



**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

Governance and Audit Committee

22 December 2021

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



Planning Service Review – Progress Report

This report updates the Governance and Audit Committee on the actions undertaken following a review of the Planning Service.

Report Author

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

Reviewed by:	Ken Lyon (Assistant Chief Executive)	14 December 2021
Approved by:	Emma Whittaker (Assistant Director of Planning)	14 December 2021
Signed off by:	Nick Robins (Cabinet Member for Planning and Planning Policy)	15 December 2021

Recommendations to the decision makers

To note the Planning Review update and associated action plan.

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 Planning has a positive and proactive role to play at the heart of South Kesteven District Council, helping to stimulate growth whilst looking after important environmental areas. Planning helps to translate the Council's Corporate Plan (2020-2023) goals into action, balancing social, economic and environmental needs to achievement sustainable development.
- 1.3 This report outlines the progress achieved with the Planning Service Review, examines actions undertaken and further considerations for the Council. The report is requested as an update following the 21 July 2021 Governance and Audit Committee. The Committee also requested that further engagement with Members of the Planning Committee take place prior to this update, which has taken place and is outlined in section 2 of this report.
- 1.4 An internal project team were deployed to engage with the Planning Service. The implementation of the actions are as illustrated within **Annex A**.
- 1.5 The actions 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.
- 1.6 Since the development of this item of work, critical posts have now been resourced and the service is functioning with a fully staffed management team, including the appointment of an Assistant Director for Planning in September 2021. This has brought stability and consistent leadership to the service, providing clearer direction for officers and improved engagement with Members.
- 1.7 In proposing steps to support the Planning service, a significant consultation between officers and Planning Committee Members has taken place. This examines in detail, the procedural which underpin service delivery and to provide clarity around how the protocols function.
- 1.8 Informal planning committees (which were held in the public domain) took place in September 2021 and November 2021 to debate the proposed changes to the protocols and processes of the Planning Committee which impact on the Constitution. At the meeting of 26 November an amended set of protocols and processes were agreed that will be considered by Constitution Committee and then, ultimately, Full Council in early 2022.

2 Consultation and feedback received, including overview and scrutiny

- 2.1 In the period since the last report was presented to Governance and Audit Committee a significant two stage consultation has been undertaken with members of the Planning Committee. These sessions were delivered informally due to the restrictions of the

Planning Committee in determining items outside the delegations made by Full Council. These sessions took place in the public domain and were held as close to Committee conditions as possible (with the exception that the Members were permitted to attend virtually to enable the maximum number of Members to engage with the sessions).

- 2.2 On 27 September 2021, a first draft of amendments was presented to the Planning Committee. Member feedback was encouraged and received to provide a basis for further revisions.
- 2.3 The feedback from the Committee was positively received by the officer team and the Assistant Director for Planning reviewed the proposals in line with this feedback. The Assistant Director for Planning, in consultation with the Chair of Planning Committee and Cabinet Member for Planning produced a revised set of proposals for Article 16 of the Constitution for consideration by the Committee on 27 November 2021, the report for which is available within Section 14 (Background Papers).
- 2.4 The revised proposals for Article 16, accompanied by a Local Code of Good Practice, were debated by the Informal Planning Committee on the 26 November 2021, which provided Members with the opportunity for questions and answers and for Members to propose further amendments. Following the discussion and further amendments the Informal Planning Committee unanimously voted to recommend that the revisions be approved by Constitution Committee and Full Council.
- 2.5 Prior consideration of the wider work programme was undertaken at the 21 July 2021 Governance & Audit Committee. During this meeting, several matters pertaining to the overarching review and intrinsic items were noted.
- 2.6 A significant amount of informal engagement with Members has taken place. These informal sessions have previously 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. Taking place from October 2020, the meetings have developed familiarity with the service and examine items for improvement. The process has included discussion with: Planning Committee Members, All Member and Officer briefings.

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 the associated action plan and note that the proposed amendments to the Councils Constitution will be considered by Constitution Committee and Full Council in 2022.

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 finalise the delivery of the action plan.

7 Financial Implications

7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the report. Should any additional costs be required, this will be assessed and considered at the appropriate time in line with the service plan.

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: Graham Watts, Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer

9 Equality and Safeguarding Implications

9.1 Impacts upon equality and safeguarding will be examined on a project-by-project basis and those deemed to have an impact will feature an Equality Impact Assessment as part of the programme of works.

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 delivery of the service will take into account matters pertaining to a climate emergency where possible. For a majority of this review, officers have continued to work remotely which reduces the impacts of travel related emissions.

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://moderngov.southkesteven.gov.uk/documents/s28333/Planning%20Service%20Review.pdf>

14.2 Governance and Audit Committee 21 July 2021: Planning Service Review – Progress Report: <http://moderngov.southkesteven.gov.uk/documents/s30479/Planning%20Service%20Review%20-%20Progress%20Report.pdf>

- 14.3 Informal Planning Committee 27 September 2021: Consultation on Suggested Amendments to Planning Protocols
<http://moderngov.southkesteven.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=165&MId=4201&Ver=4>
- 14.4 Informal Planning Committee 26 November 2021: Consultation on Suggested Amendments to Planning Protocols
<http://moderngov.southkesteven.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=165&MId=4219&Ver=4>

15 Appendices

- 15.1 Annex A – Planning Review Action Plan [updated]