

Action Notes

Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 28 April 2022, 2.00 pm

Council Chamber - South Kesteven House,
St. Peter's Hill, Grantham. NG31 6PZ



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Committee Members present

Councillor Ray Wootten (Chairman)
Councillor Sarah Trotter (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Ben Green
Councillor Philip Knowles
Councillor Hilary Westropp
Councillor Amanda Wheeler

Other Members in attendance

Councillor Richard Cleaver
Councillor Sue Wooley

Cabinet Members in attendance

Councillor Robert Reid (Cabinet Member for Housing and Property)
Councillor Linda Wootten (Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Licensing)

Officers in attendance

Alan Robinson (Deputy Chief Executive)
Andrew Cotton (Director for Housing and Property)
Craig Spence (Assistant Director for Housing)
Anne-Marie Coulthard (Assistant Director for Operations and Public Protection)
Ayeisha Kirkham (Public Protection Manager)
Yvonne Swinton (Community Safety Lead)
Carol Drury (Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer)
Amy Pryde (Democratic Services Officer)

55. Comments from Members of the Public

No comments were received.

56. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Annie Mason.

57. Disclosure of Interest

There were no interests disclosed.

58. Action Notes from the meeting held on 17 February 2022

Members considered the Action Notes of the meeting held on 17 February 2022. It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED** that the action notes were a true and accurate record on the basis that more information was added to minute 48, Regulatory Compliance.

59. Updates from the previous meeting

The Chairman noted that he would send an electronic copy of the agenda for the meeting of Lincolnshire Police and Crime Panel being held on 10 June 2022 once it had been published.

60. Crime Disorder - Neighbourhood Policing and Anti-social Behaviour

The Chairman welcomed Phil Vickers, the Chief Inspector for Lincolnshire Police (North and South Kesteven).

The Chief Inspector for North and South Kesteven Lincolnshire Police updated the Committee on neighbourhood policing issues, PCSOs in South Kesteven and Anti-social behaviour:

- That Lincolnshire was a safe place to live, work and visit.
- The breach of covid lockdown regulations were recorded as an anti-social behaviour incident.
- Over the last 2 years, crime had reduced, however, anti-social behaviour had increased nationally. This was due to public space offences.
- The police had greater enforcement and prevention ability to reduce crime during lockdown.
- Lincolnshire Police had been the lowest funded force in the country for a prolonged period. However, the performance of the force was in the top quartile.
- That the technical ability, infrastructure, and the operators of the CCTV in South Kesteven were the best in the county.
- South Kesteven could consider more proactive use of legal powers.

The Chairman requested further information in relation to the South of the county (Stamford, Bourne and Deepings area).

The Chief Inspector highlighted points in relation to specific areas:

- Offenders being enforced against in Stamford were predominantly from Peterborough and surrounding areas. Another crime area of Stamford was links to the A1 and The Meadows.

- That the Peterborough 'drug-scene' impacts Bourne and Market Deeping more than Stamford.
- That the police work to identify future offenders and victims of domestic abuse to prevent it happening.
- As of 31 March 2022, there were 1205 full-time police officers working in the force and 80 PCSOs working across the county.
- The Police and Crime Commissioner had committed to delivering neighbourhood policing, roads policing team and rural crime team.

One Member raised concern over the lack of PCSO presence in Bourne and that this adds to the recent issues relating to break-ins, vandalisms, thefts and commercial burglaries.

The Chief Inspector highlighted that in 2019, he had lost two inspectors and five sergeants posts which had impacted on the ability to police in South Kesteven. This was necessary as part of the policing budget.

The Vice- Chairman requested that a representative of the police force attends Parish Council meetings when necessary. It was confirmed that PCSOs could attend meetings where there was a specific issue that needed to be addressed.

One Member requested more visible police presence in Stamford in order to be more preventative and proactive for people coming into Stamford from Peterborough and surrounding areas to commit crimes.

A query was raised on whether there had been a domestic uplift in domestic heating oil theft and the recommendations around prevention to minimise the risk.

It was confirmed that the police had not seen a significant increase in the number of oil theft in Lincolnshire, however, there had been an increase across the broader region. Preventative physical measures that could be followed by rural businesses could be CCTV, lighting, location of tanks and security of access points. There had been a significant increase in the theft of horse boxes and flatbed trailers.

