steps and further considerations for the Council.
- 1.5 The Planning Service Review (attached at **Annex 1**) was externally developed by Cratus, includes 29 recommendations, and recognises the importance of planning as a critical component in supporting economic growth and unlocking future prosperity of local communities.
- 1.6 An internal project team were deployed to engage with the Planning Service, Members and Cratus to develop a draft action plan to scope out and begin progressing the implementation of the recommendations (as illustrated at **Annex 2**).
- 1.7 The recommendations focus upon several areas, including (but not limited to):
 - Embedding good practice in the operational (officer) delivery of the service.
 - Identifying areas where change to the protocols and functioning of the Planning Committee are likely to be beneficial.
 - Highlighting opportunities to invest in technology and communication to help improve the service.
- 1.8 Since receipt of the Planning Service Review there has been a high degree of leadership change in the Planning Service, beginning with the appointment of an Interim Head Planning (to June 2021) and the recent commencement of the Director for Growth and Culture in May 2021. A highly experienced Assistant Director of Planning has recently been appointed by the Employment Committee, who will join the Council in mid-September 2021. The Assistant Director of Planning will work closely with the Director for Growth and Culture and the Cabinet Member for Planning and Planning Policy, with the aim of providing consistent and strong leadership of the Planning Service.
- 1.9 There are items referred to in this report that are within the scope of other Committees. For example, should there be any proposals to amend the delegations and processes for Planning Committee, these will be presented to the Constitution Committee for consideration.

2 Consultation and feedback received, including overview and scrutiny

- 2.1 In line with good practice, since October 2020 a significant amount of informal engagement with Members has taken place. These informal sessions have included private briefing and workshop sessions to enable Members (and Officers) to engage with the Planning Service Review and subsequent work to help shape the recommendations.
- 2.2 On 22 October 2020, the Cratus review team, the Leader of the Council, the (then) Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing and the Chief Executive Officer, presented the findings of the initial report (**Annex 1**) as follows:
- Session One - Planning Committee Members
 - Session Two - All Council Members
 - Session Three - Officers within the Planning Service
- 2.3 All attendees at the session were provided with the opportunity to ask questions of the review team. Encouragingly, the sessions resulted in a willingness to develop and improve the Planning Service from both Members and Officers.
- 2.4 On 2 and 3 December 2020, a series of four half-day workshops were arranged to engage Planning Committee Members, all Members as observers and Planning Officers. These sessions provided a greater level of clarity, explored the recommendations, and began to develop and prioritise the action plan. This approach culminated in a combined meeting, facilitated by Cratus, which included Committee Members and Officers.
- 2.5 The Planning Service Review recommendations require a refinement to the protocols and processes of the Planning Committee to be in line with best practice across the Public Sector. Cratus drafted initial proposals by working collaboratively with both the former and current Cabinet Member responsible for Planning, as well as with the Chairman of the Planning Committee, to ensure they reflected and aligned with practice in South Kesteven.
- 2.6 Additionally, a series of informal meetings have taken place with Councillors to raise questions and concerns and provide input on the draft protocols and processes prior to formal proposal to any Committee. This approach included an extended informal session with the Planning Committee on 26 May 2021 where Members explored the draft protocols in greater depth to understand the rationale behind changes and proposed revisions. That session focused on how the protocols would work in practice and enable the smoother and efficient operation of the Planning Committee and crucially included practical examples of how adopting the proposed protocol and processes might work in practice.
- 2.7 There are two further informal sessions scheduled for 20 July which will mirror the items delivered during 26 May meeting. The first is with substitute Members of Planning Committee and those Committee Members who were unable to attend on 26 May and will take place in the afternoon. The second is an All-Member Briefing. This will take place early evening and is intended to enable Members to raise any outstanding questions.

3 Available Options Considered

- 3.1 Do Nothing – note the report but do not request further action or updates to the Governance and Audit committee.

4 Preferred Option

- 4.1 The preferred option is to note the report and support the action plan associated with it, including formal engagement with the relevant committees at the appropriate time. Governance and Audit Committee can expect to receive an update on progress within six months.

5 Reasons for the Recommendations

- 5.1 The preferred option provides Governance and Audit Committee with the assurance that the areas for development highlighted by the Planning Service Review are being prioritised and addressed, with improvements embedded. The approach outlined, provides the Audit and Governance Committee with the opportunity to maintain ongoing oversight and refinement of the action plan.
- 5.2 As indicated earlier in the report, the relevant Committees will be engaged to debate changes as appropriate.

6 Next Steps – Communication and Implementation of the Decision

- 6.1 The next steps are to support the continued delivery of the action plan, with a return to the Governance and Audit Committee for a progress update in six months' time.
- 6.2 Throughout the delivery of the action plan, there will be ongoing engagement with Members and Officers to inform the development of future proposals to the relevant Committees.

7 Financial Implications

- 7.1 It is not possible at this time to confirm if there will be financial implications arising from the implementation of the stated recommendations. Should any additional costs be required, this will be assessed and considered at the appropriate time.

Financial Implications reviewed by: Richard Wyles, Interim Director of Finance

8 Legal and Governance Implications

- 8.1 External reviews are essential to ensure good governance of public services.
- 8.2 The recommendations are to be welcomed from a governance perspective, as it indicates that service delivery can be improved if implemented.

Legal Implications reviewed by: Mandy Braithwaite, Legal Executive

9 Equality and Safeguarding Implications

- 9.1 The Planning Service Review has identified improvements to support the decision making, by officers and Members. These impacts would be positive and there are no direct impacts for equality or safeguarding.

10 Risk and Mitigation

- 10.1 No risk relating to this report have been identified.

11 Community Safety Implications

- 11.1 There are no direct community safety implications resulting from this report.

12 How will the recommendations support South Kesteven District Council's declaration of a climate emergency?

- 12.1 The Planning Service Review recommends a revision to the planning site visit protocol. It is suggested that there would be fewer site visits which will have a positive impact on climate change due to the reduction in the number of vehicular journeys undertaken.

13 Other Implications (where significant)

- 13.1 None identified.

14 Background Papers

- 14.1 Governance and Audit Committee 30 November 2020: Planning Service External Review: <http://modern.gov.southkesteven.gov.uk/documents/s28333/Planning%20Service%20Review.pdf>

15 Appendices

- 15.1 Annex 1 – South Kesteven Planning Review (Cratus)
15.2 Annex 2 - Planning Review Action Plan

Report Timeline:	Final Decision date	21 July 2021
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