

Minutes

Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Thursday, 14 December 2023, 2.00 pm

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

Committee Members present

Councillor Nikki Manterfield (Chairman)
Councillor Steven Cunnington (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Pam Byrd
Councillor Robert Leadenham
Councillor Penny Milnes
Councillor Vanessa Smith
Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing
Councillor Helen Crawford
Councillor Charmaine Morgan

Cabinet Members present

Councillor Ashley Baxter (Deputy Leader of the Council)

Other Members present

Councillor Richard Dixon-Warren
Councillor Tim Harrison
Councillor Graham Jeal
Councillor Ian Selby

Officers

Graham Watts (Assistant Director of Governance and Public Protection)
Karen Whitfield (Assistant Director of Culture and Leisure)
Claire Moses (Head of Service - Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community)
Debbie Roberts (Head of Corporate Projects, Policy and Performance)
Carol Drury (Community Engagement Manager)
Michael Chester (Team Leader – Leisure, Parks and Open Spaces)
Charles James (Policy Officer)
Amy Pryde (Democratic Services Officer)

28. Public Speaking

There were none.

29. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Habib Rahman, Virginia Moran and Sarah Trotter.

Councillor Charmaine Morgan substituted for Councillor Virginia Moran.

Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing substituted for Councillor Habib Rahman.

Councillor Helen Crawford substituted for Councillor Sarah Trotter.

30. Disclosure of Interest

There were none.

31. Minutes from the meeting held on 11 October 2023

It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 October 2023 were a correct and accurate record.

32. Updates from the previous meeting

All actions were completed.

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

The Deputy Leader of the Council confirmed he had nothing to report. He wished the Committee a Merry Christmas.

34. Statement on Grantham Hospital

Councillor Charmaine Morgan provided the Committee with a verbal update on Grantham Hospital.

One Member requested that the Chief Executive or a Member of the United Lincolnshire Hospital Trust be invited to a future Committee meeting to answer questions.

It was further requested that the Chairman of ICB be invited to a future Committee meeting to clarify queries relating to the poor health provision in the south of the County.

The Chairman highlighted that South Kesteven District Council were very limited in terms of making decisions on health provision.

Councillor Charmaine Morgan declared that she was the District's representative on the Health Scrutiny Committee at Lincolnshire County Council and would be willing to pass on any concerns.

35. Mid-year KPIs

The Policy Officer presented the report that outlined South Kesteven District Councils performance against the Corporate Plan Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the year of 2023/24.

2023/24 was the final year of monitoring for the existing KPIs. A refresh of the Corporate Plan was currently underway. All Members had the opportunity to engage in the development of the new Corporate Plan, which would be adopted in the January 2024. To accompany the new Corporate Plan, a new suite of KPIs will be developed to reflect the priorities, ambitions and actions of the new Plan. These KPIs will be approved by each Committee and reporting will commence from April 2024.

Appendix A of the report presented the overall performance against the five actions being presented, as well as specific performance against the sub measures contained within those. Specific commentary was provided for each action, which is summarised as follows:

- 3 of the actions are rated Green. These are actions which are on or above target as planned.
- 1 of the actions is rated Amber. This is an action which is currently below the planned target.
- 1 of the actions is rated Red. This is an action, which is currently significantly below the planned target.

Members expressed their disappointment of the KPI relating to safeguarding training percentages having a rating of red. It was queried as to why safeguarding training was not being actioned as a priority.

The Senior Management Team had been tasked on ensuring all of their staff were up-to-date with safeguarding training in hope to improve the percentage.

One Member raised a specific concern around the process of certain housing safeguarding issues within council-run housing and whether the concern would be dealt with internally by the Housing department. It was suggested that all safeguarding matters be referred to the appropriate outside body, to maintain the same level of transparency throughout.

ACTION: For an update on safeguarding to be brought to the next Committee meeting and for the relevant Officer to be in attendance.

Concern was raised on the high level of staff turnover and why staff could not be retained.

A recent report had been taken to the Employment Committee which had demonstrated that the staff turnover was relatively low compared to previous years. Members were referred to the dashboard information presented to the Employment Committee recently.

It was clarified that all Members of staff were required to complete safeguarding training.

A Member highlighted the importance of the Community Fund meetings and Members were encouraged to give more priority to it.

Concern was raised on the 45% KPI target for safeguarding training and how this could be improved. Previous issues had been discussed around colleagues accessing computers etc.

It was queried as to whether the Council were sending out staff untrained, rising waiting times, or whether small number of staff trained had rising workloads. It was further queried what current implications were in place and what mitigations were in place short-term.

The Assistant Director of Governance and Public Protection suggested that the Committee recommend for Managers part of the Senior Management Team ensure their staff attend safeguarding training.

The Committee were assured that certain service areas and frontline services were required to give a more significant weight to safeguarding, due to the nature of their role and had all completed significant safeguarding training.

