

Minutes

Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 16 March 2023, 14:00



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

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

Committee Members present

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

Councillor Harris Bisnauthsing
Councillor Richard Dixon-Warren
Councillor Penny Milnes
Councillor Hilary Westropp
Councillor Ray Wootten

Cabinet Members present

Councillor Annie Mason (Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities)
Councillor Linda Wootten (Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Licensing)

Officers

Nicola McCoy Brown (Director of Growth and Culture)
Craig Spence (Acting Director of Housing)
Anne-Marie Coulthard (Assistant Director of Operations and Public Protection)
Graham Watts (Assistant Director of Governance, Monitoring Officer)
Claire Moses (Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Service)
Carol Drury (Community Engagement Manager)
Amy Pryde (Democratic Services Officer)

Inspector Hillson, Lincolnshire Police

56. Public Speaking

There were none.

57. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Richard Cleaver and Councillor Robert Reid.

Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing substituted for Councillor Richard Cleaver.

58. Disclosure of Interest

There were none.

59. Minutes from the meeting held on 9 February 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2023 were proposed, seconded, and **AGREED** as a correct record.

60. Minutes from the Joint Meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 6 February 2023

The meeting from the Joint meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee were proposed, seconded, and **AGREED** as a correct record.

61. Updates from the previous meeting

The Acting Director of Housing provided responses to the following actions:

Action:	For the Acting Director of Housing to provide budgetary figures around Change4Lincs.
Status:	£32,318 spend on TA in Jan, £27,979 Spend on TA.
Action:	Tighter referral criteria have been implemented meaning that only exceptional cases are accommodated in temporary accommodation. Focus now is on supporting those at risk of rough sleeping with the aim of preventing them from being on the streets.
Status:	0
Outcome:	During Jan 2023 – Feb 2023 C4L had 12 different referrals for 'unknown'. Which was for 3 separate males, all known to the service. But all new to the service and not repeat presentations.
Action:	For the Head of Housing Services to provide the Committee with statistics around the age, gender, and ethnicity of rough sleepers.

Status:	Jan 2023 and Feb 2023 – 10 rough sleepers were located and verified.
Outcome:	9 Male, 1 Female, 9 White British, 1 Unknown ethnicity, Age range 35-59, the 1 Female was with one of the Males.
Action:	For the Head of Housing Services to provide the Committee with a figure on the number of rough sleepers that were veterans in the District

Status: 1 (South Holland)

One Member noted that individuals in Stamford had accommodation, however, had been seen begging.

The Inspector from Lincolnshire Police confirmed that begging was a legal offence and the individuals seen begging were in fact not homeless. The particular area in Stamford had been focused on and the force would act appropriately if the begging continued.

It was queried as to whether the individuals seen begging in Stamford were from within the District or further afield.

It was highlighted that some individuals travelled into Stamford to beg and did not originate from the local area.

Members requested contact details of local Police Officers of how begging could be reported.

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

The Leader of the Council provided a written update to the Committee:

Award nomination for SKDC

I am sure you have heard that South Kesteven District Council is in the running for a prestigious national award, having been shortlisted in the Most Improved Council category in the Local Government Chronicle Awards 2023.

These awards share best practice across the local government community, promoting and sharing work to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of local government services across the UK.

Simply being shortlisted for an award is recognition of the hard work and dedication, on a daily basis, of all the Offices striving to provide the best possible service to our residents and businesses, and we should all take pride in it.

Deepings Literary Festival

You may or may not be aware that this year's Deepings Literary Festival, on May 27th and 28th, is being supported by South Kesteven District Council with a £2,179 Community Fund grant.

This donation will help facilitate a book-themed weekend of activities specifically for young families, involving local children's authors and performers.

Preparations are well under way for this year's festival, where free activities will add to the high-quality educational opportunities already scheduled.

As usual, events will take place at the Deepings Library and Community Centre and other venues.

This is one of the first awards from our Community Fund for 2023/24 and we are looking forward to supporting many more throughout year.

