

Minutes

Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 5 October 2022, 2.00 pm

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



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Committee Members present

Councillor Sarah Trotter (Chairman)
Councillor Barry Dobson (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Richard Cleaver
Councillor Richard Dixon-Warren
Councillor Hilary Westropp
Councillor Ray Wootten
Councillor Virginia Moran

Cabinet Members present

Councillor Annie Mason (Cabinet Member for People & Safer Communities)
Councillor Robert Reid (Cabinet Member for Housing & Property)
Councillor Linda Wootten (Cabinet Member for Governance & Licensing)

Other Members present

Councillor Harish Bisnauthsing
Councillor Ashley Baxter

Officers

Alan Robinson (Deputy Chief Executive)
Craig Spence (Assistant Director of Housing)
Claire Moses (Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Service)
James Welbourn (Democratic Services Manager)
Amy Pryde (Democratic Services Officer)

14. Public Speaking

Councillor Ashley Baxter noted that he had submitted a question relating to a comment made at a recent Full Council meeting. Councillor Ashley Baxter accepted Officer advice that the question did not fall under the remit of this Committee and therefore, did not proceed to ask it.

15. Apologies for absence

All Committee Members were present.

Councillor Virginia Moran filled the Alliance SK vacancy for this meeting.

16. Disclosure of Interest

There were none.

17. Minutes from the meeting held on 23 June 2022

Members considered the minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2022. It was proposed, seconded, and **AGREED** that the minutes were a true and accurate record.

18. Minutes from the Joint Meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 27 June 2022

Members considered the minutes of the Joint meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 27 June 2022. It was proposed, seconded, and **AGREED** that the minutes were a true and accurate record.

19. Updates from the previous meeting

The Chairman provided an update on the action relating to the lack of attendance from PCSO's and representatives of Lincolnshire Police at Parish Council meetings.

There had been a new team leading the Police locally, who wanted to seek a process of engagement and were recruiting 7 more PCSO's for the area.

It was confirmed that PCSO's would aim to attend Parish Council meetings at least once a year to discuss local issues or would provide regular reports specific to each Parish Council in relation to crime.

ACTION: For the Chairman to circulate email addresses to the Committee of the new team/Senior Officers leading the Police locally.

One Member requested a Crime Disorder meeting to be scheduled at a future Committee meeting for the Police to provide an update.

It was queried as to what the best contactable number for the Police on a Friday and Saturday evening would be.

The Chairman confirmed that dialling '101' would divert to an operative, however, this would be queried with the Policing team.

ACTION: For Councillors Richard Cleaver and Harish Bisnauthsing to be forwarded the email in relation to Fuel Poverty Data.

The action relating to 'Homes for Ukraine Scheme' was ongoing. The Assistant Director of Housing highlighted several works undertaken in the South of the District in terms of fundraising for local Ukrainians:

- Fundraising for local Ukrainians via a music concert
- Ukraine Peace Walk attended by hundreds
- Alternate Friday meet ups at Christ Church ('the Friday thing')
- Quarterly Food share at Christ Church (international Culture feast)

Further updates would be provided to the Committee in due course.

One Member requested a progress update on the Grounds Maintenance Contract that had previously been discussed at the Joint meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Rural & Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

A concern was raised regarding the 'Homes for Ukraine Scheme' and that placements were for 6 months only. An update was requested in terms of Ukrainians living in the District that had come to the end of their placement.

ACTION: For an update on Ukrainians living in the District that had come to the end of their 6 month placement.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property informed the Committee a Grounds Maintenance Option meeting was scheduled within the next week for 3 options to be considered and an update would be provided to the Committee.

A further query was raised on the outcome of the decision made at the Joint meeting and where the minutes from Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Rural & Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be reported to in the future.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the minutes of the Joint meeting had been approved earlier in the meeting. It was confirmed that a 'next steps' report regarding Grounds Maintenance would be brought to Committee in due course.

20. Announcements or updates from the Leader of the Council, Cabinet Members or the Head of Paid Service

There were none.

21. Housing Regulatory Compliance Update

The Cabinet Member of Housing and Property introduced the report around landlord health and safety issues. It was confirmed that the Chief Executive, Director and Assistant Director of Housing, Cabinet Member and the Leader of the Council had continued to hold regular meetings.

A further 'All Member's Briefing' for housing was due to be arranged to ensure all Member's were updated with key areas: Housing Revenue Account Business Plan, Progress on Digital Housing Management System and collective communication with Member's with housing enquiries service.

The report outlined changes within the performance and measures on moving them to high compliance percentages. The Council continued to work with tenants, and occasionally tenants do not cooperate in relation to gas and electrical inspections in their homes.