The online training was accessed through an online training account of Lincolnshire County Council. It was noted that issues in the way in which the data was tracked on our system may have caused issues.

It was further suggested that the Committee receive further assurances that people are not being put into the field untrained in safeguarding, which would be a breach of the authority's requirement.

It was clarified that all Members of staff were required to undertake e-learning modules which was facilitated by Lincolnshire County Council, however, staff in specific fields were trained to a higher level.

A further breakdown was requested in relation to safeguarding training on who required advanced training and how far the training had progressed.

It was noted that the Repairs Team and Council contractors were of a high importance to complete advanced training due to visiting people's houses.

One Member queried whether there were any reinforcement of refreshment in-person training.

The Community Engagement Manager clarified that every member of staff and Elected Member were required to complete a level of safeguarding training. The training followed a six-year training pathway and was put forward by the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Childrens Partnership and the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Adults Board, whether that be e-learning or face-to-face sessions. The Council followed their training as they were the responsible body. For members of staff that couldn't access computers, face-to-face training would be delivered by Officers.

Clarification was sought around the 90% target of staff receiving safeguarding training and the current percentage being 45%. It was suggested that a target be set for mid-year rather than the end of the year, in order to measure the likelihood of achieving the annual target.

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

- 1. Review and scrutinise the performance against the Corporate Plan Key Performance Indicators in relation to the delivery of the Corporate Plan priorities and outcomes.**
- 2. Use this report to inform and support the ongoing work programme of the Committee**
- 3. For the Committee to receive a further report on a breakdown of staff training and the type of training they require, as well as the progress made against each service area, including contractors and the safeguarding process within Housing.**

36. Community Engagement Strategy and Action Plan

The Community Engagement Manager presented the report which outlined the Community Engagement Strategy and Action Plan for 2024-27. A report had previously been brought to the Committee to seek views of Members on the development of the strategy.

A public consultation was then held via the Council's website and direct opportunities were offered to the voluntary and community sector organisations within South Kesteven to comment on the proposed content. The response to the consultation was higher from residents than it was from community groups, with general agreement of what was proposed.

It was clarified that the strategy would be amended to reflect the new Corporate Plan and the plan would become a living document and could be developed over time.

The Council's Armed Forces Lead Member made the following statement:

'As Armed Forces Lead Member, I welcome the inclusion of the Armed Forces Covenant, the Armed Forces Community and the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme in the proposed Community Engagement and Development Strategy. I further welcome the Armed Forces actions included in the accompanying Action Plan 2024 – 2027. I support the recommendation at Item 9 of today's meeting that the Committee recommends to Cabinet its adoption to complement the Council's emerging corporate priority of Connected Communities.'

I will also suggest a few minor amendments to the Action Plan for your consideration as follows:

- *Sixth action – 'Continue to ensure the Council's compliance with the Armed Forces Act and its associated duties'. Include elected Members in 'What success means' (Well-informed officers who understand what is necessary to comply with the Act).*
- *Ninth action – 'Develop an effective working relationship with the Lincolnshire Armed Forces Officer to explore opportunities for collaboration'. Add a similar action for the Armed Forces Lead Member / Champion to 'develop an effective working relationship with the Lincolnshire Armed Forces Champion'.*
- *Seventeenth action – 'Encourage staff within food businesses to sign up as Army catering Reserves for training/upskilling':*
- *Amend designations to read '167 Catering Support Regiment RLC' and 'Army Reserve catering school'.*
- *Add 'Encourage SKDC Members and staff to sign up as Army Reserves for training in the range of command and control, contract management, labour support, catering and logistic support jobs available' partnering 'PWoG Barracks Army reserve units' with success meaning 'To increase reservist sign up across a range of military disciplines with consequent individual, collective and organisational benefits to SKDC'.*

One Member suggested that Members be included within the engagement of Communities.

The Head of Services (Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community) clarified that Members would be made aware of anything that came out of the plan on a case by case basis, rather than the inclusion of an action relating specifically to Members.

One Member queried whether there was an age limit on reserve training.

It was confirmed that there was an age limit of 43 years old for the reserves and was wider than it was for the regulars.

It was further requested that the strategy and plan include the involvement of elected Members being consulted.

The Committee were reassured that the report would come back every six months, and Officers would ensure that elected Members be updated.

The Committee and report author accepted the suggested amendments.

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

- 1. Considers the Community Engagement and Development Strategy and recommends to Cabinet its adoption to complement the Council's emerging corporate priority of Connected Communities.**
- 2. Following the implementation of the Community Engagement and Development Strategy this Committee agrees to receive an update every six months on the progress and delivery of the Action Plan.**

37. Customer Service Update (Q1 and Q2)

The Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community) presented the report which provided the Committee with the Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 position regarding customer interactions and call handling within the Customer Service Team and high contact Services Areas.

