

Minutes

Cabinet

Tuesday, 13 December 2022



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

The Leader: Councillor Kelham Cooke, The Leader of the Council (Chairman)

The Deputy Leader: Councillor Adam Stokes, The Deputy Leader of the Council (Vice-Chairman)

Cabinet Members present

Councillor Robert Reid, Cabinet Member for Housing and Property

Councillor Rosemary Trollope-Bellew, Cabinet Member for Culture and Visitor Economy

Councillor Mark Whittington, Cabinet Member for Waste Services and Climate Change

Councillor Linda Wootten, Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Licensing

Non-Cabinet Members present

Councillor Helen Crawford

Officers

Karen Bradford, Chief Executive

Alan Robinson, Deputy Chief Executive (Monitoring Officer)

Nicola McCoy-Brown, Director of Growth and Culture

Richard Wyles, Chief Finance Officer (Section 151 Officer)

Anne-Marie Coulthard, Assistant Director of Operations and Public Protection

Chris Prime, Communications Manager

James Welbourn, Democratic Services Manager

Jordan Brooks, IT Help Desk Engineer

Gyles Teasdale, Senior Assets Officer

58. Register of attendance and apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Annie Mason and Councillor Nick Robins.

59. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 8 November 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

60. Disclosure of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

61. Council Tax Base 2023/24

Purpose of report

To recommend the Council Tax Base for the financial year 2023/2024.

Decision

That Cabinet recommended to Full Council the Council Tax Base for 2023/2024 of 49,329 in accordance with the relevant legislation. This would form the basis upon which the Council would estimate Council Tax Income for the 2023/2024 budget.

Alternative options considered and rejected

There were no other options considered – there was a requirement to set a Council Tax base.

Reason for decision

The recommendation would be used in the calculation and Budget preparations for 2023/2024 and was a key component of annual budgeting prescribed in legislation. The Budget report would be presented to Full Council at their meeting on 1 March 2023.

The Council Tax Base for parish purposes was based on the number of properties as at 12 September 2022 and the discounts and exemptions applicable on 3 October 2022. Adjustments were made to allow for the impact of the local Council Tax Support Scheme adopted by the Council, and the empty property premium, which allowed the Council to charge a premium of between 100% and 300%.

The proposed tax base for South Kesteven for 2023/2024 was 49,329 for Band D equivalents, an increase of 1.28% from 2022/2023.

Parish and Town Councils within the District had been contacted and the Band D equivalents for each Parish were documented at Appendix A of the report.

62. Local Council Tax Support Scheme

Purpose of report

This report reviewed the Council's Localised Council Tax Support Scheme in advance of the 2023/24 financial year, as well as proposals made in relation to the discount for care leavers, discount for Special Constables and the Discretionary Hardship Fund.

Decision

That Cabinet:

1. recommended to Council the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2023/24 which was based on the same overarching criteria as the current year scheme as detailed in paragraphs 2.14 to 2.22 of the report.
2. Included the continuation of the £20,000 Discretionary Payment fund for 2023/24 in their budget proposals.

Alternative options considered and rejected

Options considered were set out in the report and supporting appendices. The current scheme information was detailed in paragraphs 2.14 to 2.22 of this report.

Reason for decisions

Each year the Council were required to review their Council Tax Support Scheme to determine its sustainability and to consider any changes for the following financial year.

The original scheme came into effect on 1 April 2013 and provided for 80% entitlement to working age claimants.

Due to the protection provided to pensioners and vulnerable working age claimants there would also be an element of cost that the Council had to incur over which it had no influence. Any savings to be made to the proposed scheme could only be applied to the working age claimants, which were 20.79% of the caseload. Out of the current Council spend of £635,000, £135,000 could be influenced by a change to the current Scheme.

The Scheme was determined locally by the Council having undertaken consultation with precepting authorities, key stakeholders and residents. Consultation on a 'no change' scheme took place during October 2022; this was supported by 84% of respondents.