If you would like to see if any groups you are involved with can apply, simply visit the South Kesteven District Council website and search for Community Fund.

Tourism Update

I was so pleased to see the statistics which point to the sector recovering well after COVID. In 2021 tourism contributed £168m to the SK economy, recovering from the £90m economic contribution during the pandemic lockdown and restrictions.

We are waiting for the 2022 figures, but it does very much show that the sector is bouncing back.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

You will know of course Council has £1 million available for community projects across the District through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

As you know the applications can now be made by town and parish councils, parish meetings, charter trustees and community groups to finance projects that deliver community improvements and build pride in place.

Please encourage any community groups to submit a bid if their project falls within one of the project categories: building improvements; green space and outdoor improvements; culture, arts and heritage and heritage initiatives and of course meets the project criteria.

Digital upgrade for CCTV

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is also helping to make our District a safer and more secure place. A £284,000 project will see ageing CCTV technology upgraded, with a digital line installed and existing analogue cameras replaced with digital equipment.

We will have much clearer imaging and better picture and video sharing capabilities, far superior to analogue, and the new functionality could also allow us to deploy mobile CCTV in the future so good news all-round.

SKToday has landed!

Your latest edition of SKDC's community magazine, SKToday should be with you by now.

This issue is another important one as it contains the bin collections details for the various upcoming Bank Holidays.

Our editorial team has also put together advice on how households can better cope with the cost of living, facts and figures on the Council Tax and what we do with your payments – and it also features our vital homelessness prevention work and highlights some inspirational women of South Kesteven

63. Crime Disorder and Local Partnership working update

A joint presentation was provided to the Committee by the Acting Director of Housing, Assistant Director, Operations and Public Protection and Inspector Mark Hillson from Lincolnshire Police. The presentation outlined the following points and figures in relation to the crime and disorder partnership response:

- Partnership working journey
- Key Officers involved
- Overview of Tools and Powers that the partnership use
- Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
- The ASB Case Review/Community Trigger
- Partnership Working in Practice (ECINS)
- Neighbourhoods and CCTV Headlines
- Housing headlines
- Police framework – partnership plan
- Policy headlines (Grantham and Stamford – All crimes from April 2020-February 2023)
- Policy headlines (Grantham and Stamford – Burglary Residential from April 2020-February 2023)
- Policy headlines (Grantham and Stamford – Vehicle Offences from April 2020-February 2023)
- Policy headlines (Grantham and Stamford – Anti Social Behaviour from April 2020-February 2023)

One Member raised problems with dog walkers leaving dog fouling and how this could be reported.

Dog fouling could be reported online through the Council's website, by contacting customer services. The Council's usual response would be Officers patrolling the area, signage being erected where needed and Officers would engage with dog walkers and ensure they have the appropriate bag to pick up dog fouling.

Calls to Lincolnshire Police were handled at the headquarters in Lincoln.

The Inspector from Lincolnshire Police clarified that calls were ranked due to their urgency and risk assessed. Local trends and information assist the Police in identifying the appropriate next steps.

It was queried as to whether the Police within the area had more reactive attendance or proactive attendance.

The Inspector of Lincolnshire Police noted that his department were proactive due to the increase of staff. During the Covid lockdown, crime figures increased because Police were more proactive as demand changed as few people were out of their homes.

The Chairman informed the Committee that a virtual meeting had been held between Lincolnshire Police and Parish Councils.

It was confirmed that a quick questionnaire was provided to every Parish within South Kesteven that are delivered prior to the quarterly priority-setting meetings taking place with the Police. This allowed every Parish Council to feedback their concerns and is discussed at the priority-setting meetings.

One Member noted that the sexual offences and rape cases equated to nearly 2 offences every week in 2022. It was queried as to whether the offences were domestic abuse or in public spaces.

The Inspector of Lincolnshire Police confirmed that 90-95% of the recorded rape offences were in a domestic environment and included incidents which had been historically recorded.