The Community Safety Lead provided the Committee with a presentation that outlined neighbourhoods and CCTV within the Council. The responsibilities of the neighbourhoods, public protection team consisted of:

- Anti-social behaviour (ASB) including vehicle ASB
- Noise complaints including noisy animals
- Neighbour disputes
- Untidy garden/land
- Pests
- Abandoned vehicles
- Fly tipping and other waste offences
- Graffiti
- Littering and dog fouling

- Parking enforcement within Council owned car parks.

The CCTV scheme provides coverage of retail, commercial, residential, recreational, car parks and open space areas located in South Kesteven. The purpose of the scheme was to help provide a safe public environment for the benefit of those people who live, work, trade, visit, service and enjoy the facilities of the town centres. It was highlighted that 197 CCTV cameras throughout the District, which were operation 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

The partnership working between the police and the Council were provided to the Committee.

One Member raised a query regarding 2 jobs that involved car park enforcement as part of their remits and whether these were the only employees who patrol the Council owner car parks. A further issue was raised in relation to Stamford bus station being used as a car park and disrupting the ability for buses to park in designated spaces.

A request was made for the neighbouring team to attend Stamford Meadows to give out litter fines to offenders.

The Community Safety Lead confirmed that one officer in the team completed car park enforcements on a full-time basis and another office was part-time. It was highlighted that staffing was sufficient. Stamford bus station was owned by South Kesteven District Council; however, it was not on the Car Parking Order.

One Member raised further queries:

- Why the Council were not using protection orders and community protection warnings as much as North Kesteven District Council were.
- How many CCTV cameras were constantly monitored in real time due to several being internal.
- What the legal position was around authorising and issuing littering fines.
- Whether the CCTV email address was monitored 24 hours a day.

The Community Safety Lead confirmed that the email was monitored 24 hours a day but should not be utilised instead of calling the police. A community protection warning had to be issued before a community protection notice can be issued and the Council and the police had the powers to issue them.

It was highlighted that 130 CCTV cameras were constantly monitored and there were 62 cameras within the Council's premises, which are only monitored if an issue arises. An authorised officer of the Council would be able to issue littering fines.

A Member highlighted the struggle of getting through to an operator through the Customer Service number provided.

61. Regulatory compliance

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property introduced the progress report on the Council's full recovery of compliance with the regulator of the Social Housing Home Standard.

The Council's Chief Executive, Director for Housing and Property and the Assistant Director for Housing had continued monthly meetings with the regulator. Compliance meetings were also being held with the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Housing Property.

The charts set out in the appendix in the report outlined changes within the performance and measures to ensure high compliance percentages could be met.

It was highlighted that good practice suggested that landlords should undertake a comprehensive stock condition survey every five years.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property confirmed that tenant's involvement was progressing, and two workshops had taken place. The 'Rant and Rave' system had also been launched for tenants to provide feedback and events with officers were in place.

The Chairman raised a query on the number of tenants responses.

The Director of Housing and Property confirmed that out of 6000 tenants in South Kesteven, 12.84% had responded to the Big Listen survey, which had doubled to 25%.

One Member raised queries in regard to access to properties with achievement dates of April 2022:

- Whether legal action had been taken on inaccessible properties for electrical testing.
- Whether the remaining 8 properties had been accessed for legionella testing.
- Why there had been a reduction in asbestos compliance testing since February.

The Director for Housing and Property confirmed that 10% of properties had issues with access for electrical testing due to reasons around covid, vulnerability, illness, or refusal. Three notices had been served at present and further action would be taken where necessary.

It was confirmed that the legionella testing had seen an increase of 8 properties and where water supply was shared, which would trigger the Council's landlord responsibility. The legionella test had now been completed and the Council was awaiting confirmation paperwork.

The Committee was reassured that all contractors and the Council's colleagues were completing inspections and assessments where a high risk action is identified and notify the team immediately.