The Scheme had also been considered, and recommended to Cabinet by the Finance, Economic Development and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee (FEDCO) at their meeting held on 22 November 2022.

Members of Cabinet, in supporting the Scheme highlighted as positives the Council Tax exemptions for care leavers and Special Constables.

63. Theatre Roof Replacement Works Stamford Arts Centre

Purpose of report

This report set out the procurement process undertaken in respect of the roofing repairs at Stamford Arts Centre.

Decision

That Cabinet approved the contract award to Hardy Construction (Stamford) Ltd. to undertake essential maintenance works to the Stamford Arts Centre roof for the sum of £384,985.

Alternative options considered and rejected

Option 1 – consultation had been held with Welland Procurement and the Council's Procurement Lead to establish the most appropriate route of procurement. An open tender exercise was identified as the most appropriate route for the roof repair works to the Theatre roof at Stamford Arts Centre. This was an advertised process using the mandatory procurement portals. This process included no shortlisting and therefore, any interested bidder had the opportunity to submit a full tender. The criteria meant that the winning bidder would be the bidder with the highest evaluation score, based on 40% cost and 60% quality.

Option 2 – consideration had also been given to deferment of the Theatre roof replacement works to a future financial year. A survey was commissioned with William Saunders Partnership prior to commencement of the tender process to ascertain the existing condition of the roof following repairs. The report identified that the life expectancy of the roof was poor and in order to mitigate the risk associated with the roof condition, it was recommended that works to replace the roof covering should be undertaken.

Reason for decision

In 2021 when essential roofing work was undertaken at Stamford Arts Centre it was highlighted that there was further deterioration that had not been included in the original scope of works. The Collywestern slate roof covering required replacing due to wear and tear.

It was agreed that Hardy Construction (Stamford) Ltd were awarded the works contract based on their achievement of the highest overall evaluation score from the tender process. The tender process was conducted in accordance with the Council's Contract and Procurement Procedure Rules and the Public Contract Regulations 2015.

64. Contract Awards in relation to social landlord responsibilities

Purpose of report

The report outlined contracts awards for:

- A Choice Based Lettings system
- Residential windows and doors replacement
- Energy efficiency measures should a Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) bid be successful.

Decision

That Cabinet:

1. approve the award of a contract for Choice Based Lettings with Hume following compliant procurement. Contract period would be 4 years (3+1) with a value of circa £112,500.
2. approve the award of a contract for windows and doors with Nationwide following compliant procurement. Contract period would be 4 years (3+1) with a value of up to £6,000,000.
3. approve the award of a contract for energy efficiency measures with EON following compliant procurement. The contract period would be for 2 years 6 months, with a value of up to £8,000,000 dependent upon the outcome of a bid to the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund.

Alternative options considered and rejected

There were no other options available.

Reason for decisions

All of the contract awards had followed compliant procurement processes and would provide the Council with the appropriate contracts to aid the delivery on the Corporate Priority to provide “Housing that meets the needs of all residents.”

The Choice Based Letting system would help to ensure the best service to applicants and would give the widest possible choice. The standalone system was due to go live in quarter 2 of 2023.

The Council had the responsibility to provide doors and windows that provided security for residents with multi-locking systems, whilst also being in line with current environmental and energy efficient requirements. The contractor, Nationwide, was ranked as number one in the procurement framework used.

The outcome of the Council's bid into the SHDF would be announced in February 2023. The bid identified 333 properties for upgrades at a total value of £7,265,997 with 47% (£3,418,480) of this total to come from the grant application.

The contract awards would assist with the Council's housing budgets and provided good supplementary support to the housing stock. In addition, some fuel poverty would be addressed by the contract awards.

65. The Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy (vehicle age at first licence)

Purpose of report

At their meeting of 12 July 2022 Cabinet resolved to further review the vehicle age requirements for first licensing of hackney carriage and private hire vehicles.