The proactive suggestion was raised on the possibility of communication taking place with Parish and Ward Councillor's to put out an information campaign to provide knowledge to residents on the partnership working.

A query was raised on whether the Council had any powers on Council tenants that had committed an offence in the property and whether it may result in eviction.

The Acting Director of Housing confirmed that tenancy agreements enabled the Council to challenge behaviors from receiving information from other channels,

such as the Police and Neighborhoods team which allowed Policing and ASB powers alongside the tenancy enforcement powers.

An introductory tenancy was given to residents who had not rented a Council property before, meaning the ability to evict the individual within the first year through behavior or rent arrears was simpler. A secure tenancy required a longer process and was more difficult to evict a tenant or an individual visiting the tenant purely based upon behavior.

ACTION: For Parish Councils and District Councillors to engage more proactively with Lincolnshire Police

One Member noted that there had been 539 cases of criminal damage. It was queried as to whether figures included multiple reports of the same offence.

It was confirmed that it was not 1 person committing 539 offences of criminal damage. Proactive measures and links to offences would be identified to establish whether the same individual was reoffending.

One Member invited the Inspector of Lincolnshire Police to attend a Stamford Town Council meeting in order to decrease the level of Anti-Social Behavior in Stamford.

It was queried as to whether shoplifting crime was seasonal and whether the current economic climate increased the rate of shoplifting crime.

The figures for shoplifting crime meant that the percentage figures showed that there had been an increase of 40 offences, which equated to less than 1 shoplifting offence across the three market towns and beyond.

The Chairman thanked the Inspector of Lincolnshire Police for the presentation and for the keeping the district as safe as possible.

It was clarified that the Council's CCTV had a strong link with the Police. The Council's CCTV control room was due to move to the Grantham police station imminently, which would further improve relationships and reduce travelling time.

64. Development of a Communities Strategy

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities presented the report that sought the views from the Committee in relation to the proposed development of a community strategy for South Kesteven.

The report outlined key themes and objectives proposed for inclusion in the strategy and discussed the need for inclusive consultation in the development of the document and its action plan.

The development of a community strategy is a direct response to recommendations made as a result of the Local Government Association peer challenge, which took place in November 2021.

The proposed strategy would cover both community engagement and community development. Effective engagement allows inclusive community development and will reflect the Council's commitment to all communities and an action plan would be developed following an inclusive consultation period in support of the strategy.

Concern was raised on the possibility of having political links to the strategy.

The Committee were assured that there would be no political links and the Council would only work with voluntary and community organisations to strengthen the working relationship.

One Member suggested that affordable housing and general social housing for communities be included within the strategy.

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities confirmed that the particular strategy document would focus on the voluntary organisations and community groups in the area. The concerns around affordable housing and general social housing for communities would be included within the Local Plan.

It was noted that affordable housing and general social housing for communities would be better suited for Planning Committee/Assistant Director of Planning.

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

- 1. Considers the key themes and objectives suggested for inclusion in a Communities Strategy and suggests enhancements to the extent and clarity of information for consideration and inclusion.**
- 2. Endorses the commencement of a consultation exercise and the subsequent development of a Communities Strategy for the District.**

65. Cost of Living update

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities presented the report that outlined the work undertaken by the cost of living strategic working group.

At the previous meeting, the Committee had recognised the Council's immediate and future responses requirement to be focused and have clear steps that could be taken further to support businesses and residents within the district.

The work undertaken had involved Officers cross cutting from various service areas of the Council, including communications, community engagement, economic development, finance, housing, HR, revenues and benefits and customer services. Officers had ensured that steps set out in the action plan for both the Council and partners were undertaken to support those most impacted by the cost of living.

The working group had agreed the key themes for developing and implementing support for businesses and residents, positive relationships with support from organisations, particular Members of the external task force and those who supported the wellbeing fair on 25 February 2023, hosted 2 external task force meeting with support organisations. The full list of actions completed by the group were detailed within Appendix 1.

The Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services urged Parish and District Councillors to contact the team if they had any residents with concerns or required any information. A dedicated cost of living email address was provided: costofliving@southkesteven.gov.uk

One Member queried as to how business and resident outreach would be provided to rural areas of the district. It was further queried as to whether the Council were communicating with Parish Council's on the cost of living.

It was questioned as to whether any businesses and residents from around the district attended the wellbeing fair, or whether it was merely people from Grantham.

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities confirmed that this wellbeing fair was predominantly for Grantham residents, however, it had been promoted across the district via social media and on the Council's website. Parish Council's had been contracted regarding the dedicated cost of living email address and leaflets to hand out to residents, however, there were not many responses received.

It was noted that rural areas of the district were difficult to reach out to and the Council were exploring ways of integrating the wellbeing fair with other organisations.

One Member queried as to why mortgage providers, bankers or building societies were not invited to the wellbeing fair, due to mortgages being the biggest affect of cost of living.

Mortgage providers, bankers or building societies were not invited to the wellbeing fair, however, Citizens Advice Bureau were in attendance to provide debt advice as well as other organisations.

Members commended the work undertaken by the strategic working group and the cost of living leaflets which had been delivered in a hard copy format to maximise the distribution as far as possible.

One Member suggested more proactive communications of another wellbeing fair taking place across the district and also to encourage Councillors to publicise the event.

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities confirmed that a 'lessons learnt' document would be created to further improve the event in the future. Councillors were advised of the cost-of-living event within the All Member Briefing provided by the Leader of the Council.

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

- 1. Consider the report and comment on the potential of future wellbeing fairs across other locations in the district, in order for the Cost of Living Working Group to review viability of any future events.**
- 2. Approval for the Strategic Working Group continue to review the impacts of cost of living and implement activities within the action plan to support businesses and residents of South Kesteven.**

66. SK Community Fund

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities presented the report that outlined proposed amendments to the SK Community Fund.

It was important that the application process, including the assessment and funding criteria were regularly reviewed to ensure that they remain fit for purpose. A recent review identified proposed changes to the funding criteria, which were to be considered by the Committee.

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities informed the Committee of all proposed amendments to the criteria.

It was queried as to whether a community building included a church within the funding criteria.

The Community Engagement Manager clarified that the SK Community Fund criteria currently did not allow for changes to the fabric or fittings of a church building. Projects that take place within a church location that involved the wider community would be covered under the current eligibility of the fund.

One Member queried as to whether the Community Fund would apply to small groups like twinning associations.

The Community Engagement Manager stated that under the current criteria, any constituted community group that had a dedicated bank account with two unrelated signatories would be eligible to apply for the grant.

A query was raised on whether the criteria included tangible assets.

The Community Engagement Manager suggested that general queries in relation to the Community Fund be asked after the meeting, in order to concentrate on the proposed changes outlined in the report.

Clarification was sought on the monetary figures around the maximum grant amount that could be applied for village halls.

Changes to a village hall building no longer fell under the remit of the grant, however, an event within the village hall would still fit within the SK Community Fund criteria.

It was clarified that the budgetary figures around the community projects and events categories were to a maximum of £5000, the Fund would support up to 80% of projects to a maximum of £5000. The remaining 20% would need to be found by the applicant. The maximum the Council would pay on a small grant would be £2000 and applicants could request 100% of the funding, which only organisations that had financial resources of £10,000 and below would be eligible for.

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities recommended all Members to read through Appendix A thoroughly and to always have a copy available to provide the application criteria, application process and the conditions of funding to provide to organisations.

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

- 1. Suggest any enhancements to the changes proposed to the criteria of the SK Community Fund.**
- 2. Recommends the Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities approves the agreed changes to the criteria of the SK Community Fund via a non-key decision.**

67. Regulatory Compliance

The Acting Director of Housing presented the report.