The Head of Housing Services was due to provide a working list for each Member of the Council to see if they can assist by communicating with tenants that are not allowing the Council's representatives to enter their homes.

The Assistant Director of Housing provided the Committee with the compliance figures as of the end of October:

- Legionella performance was still at 100%.
- Gas compliance had slightly improved to 99.66%, with 16 properties being non-compliant.
- Electrical safety had increased to 86.68% compliance.
- Asbestos, fire risk assessments and lifts all remained at 100% compliance.

The Assistant Director of Housing confirmed that the team were in the process of scoping an external audit to be undertaken on the Council to verify the position to report to the Regulator of Social Housing. This should hopefully then result in a sign off from the regulatory notice.

One Member raised a query in relation to properties where warrants had previously been issued and whether the warrants had now been executed.

It was confirmed that the 17 warrants that were listed for court in August 2022 had not been called into court on that date, they were therefore carried forward. Access was gained through tenant engagement on the Council's behalf. The Council continued to go through the court warrant system regarding gas compliance.

The Assistant Director of Housing highlighted that there were 16 warrants outstanding at the end of August 2022. Therefore, 4613 gas safety checks had been completed in the last 12 months.

It was queried as to whether there had been sight of the Health Safety Executive (HSE) reports following safety breaches at Riverside, Grantham.

The Assistant Director of Housing noted that the Council had been in constant communication with the HSE and had not yet received the reports in question. The Council escalated this within the HSE, assurance had been provided by HSE that they would be in communication by the end of October 2022.

The Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council had jointly written to the HSE to express the Council's concern as to why the reports had not been received. An acknowledgement from the HSE was received in October 2022, including that contact would be made by the end of October 2022.

A query was raised on the expected timescale for the Council to be signed off from the Regulator of Social Housing.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property confirmed that the Director of Housing and Property was working on the procurement for the final external audit. Once completed, the Regulator of Social Housing would receive and review the audit and should sign the Council off from Regulator of Social Housing.

Members compared compliance special measures figures to current compliance figures and congratulated the team on their hard work.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property stated that Officers had already tried to knock on doors of non-compliant tenants regarding gas and electrical. It was highlighted that non-compliant tenants may trust their Ward Members.

The Chairman suggested posting a 'calling card' with the Ward Members details for non-compliant tenants who were not present at their property.

One Member suggested whether Ward Members could receive notifications of non-compliant tenants in their Ward.

It was confirmed that members of the Working Party had designated areas of the District and would focus on their non-compliant tenants.

One Member requested a written update on the outcome of the Housing Working Group meeting that took place on 5 October 2022.

The Cabinet Member of Housing and Property highlighted that the Working Group assisted with streamlining communication with tenants on a one-to-one basis.

A mechanism was discussed where individual housing enquiry outcomes would be forwarded onto all relevant Officers and Members to avoid duplication of issues raised.

The Workgroup Group had considered:

- Member contact and challenging customers
- Member enquiries and complaints
- Compliance Update
- Voids and turnaround times
- Digital Housing Management System
- 'Big Listen' Update
- Earlesfield project

It was clarified that the Working Group would establish a visiting slot for other Members to attend and highlight any issues.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property invited Councillor Ashley Baxter to the next Working Group meeting.

ACTION: For the Working Group update to be included within the Housing Regulatory Compliance Update agenda item at future Rural & Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Further clarification was sought around the timeframe that the Council would become out of special measures with the Social Housing Regulator.

The Assistant Director of Housing confirmed that the Audit would be commenced in November 2022, with the report to be received by late November 2022. It was estimated that the report would be supplied to the Social Housing Regulator in December 2022. The timeframe would depend on the time it takes the Regulator to sign off the regulatory notice however, the Council's goal was January 2023.

That Committee:

- 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.**

22. Cost of Living Strategy

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities introduced the report that outlined the concerning cost of living crisis for residents and businesses across the District.

The cost of living strategic working group was created in August 2022 and supported by Senior Managers in key areas: Community Engagement, Communications, Economic Development, Finance, Housing and Revenues and Benefits. The working group meets on a weekly basis.

A cost of living information and advice Hub had been created as part of earlier working group meetings and is included on the home page of the Council's website.

Residents that did not have access to the internet were being considered as part of the working groups action plan, along with ways in which these residents could be reached. It was suggested that this may be through Parish and Town Councils networks.

A cross-partner approach to the cost of living had been undergoing, which included an internal strategic working group (Cabinet Member and Senior Management). In addition, an external strategic task force had been developed for collaborative working.

Crisis Support Events were due to be held across the District.

Members welcomed the report.