Decision

That Cabinet review the South Kesteven District Council Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy ('the Policy') upon publication of the results of the Department for Transport's consultation on the revised Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing Best Practice Guidance for Licensing Authorities in England.

Alternative options considered and rejected

Other options that had been available to Cabinet included:

- Amending the Policy to alter or remove the current vehicle age criterion for newly licensed vehicles; and;
- Amending the Policy based on the draft best practice guidance, introducing an emissions-based criterion for newly licensed vehicles.

Reason for decision

The adoption of the South Kesteven District Council Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy was an executive function of the Council.

The Government had not yet published a response to the consultation and the current draft Best Practice may be subject to change.

All elements of the existing Policy would be reviewed in full following the publication of the revised Department for Transport Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing Best Practice Guidance for Licensing Authorities in England. Any changes made prior to the final guidance could have resulted in subsequent alterations to the same elements of the Policy.

Other points raised by the Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Licensing were as follows:

- The current Policy was approved by Cabinet on 12 January 2020. The Policy included conditions related to the age of vehicles at first licensing.
- In March 2022 the Department for Transport consulted on changes to Best Practice Guidance with vehicle licensing authorities. The consultation closed

in June 2022; however, the final guidance and the responses to the consultation had not yet been published.

- At the Cabinet meeting in July 2022 there was consideration given to a recommendation from the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee to urgently review the vehicle age at first licensing aspect of the Policy, paying special regard to the vehicle age five-year rule.
- The Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Licensing wrote to the government minister responsible, The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP on 28 July 2022 requesting an update on progress. A response was received on 27 October 2022 advising that the Department for Transport was progressing work as quickly as possible but that there was no specific date for the publication of the final guidance.
- Draft Best Practice Guidance acknowledges that most authorities have a Policy that focussed on the age of the vehicle.
- This report was initially due to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting in October but was delayed due to the pre-election period surrounding by-elections held around that time.

The following points were raised during discussion:

- The approval of taxi licences was an executive function of the Council, following best practice guidance produced by the Government.
- Comparisons and benchmarking against other local authorities had been carried out and was contained within the report.
- Grantham town centre was an air quality management area and was subjected to regular reporting on air quality. Vehicles were a major contributor to poor air quality, and taxis contributed to this as they spend a large proportion of time driving around the town centre. Two factors that could improve the air quality in Grantham, and the wider District were:
 - An air quality package would provide infrastructure to improve air quality in Grantham specifically; and;
 - Council policies would be updated to support low emission vehicles.

66. Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge - Progress Review

Purpose of report

To formally receive the Local Government Association's progress report following a six-month review that took place in September 2022 further to the Council's involvement in the Corporate Peer Challenge and consider adoption of an action plan to implement further improvements to service delivery.

Decision

That Cabinet;

1. Noted, and would promote when appropriate the content of the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Report, attached at Appendix A of the report.

2. Approved the Action Plan, attached at Appendix B.

Alternative options considered and rejected

Other options considered included noting the report and taking no further action, in addition to identifying any further areas for improvement for inclusion in the Action Plan.

Reason for decisions

The Council took part in the Local Government Peer Challenge between 16 and 18 November 2021. The Council adopted an Action Plan, setting out how the Authority intended to address each of the recommendations for improvement, whilst ensuring that necessary action was taken to address further improvements that could be made to service delivery, as highlighted in the report.

The progress review took place on 21 September 2022 with the Peer Review Panel meeting key Members and Officers of the Council. The Peer Review Panel were impressed with the scale of activity that had taken place since the commencement of the initial Corporate Peer Challenge. They also commended the engagement with the public and local businesses. Further highlights of the review included:

- The willingness to embrace a culture change through leadership involving openness and transparency;
- There was greater rigour and robustness evident through the substantial level of assurance provided by the internal auditors.
- There had been investment in organisational development and culture change through the People Strategy, with a range of activities and initiatives.
- There were areas for further improvement included within the Action Plan.