The Committee were aware that the Chief Executive determined, in consultation with the Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning, to self-refer the Council to the Regulator of Social Housing. Since this referral Officers have been providing further data and details relating to the core issues of non-compliance for the Regulator to consider and review.

The Committee had now received eleven update reports since March 2021 that have confirmed the Regulatory Notice served on the Council and provided an outline of the work that officers would continue to ensure we logically and methodically progress through a programme of improvement.

Updating Tenants and Members:

Following on from previous briefings, further All Member Briefings will be arranged to ensure Members are fully informed on progress and continued challenges.

As reported to the Committee's meeting in June 2022, a full tenant consultation exercise has been undertaken – "The Big Listen". This involved several questions on both the current experience of tenants in terms of the services the Council offers as a landlord, and what they would like to see prioritised in the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan, which will require a complete review in 2022/23. The questions were based on the Regulator of Social Housing's proposed Tenant Satisfaction Measures and the initial report was provided to Committee in the meeting on 23 June 2022.

We commit to an ongoing programme of regular costed building condition surveys to inform a proactive, planned maintenance programme and reduce the need for more expensive reactive repairs.

A key activity to support the HRA Business Plan is up-to-date information on the Council's housing stock. As noted in previous reports, the last full Stock Condition Survey was completed in 2009; good practice suggests comprehensive Stock Condition survey should be completed every 5 years, usually by undertaking a survey of 20% of the stock each year.

The Council continues to utilise its Rant and Rave feedback, seeking real time feedback from tenants following responsive repairs. We continue to see overall satisfaction of 4.5 out of 5, demonstrating sustained high satisfaction at the point where repairs are undertaken.

Regular Meetings with the Regulator:

Monthly meetings between the Chief Executive, Acting Director of Housing and the Regulator's Officers take place as scheduled; the next meeting at time of writing is due on 17th March 2023. Progress has been significant right across the landlord health and safety compliance function (latest monthly figures attached as Appendix One to this report) and the relationship with the Regulator is positive, with the Regulator acknowledging that the Council is moving to a position to seek removal of the Notice that was formally served in February 2021.

That removal is contingent on three issues:

- (a) Sustained maintenance of performance in relation to the key landlord health and safety areas (i.e. those shown on Appendix One)
- (b) Clear programmes of work related to the actions that arise from those areas (these are provided to the Regulator on a monthly basis)
- (c) A satisfactory external audit of the above, providing external assurance. Scoping work in relation to this external audit is underway, with actions to address potential gaps identified and clear responsibilities and timescales for those actions delegated.

To enable the Regulator to remove the notice we are required to undertake an external audit of our compliance related functions. The outcomes of this audit shall then provide assurance to the Regulator on our current performance and governance structures. The audit commenced in mid-December and is currently ongoing, we shall update committee on its findings in due course.

Committee may find additional comment on Appendix One helpful:

Legionella – 100% compliance in relation to water hygiene.

Gas – 99.22% in February, again slightly down from the excellent result of 100% of properties with an up-to-date gas certificate in April 2022. Of the thirty-six properties without valid certificates all have appropriate actions that are up to date.

Electrical testing – this shows the position in relation to properties (both dwellings and communal areas) with an up-to-date electrical certificate, with the current position being 87.97% in January with a current satisfactory certificate, as the February figures were not validated at the time of writing this report.

Asbestos – this shows 100% compliance in terms of asbestos inspections. Fire Risk Assessments – 100% compliant, this shows all communal blocks assessed as “higher risk” have been inspected, and corrective actions are being programmed and completed. It is consistent with the Council’s Fire Safety Management Plan.

Lift inspections – all properties are currently compliant at 100%.

Smoke and CO – this shows the position for all the alarms within all our properties being 99.63% compliant. This is a recently introduced Regulatory requirement which came into force on the 1st of October 2022, again those properties that are non-compliant totalling twenty-two in February are being dealt with through due process.