It was queried what happened to residents who did not meet the criteria to receive benefits. It was further questioned, how residents with language barriers would be communicated with.

The Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Service recognised that residents who did not meet criteria had been recognised throughout 2022/23 and additional support had been provided. District network meetings with Lincolnshire County Council were due to take place to discuss how 'hard to reach' residents could be contacted and whether there was funding available.

It was suggested that Parish Councils assist with communication residents that are 'hard to reach'.

It was confirmed that Department of Working Pensions and Citizens Advice assist with residents who do not speak English.

One Member queried whether the funds had to be claimed or are automatically sent.

The Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Service highlighted those where an application process is in place. Statutory benefits were means tested and an application form was required. The £150 Council Tax energy rebate required no application form, the guidance had been established and provided by Central Government. The Household Support Fund was assessed on an income and expenditure level; therefore, an application was required.

It was queried as to whether there was a time limit on providing funds to eligible residents.

It was confirmed that the Council Tax energy rebate (mandatory scheme) had ended on 30 September 2022 and 99.8% of people within the District had received their payment. The people that had not received their payment, was as a result of their voucher not being redeemed. The Discretionary Scheme was in payment until 30 November 2022. Household Support Fund (new fund) had been announced with effect on 1 October 2022 – 31 March 2023.

Clarification was sought on the difference between the Task Force and the Strategic Working Group.

The Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Service clarified that the Strategic Working Group was the internal group, chaired by Councillor Annie Mason with Officers from each service area. The external working group had been renamed to Task Force.

The Cabinet Member of Housing and Property suggested that a table could be published in newspapers for individuals who do not have access to IT to communicate with them regarding the cost of living and the benefits available.

It was further noted that a table regarding the cost of living and the benefits available could be published in December 2022 version of SK Today, this would be explored.

It was questioned whether Citizens Advice Bureau and Samaritans were involved with the working group meetings.

The working group meetings were working alongside Citizens Advice Bureau. It was confirmed that Samaritans would be contacted to be included within future meetings.

One Member suggested a leaflet campaign to ensure tenants with no access to the internet were communicated with.

An action put forward by the Strategic Working Group had been to include information within the Council Tax Annual Bill next year. If any resident receives a reminder letter for their Council Tax, a leaflet may be included on this matter.

One Member highlighted a website called 'Entitled To' which could be accessed via the government's website. The website can be utilised to establish what benefits an individual could be entitled to.

The Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Service noted that a link to 'Entitled To' could also be found on the Council's cost of living website.

Another Member emphasised the need to dispatch leaflets on this matter. It was suggested to save costs, that leaflets are only sent to households within maps of multiple deprivation indices.

Concern was raised on Citizens Advice Bureau in Stamford and the lack of provision and help from Stamford Town Council. It was queried whether any funds could be put towards supporting staff at Citizens Advice Bureau in Stamford.

Clarification was sought around figures on appendix one.

The Cabinet Member for People & Safer Communities noted that the communication needed to be improved by all organisations to the 'hard to reach' residents.

Citizens Advice Bureau receive funding from South Kesteven District Council, as well as Lincolnshire County Council.

The Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Service clarified that the £262,900 within appendix one was for the £110 per pensioner, 2390 pensioners were in receipt of pension credit. This requirement was from the Department for Work and Pensions who had provided the funding.

The Council had supported an additional 622 households, who had received voucher values of either £100 for adult households or £200 for households with children.

One Member queried how the households receiving £100 or £200 should be claimed.

It was confirmed that applications were through referral from Citizens Advice Bureau or internal teams within the Council. The resident would be required to complete an income and expenditure form.

One Member highlighted that it would be useful to receive a list of attendees to establish who is part of the Strategic Working Group and the Task Force.

ACTION: For the Committee to receive a list of attendees to establish who is part of the Strategic Working Group and the Task Force.

It was queried as to whether any representative of the Task Force had knowledge of education, health, locations across the District and equality and diversity.

The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that a representative from Citizens Advice Bureau was part of the Task Force.

One Member suggested that a representative from 'Christians against Poverty' be included within the Task Force.

It was queried as to who was in control of people attending the Task Force and who decides on how many politicians are present.

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities highlighted that the internal Strategic Working Group and the Task Force were not based around politics. The Member currently part of the groups was Councillor Annie Mason, the attendance was due to be widened.

One Member suggested television adverts or radio broadcasts could be used to reach out to tenants in the colder months.

It was proposed, seconded, **and AGREED** that the Committee:

- 1. Notes the support that has been provided so far to residents and businesses, as detailed in Appendix 1;**
- 2. Supports the establishment of a Strategic Working Group and Taskforce;**
- 3. Notes the actions to be taken as detailed in Appendix 2.**

23. Communication with tenants across the Council

The Cabinet Member of Housing and Property introduced the report that outlined communication with tenants across the Council.