The following points were raised during discussion:

- Thanks were given to the Peer Review team.
- The Review highlighted positive practices and areas for improvement.
- It was important for all Members to engage with the #TeamSK culture, which promoted respect and addressed poor behaviours.
- Further guidance on a buddying system would be welcomed.

67. Finance Update Report: April - October 2022

Purpose of report

To inform Cabinet of the Council's forecast 2022/2023 financial position as at the end of October 2022. The report covered the following areas:

- General Fund Revenue Budget
- Housing Revenue Account Budget
- Capital Programmes – General Fund and Housing Revenue Account

Decision

That Cabinet reviewed and noted the forecast 2022/2023 outturn position for the General Fund and HRA Revenue and Capital budgets as at the end of October 2022.

Alternative options considered and rejected

This was an update report for noting only.

Reason for decision

Cabinet Members should be kept up to date on the financial position of the Authority, as effective budget management was critical to ensuring financial resources were spent in line with the Budget and were targeted towards the Council's priorities. Monitoring enabled the early identification of variations against the plan and facilitated timely corrective action.

This report provided an overview of the forecast 2022/23 financial position for the Council and focused on the position as at the end of October 2022.

The Deputy Leader of the Council highlighted the following items from within the report:

- Table 1 of the report contained General Fund Revenue Budget Amendments; in particular it was noted that there were three approvals from November 2022 related to the Inflation Reserve and the Local Priorities Reserve.
- Council approved a number of budget adjustments on 24 November 2022 which would fund the forecast overspends on electricity (£199k), fuel (£200k), and workshop (£280k). The budget adjustments reduced the overspend at net cost of service from £817k to £138k.
- Table 3 showed the significant forecast variances as part of the General Fund Revenue; the salary vacancy factor sum of £446k resulted from a reduction in vacant posts across the Council and increases in agency provision.
- Table 5 summarised the General Fund Capital forecast outturn position, which forecasted a £774k underspend.
- Section 6 of the report gave an update on the Housing Revenue Account revenue budget. The budgeted surplus was fully utilised to fund future investment in stock growth and property maintenance.
- Table 11 within the report shows a forecast underspend of £9.6 million.
- Since budgets were prepared last autumn and approved by Council in March 2022 there had been an unforeseen increase in inflation and energy costs. As part of the outturn report, an inflation reserve of £500k was created for the General Fund to absorb any potential cost pressures during the current financial year.
- The original budgeted price per litre for fuel was set at £1.10; however the latest bulk purchase unit price paid was £1.48. If the price of fuel continued to rise at the same rate for the remainder of the year there would be a pressure of circa £230k for the current financial year. The budget amendment of £200k

to increase the fuel budget allocation was approved by Full Council at their meeting held on 24 November 2022.

- The utility budget allocations for the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account were increased by Full Council at their meeting held on 24 November 2022 by £199k and £167k respectively.
- In 2023/2024 it was expected that the General Fund would have a projected increase of £1.247,500, and the Housing Revenue Account would have a projected increase of £795,300.
- The Financial Risk Register attached as Appendix E to the report was updated on a monthly basis to reflect all known risks.

The following points were raised during discussion:

- The financial management of the officers involved gave great confidence. It was clear that there were increased budgetary pressures; if these were excluded then the forecasted variances were minimal.
- Although repairs and improvements were required to some of the Council's housing stock, there had been an upturn in recruitment which would mean that the increased surplus on the Housing Revenue Account could be employed in 2023.
- The Council had contained costs pressures due to its reserves; it was positive to be able to make a net contribution to those reserves.
- It was positive to be able to provide a degree of social housing.
- Budget monitoring reports had been presented to the Finance, Economic Development and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 19 July and 22 September 2022.

68. Cabinet's Forward Plan

Cabinet noted its Forward Plan and were made aware that an updated plan had been made available following the dispatch of the agenda pack.

It was requested that an item on land transfers to parish councils was included on the Forward Plan for 7 February 2023.

Meeting closed at 2:47pm.