Damp and mould – this shows 99.80% compliance and the appointments for CAT1 and 2 have been made with several tenants refusing access.

Leadership Compliance Meetings:

Chaired by Cabinet Member for Housing and Property and attended by the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive, and the Acting Director of Housing, these meetings have been a continued feature of the more detailed compliance review process being undertaken. This group ensures specific responses to the changing compliance review process and manage tenant communication responses to actions associated with key service and regulatory responses.

Regular Reports to Committees and Cabinet:

The necessary reporting to appropriate committees will continue. Members are invited to comment on this report content and confirm their views and observations relating to the detail contained within this report.

A query was raised on whether the Integrated Housing Management System was assisting the team in relation to regulatory compliance.

The Acting Director of Housing noted that the Integrated Housing Management System was still being implemented. The target of the system going live had been delayed due to a couple of external pressures, with some of the interfaces between the Council's financial systems and the housing benefit system.

One Member raised concern on the current number of complaints on repairs being outstanding or not completed. A query was raised on the number of staff employed within the housing maintenance team and whether they had all the skills necessary or whether external companies were required to complete the Council's repairs.

It was clarified that the 'Rant and Rave' feedback was solely upon the completion of a repair. There was a significant backlog of repairs, however it remained a priority. A 4.5/5 score on completed repairs was received out of just less than 1000 interactions since April 2022. The Council had around 35-40 tradesmen from the Council's direct works team.

ACTION: For the Acting Director of Housing to provide the Committee with the definite number of staff employed within the housing maintenance team.

The historic negativity around housing repairs had been due to previous poor-call handling response rates. It was reported that the Council were regularly achieving more than 92% call handling rates within the repairs call lines.

Further concern was raised on the number of complaints received regarding void properties and whether there was a dedicated team to undertake void repairs.

The Acting Director of Housing confirmed that void properties were split into two categories: minor works void which required minor works which were undertaken by an in-house team that gives the Council the ability to turn things around as quickly as possible. A major void element works (for example, replacement of kitchen/bathroom, roof, insulation works etc) would be undertaken by a contractor. There had been supply chain issues which led to 4–6-week lead time for a kitchen after ordering.

It was queried as to whether the Council re-charged former tenants who had left a property in an unacceptable condition.

It was noted that the Council did re-charge former tenants where necessary. The recharge policy had been through Cabinet in 2022. Once notice of termination had been received from a tenant, a pre termination inspection would be booked in with a Housing Officer and the tenant would be made aware of any work that needed rectifying prior to the property becoming void, if the work was not completed, the tenant would be re-charged.

It was queried as to whether any progress had been made on replacing gas boilers with air source heat pumps and whether any other options could be explored to reduce the cost of electricity.

At the previous all Member briefing, it was highlighted that the Council had made a significant bid to the social housing decarbonisation fund, a total project bid of around £7.2 million of which £3.46 million was grant funding from the Government. The outcome for the bid was expected imminently, which would target approximately 332 properties with energy efficiency improvements.

One Member emphasised the importance of returning tenants phone calls.

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

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

68. Work Programme 2022 - 2023

The Committee noted the Work Programme 2022-2023.

Members requested that community cohesion and refugees be added onto the Work Programme.

The Acting Director of Housing noted that updates on the 'Homes for Ukraine scheme' would continue.

It was confirmed that further updates would be provided to the Committee in regard to the delivery of the Local Authority Housing Fund alongside Regulatory Compliance.

Clarification was sought on DASH landlord accreditation scheme and how this fit into the Committee's remit.

The Assistant Director for Operations and Public Protection clarified that DASH related to the accreditation scheme for private sector rented properties. The scheme was voluntary, whereby private rented landlords can join to become accredited which would provide reassurance to their tenants.

It was noted that the Council could take enforcement action where landlords were not maintaining private sector rented properties.

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

The Chairman thanked all Officers and Members.

70. Close of meeting

The Chairman closed the meeting at 16:15.