It was confirmed that 'The Big Listen Survey' had taken place, where a good response rate was received from 1723 tenants and the overall satisfaction was 72%. The feedback from the survey was under review and issues raised were being addressed.

The transactional satisfaction system, 'Rant and Rave' was also in operation. The current performance satisfaction was 4.5 out of 5, from 547 completed surveys.

Further events and engagement were to be arranged. The Housing Working Group were hoping to incorporate tenant's liaison to strengthen communication between tenants and landlord.

Skyline is an effective publication for updating all tenants and providing satisfaction including compliance updates and landlord performance. It was suggested that the 'Entitled To' website be included in the next publication to benefit housing tenants to access and utilise.

The Housing Management System was due to go live in April 2023. The system would be more transparent and easier to manage. It was noted that another system for corporate assets would be explored to work in conjunction with the new Housing Management System in the future.

Members congratulated the team for their engagement with tenants.

It was queried as to why an engagement session at Greyfriars, Grantham had not taken place.

The Assistant Director of Housing confirmed that the session was due to be scheduled.

Concern was raised regarding repairs of external doors at Manners Street, Grantham. It was further confirmed that this issue would be addressed urgently.

It was queried as to why the Skyline reports for summer 2022 were not available on the Council's website.

One Member suggested that the resident satisfaction survey be repeated. It was noted that 1/3 of tenants who had received repair or maintenance works from the

Council were unsatisfied with the service, therefore, the satisfaction targets were requested.

The Assistant Director for Housing highlighted that the Skyline reports were requested at the time of publication to be uploaded to the website, however, would be investigated.

It was confirmed that satisfaction surveys were scheduled to be repeated once every two years to monitor progress and to measure improvements.

The Regulator for Social Housing had relaunched their 12 satisfaction measures (standard questions) which were included in a survey, which are to be completed every year.

It was noted that the Skyline report results did not match the 'Rant and Rave' feedback from completed repairs. The Council had undertaken works with unsatisfied tenants, it was highlighted that the dissatisfaction had been around waiting times for repairs. It was confirmed that the goal for total customer satisfaction would be 75%-80%.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property thanked colleagues in the Repairs and Improvements Team.

It was suggested that time measures for repairs be put into place to distinguish timeframes for competition of kitchens bathrooms or building works. The Housing Management System would provide this feature.

Clarification was sought on the dissatisfaction figures.

Hard copies of the Skyline reports were available at the meeting.

That the Committee:

1. Notes the contents of this report and the progress made by the Housing and Property directorate to improve and embed the importance of communication to our tenants in line with the Social Housing White Paper.

24. Work Programme 2022-2023

The Committee noted the Work Programme 2022-2023.

The Committee agreed that the Progress report on Housing Allocation Policy and Choice based lettings would be moved to the Committee meeting taking place on 9 February 2023.

One Member requested items for future meetings be included on the Work Programme:

- Update on anti-social behaviour and community safety.
- Update on Cost-of-Living task groups.
- Effectiveness of affordable housing.
- Update on Voids
- Grounds Maintenance
- 'Change4Lincs' Update
- Homes for Ukraine Scheme update

It was suggested that a briefing session be held for the Committee relating to Primary Care Networks.

The Assistant Director of Housing confirmed that the report on effectiveness on policies of affordable housing was a Planning matter. This would be discussed following the meeting.

A query was raised on whether there would be any further update on the 'Homes for Ukraine Scheme'.

Clarification was sought regarding the Joint meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee and when Grounds Maintenance would be discussed further.

The Deputy Chief Executive highlighted that Grounds Maintenance should be added to the Work Programme to be scheduled in the future and should be discussed once a meeting had been confirmed.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property confirmed a meeting had been scheduled for 'Change4Lincs' on 13 October 2022.

It was requested that an update on 'Change4Lincs' and Capital Programme – Heating be added to the Work Programme for the meeting on 8 December 2022.

It was requested that the HRA Business Plan be added to the Work Programme for the meeting on 9 February 2022.

The Assistant Director of Housing noted that an update on 'Homes for Ukraine Scheme' had been heard at the previous Committee meeting.

It was confirmed the Council had 153 families in the District that were part of the 'Homes for Ukraine Scheme'.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property had previously attended a meeting for Bourne Town Council, where Ukrainian families, Town Councillors and a representative from Lincolnshire County Council were in attendance to discuss any problems the families had raised.

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

There were none.

26. Close of meeting

The Chairman closed the meeting at 16:15.

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