The Director for Housing and Property highlighted some figures set out in the report:

- That gas figures had moved on significantly since the previous month, 23 non-compliant properties were down to 3.
- Asbestos reinspection's baseline figure changing with a completion date of 10 June 2022. New asbestos surveys had been ordered.
- Fire risk assessments were all complete, so would change from amber to green.
- Lift inspections were back to 100% compliance.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property highlighted that tenant's engagement was going well. The Council were currently in communication with Manor Court in Bourne to address their concerns and discuss ownership of gardens at a public meeting for the tenants.

It was noted that the other sheltered housing schemes were due to receive tenant engagement.

One Member raised a query in relation to the Council's position with homelessness.

The Director for Housing and Property confirmed that the Council have a working partnership with Change4lincs, which has had success in regard to rough sleepers. The Allocation Policy would be coming to the Committee for review in due course.

The Committee were informed of the future funding of the government's initiative on homelessness. The Council had submitted a bid for the funding, which was being considered. Informal feedback stated that the Council had provided a strong application for the bid.

It was confirmed that following a rough sleeper count, only 1 rough sleeper had been identified. The rough sleeper count is based on a physical count and information provided from other agencies.

A query was raised on where the rough sleeper would be housed.

The Director for Housing and Property confirmed that it would depend on the individuals' circumstances. The Council aim to find accommodation that would be sustainable and meets the needs of the individual.

AGREED:

- 1. That the Committee notes the latest compliance position following the ongoing meetings with the Regulator of Social Housing.**
- 2. That the Committee receives a further update report at its next scheduled meeting.**

62. Tenant Grounds Maintenance consultation, including Assisted Garden Scheme

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property presented the information report that provided an insight into the Grounds Maintenance specification for the Housing Revenue Account communal land. It also provided an overview of the number of tenants currently utilising the scheme.

The report provided a detailed breakdown of the service to be delivered in the financial year of 2022-23. The cost to the Housing Revenue Account of £153,700 was provided.

Figures set out in the report were provided to the Committee:

- That 501 tenants were currently using the scheme.
- 114 tenants were using the service for grass cutting only at a cost of £7.87 per week.
- 264 tenants required grass and hedge cutting at a cost of £9.42 per week.
- 123 tenants were using the service for hedge cutting only at a cost of £1.55 per week.

The service was currently being delivered at a flat rate, regardless of the size of garden or hedge. The Council were seeking to address this in the future.

It was noted that there was a future option for this service becoming chargeable.

It was confirmed that the grounds maintenance inspectorate was being improved.

A query was raised on when the costings for the scheme would be available.

The Assistant Director for Housing confirmed that the costings per property around the assisted garden scheme were available at present.

A recharges policy would be coming to the Committee in June/July 2022 which would need to be agreed by Cabinet to enable the levying of charges to tenants on a pro-rata scheme where the charges would be built up over the next two years from a 50% charge up to a 100% charge.

Additional work had been undertaken to grade the size of the gardens (small, medium and large) so the charges could be more equitable.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property confirmed that 41% of tenants utilising the assisted garden scheme had assisted living expenses by benefits.

One Member reminded Members that the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee unanimously rejected any charges to be made to tenants. It was suggested that the charges were inappropriate due to the increase of inflation.

Clarification was sought on the table (1.6) set out in the report and whether they were costs to the tenant or costs to the Council.

It was confirmed that the table outlined costs to the Council.

One Member highlighted a previous issue relating to the terminology of overall costs to the Council, due to the services being provided by Environment SK Ltd.

A query was raised on the average cost of the work that is undertaken per hour and how many hours per cut had been allocated to establish the charge price and what charges were being made for overheads and profit to Environment SK Ltd.

The Assistant Director for Housing confirmed that work was being undertaken later in 2022 around the grounds maintenance contract and would form part of a specification to tender for works.

A Member highlighted the inconceivability of the Council accepting charges from Environment SK Ltd without having the basis of charges defined.

The Director for Housing and Property notified the Committee that benchmarking had been completed with other districts in relation to the hourly cut rate from Environment SK Ltd. It was confirmed that the hourly rate from the Council was similar to other authorities.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property noted that he was the Director for Environment SK Ltd for two months to assist during a transition.

It was confirmed that the cost of profit on Housing Revenue Account services was 10%.

A query was raised on whether the service was to be requested verbally by the resident and whether the Council had any influence over gardens that were not kept tidy.

The Director for Housing and Property highlighted that within the scheme, an untidy garden would be a breach of tenancy. Some landlords had a criterion for a resident to be eligible for assisted garden scheme e.g., old age or disability.

It was clarified that residents that receive income related benefits may decide to spend their benefits on the chargeable assisted gardens scheme.

AGREED:

- 1. Notes the specification to be delivered to HRA Communal Areas and total cost**
- 2. Notes the numbers utilising the Assisted Garden Scheme**

63. Update on Voids

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property presented the report that provided assurance that positive progress was being made with the management of void properties within the Housing Revenue Account since the adoption of the Voids Policy.

In 2021, the Council completed works and re-let 327 Void properties, which was an average of 83.5 days; meaning the team turned around one every day for a whole calendar year, excluding bank holidays.

It was highlighted that the amount of household goods left behind by tenants had improved.

The performance targets for 2022/23 were in line with the corporate priorities. A stretch target was set to improve the void turnaround times by over 25%, to 60 days which would place the Council in the top quartile performance bracket utilising 2021/22 Housemark data.

One Member suggested that the carpet in re-let properties be treated rather than replaced to save time, money and waste in relation to climate change.

A query was raised on why the Voids had not been broken down into 'major and minor' categories as seen in a previous report.

It was noted that the void rent loss in 2021 had doubled.

The Assistant Director for Housing clarified points made:

- That exceptions would be made regarding the re-let standard and inspection regime in relation to carpets. They would not be removed if they were in good condition and of neutral colour. The carpets are predominantly removed to inspect the condition of the floor underneath.
- The void rent loss for 2021 was caveated around the Council's data and that data had historically been excluded.
- That void days were preferred to manage as one holistic number rather than broken down into categories.
- The quality of data would be consistent and transparent moving forward.

AGREED:

- 1. Notes the year end void turnaround performance of 83.46 days**

2. Notes the 2022/23 void turnaround performance target of 60 days for 2022/23

64. Queen's Jubilee

The Deputy Chief Executive presented the report which outlined a snapshot of events taking place throughout the district to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

Communities were encouraged to participate and engage with the Council to publicise events/activities.

One Member highlighted that the community in Stamford would be 'planting a tree for the Jubilee' at the recreational ground on the 2 June 2022, as encouraged by the Royal Family.

Another Member reminded the Committee of activities taking place in Bourne, co-ordinated by Bourne Town Council. Activities were due to take place at Elsea Park, village of Dyke.

It was suggested that photos of the public are used within the commemorative version of SK Today, to show the communities celebrating the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

A query was raised on whether the Grantham Charter Trustee had been contacted regarding activities.

The Deputy Chief Executive would check as to whether they had been contacted or not.

The Chairman noted that there was also a special afternoon tea taking place in Grantham on the 2 June.

The Deputy Chief Executive reminded the Committee that the report was a snapshot and was not comprehensive.

One Member expressed disappointment on the table of events set out in the report. It was suggested that an accurate itinerary of events throughout the district could be displayed on the Council's website.

The Vice-Chairman highlighted that an event such as the Queen's Jubilee was an ongoing programme of liaising with Parish Councils and the communities.

AGREED:

1. Notes the activity and events planned both by South Kesteven District Council and the community to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

2. Thanks all those involved in organising events to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, embracing national pride and the spirit of South Kesteven communities.

65. Community Awards 2021/22

The Senior Community Development Officer provided the Committee with a presentation that highlighted feedback from a working group that met on the 2 March 2022 to discuss lessons learnt from the Community Awards in 2021.

The lessons learned from the Community Awards in 2021 were outlined:

- Early planning to ensure smooth process
- Launching in Volunteers Week (1 to 7 June)
- Dedicated web page on SKDC website
- On-line nomination form
- Clear criteria for eligibility of nominees
- Six-week nomination period
- Agreed criteria for judging of nominations received
- Comms interaction with winners and positive PR.

Further options that were considered as part of the Community Awards 2021:

- All nominees must operate within South Kesteven
- Elected Members could not judge a group they were connected to or have personal interest in
- Nominee must carry out voluntary service that benefits others within the community
- Nominations could not be for individuals, groups or businesses that operate for personal gain
- What made the nominee stand out.

Nominations were not considered that were:

- Made in support of a lobbying group
- Made in support of a political group/party
- Made in relation to religious activities
- Made relating to individuals or group that did not operate within South Kesteven for the benefit of those within the District.

Areas for improvement within the 2021 Community Awards related to:

- Non-electronic nomination processes
- Publicity needing to feature individuals nominated rather than representatives of SKDC
- Too many similar categories and categories were chosen to match with Cabinet portfolios

- Early distribution of certificates and publicity photographs of winners led to leaks to press and social media
- More outlets needed for promotion of Awards to include under-reached communities.

It was confirmed that the public nomination categories had been changed for the 2022 Community Awards:

- Business and the Community
- Inspirational Young Person (nominees up to the age of 25)
- Best School's Green Project
- Good Neighbour
- Lifetime Community Champion
- Health and Wellbeing
- Neil Smith – Beyond the Call of Duty

It was confirmed that preparations were undergoing for the Community Awards which would be launched during Volunteers Week (1 – 7 June), with a celebratory event which will take place on the 21 October 2022 to honour the nominees and winners.

A query was raised on reason that hard-to-reach communities did not come forward for nominations or whether they were unaware of the Community Awards.

It was highlighted that the Council only work with the nominees that are provided by the public. The information was publicised, but the covid pandemic restricted the Council slightly, however, more work could be done in 2022.

It was suggested that Members could encourage the public to put forward nominations.

The Senior Community Development Officer had completed direct work with the Jubilee Church in Grantham due to being the recipients of support from local businesses that could have been nominated.

One Member suggested on separating one category into two: 'Best School Project' and 'Environmental Project'.

Clarification was sought over the judging panel for 2022.

It was suggested that the judging panel would be a combination of elected members, officers, and previous winners of the Community Awards. The Council was also seeking sponsors for the event, who would be invited onto the panel.

It was noted that the possibility of Community Awards winners from 2021 judging for 2022 would allow a celebration for them, as well as deciding the winners for 2022.

The Senior Community Development Officer confirmed that all winners from 2021 were invited to the Chairman's lunch.

A query was raised on whether a 'runners-up certificate' could be considered for the 2022 Community Awards.

It was confirmed that a 'certificate of acknowledgement' was sent to all nominees. The possibility of a 'runners-up certificate' would be worked on for the finalists.

ACTION:

For the Senior Community Development Officer to explore the Community Award categories and consider breaking down one category into two: 'Best School Project' and 'Environmental Project'.

AGREED:

- 1. Present feedback from the working group on 2021 SK Community Awards and share information on the lessons learned**
- 2. Allow Members to consider whether there are further actions required in relation to the plans for the SK Community Awards 2022 and accompanying celebratory event.**
- 3. Enable Members to request routine progress updates for future Committee dates.**

66. SK Community Fund

The Senior Community Development Officer presented the report which requested the Committee to recommend to Cabinet amendments to the criteria of the small grants scheme of the SK Community Fund.

In SK Community Funding scheme, groups were able to apply for 100% of project funding up to a maximum of £2000.

The request to change criteria was to prevent groups and organisations who had considerable financial resources from utilising the scheme. Groups that hold financial resources of £10,000 and above would become ineligible to apply to the small grant scheme. These groups would still be eligible to apply for funding to the SK Community Fund for a Community Event or Community Project.

The other criteria change would be to reduce the minimum grant within the small grant scheme from £500 to £200. The request was in response to the removal of the Ward Member grant scheme in an effect to minimise impact on small groups.

Members supported the report and the recommendations outlined.

It was proposed, seconded, and **AGREED** that the Committee recommends to Cabinet the changes to the eligibility criteria for the Small Grants Scheme of the SK Community Fund.

67. Work Programme 2021 - 2022

The Committee noted the Work Programme for 2021-22.

The Chairman requested Committee Members to recommend items to discuss at future meetings.

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

There were none.

69. Close of meeting

The Chairman closed the meeting at 17:10.