The report also provided an update regarding various projects being undertaken by the Customer Service Team and a review of the customer service action plan.

The table and graphs on paragraph 2.5 onwards of the report provided figures of customer interactions received into the Customer Service Team since the 1 April 2023 to the 30 September 2023. The interaction figures were broken down by e-method and traditional methods.

The tables in paragraph 2.10 and 2.13 of the report provided the customer contact handled by Customer Services during Quarter 1 and Quarter 2. There had been an increase in customer contact in Quarter 2 from 47,420 to 50,412. Despite the increase, the number of calls handled had increased from 75% to 81% and had further increased to 83% as at the beginning of December 2023.

There had been a significant reduction in calls to the switchboard, meaning that callers were being re-directed to the service area at point of contact. Week commencing 27 November 2023, 452 calls went straight to the switchboard, in comparison to 657 for the same week in 2022. Week commencing 4 December 2023, there were 281 calls directed to the switchboard, compared to 685 for the same week in 2022. This meant switchboard Officers were able to undertake other work whilst not answering calls.

It was noted that the Deepings and Stamford walk in offices had been closed. As part of the customer experience strategy, a working group had been formed for 2024 and the service offer for the Deepings and Stamford would be discussed. This review would be included as an action within the customer experience strategy.

One Member raised concern of vulnerable residents in the Deepings and Stamford, who no longer had access to a walk-in office for face-to-face communication with Customer Services.

It was queried as to whether the location of calls received was monitored.

The technology used by Officers did not allow access to the location of where the person was calling from. Customer services would complete a request form when speaking to a caller, where that data would be gathered.

Clarification was sought around the figures relating to online forms.

A query was raised in relation to the Bourne Library, and whether Bourne Town Council were able to assist residents with blue badges and bus passes, as this fell under the responsibility of Lincolnshire County Council.

The Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community) clarified that the funding provided by Lincolnshire County Council was purely for the library service and any further support was not funded for. The blue badges and bus pass forms were online, and computers were available at Bourne library for residents to utilise.

It was queried whether any provision had been put into place for the possible increase in calls during the rollout of the 'purple bin scheme'.

The Council were being heavily supported by Lincolnshire County Council colleagues, who were proving 2 FTE members of staff to deal with all enquiries, any overflows would be dealt SKDC colleagues. It was unknown as to how many queries the Council would receive; however, this would be monitored on a daily basis.

The customer experience strategy would be drafted in due course and be brought back to the Committee for review at a later date.

Concern was raised on significant changes in staffing and a high number of staff resigning. It was queried as to whether Officers were aware of the reasoning of high staff turnover.

It was clarified that the changes in staffing was mostly down to staff relocating to a different department within the organisation, to develop further opportunities.

The FTE was a lot less than it was in Quarter 1 (6.23) and Quarter 2 (4.42). In Quarter 2, new staff were trained within service areas.

The Customer Service Team dealt with 18 service areas. When an internal vacancy arises, the customer service staff were well positioned to be able to apply for a role.

One Member raised a query on whether customer services had any succession paths or ways of progression.

It was confirmed that within the team are Officers, Lead Customer Service Advisors and a Manager. The current way in which the role was graded was being reviewed and potential ways of succession.

A preview of the significant number of projects taking place across customer services in individual service areas was requested.

The projects taking place were set out with appendix 2 of the report pack:

- Twin Stream Bin Rollout
- Garden Waste Collections (2024)
- Replacement of Customer Service document management system
- Customer Service Centre – move to new location (Unit 1, The Picture House)
- Launch of Citizens Access portal (Revenues – Council Tax) – Phase 1
- Review of new website
- Virtual Operator Service
- Launch of Citizens Access portal (Revenues – Council Tax) – Phase 2: Moves in, out and within the District
- Customer Experience Strategy Review
- Launch of Citizens Access portal (Revenues – Council Tax) – Phase 3: Students and Severely Mentally Impaired – reporting and forms

It was queried as to how the 83% target for the call centre satisfaction level was benchmarked, as the percentage seemed low.

The target was set at 85%, which was not based on any data or analysis. As part of the customer experience strategy, the satisfaction level rate could be review. The Customer Service Team were not a call centre and they dealt with more complex queries.

That the Committee

1. Notes the report and are invited to ask questions relating to the report

38. South Kesteven Health and Wellbeing Action Plan

The Team Leader – Leisure, Parks and Open Spaces presented the report.

Cabinet had formally adopted the Lincolnshire District Council's Health and Wellbeing strategy at their meeting in March 2023. The strategy contained an action plan detailing interventions across Lincolnshire, which would improve the health and wellbeing of residents.

When agreeing to adopt the strategy, a commitment was also made to develop a bespoke action plan specific to the district of South Kesteven.

Since March 2023, a significant amount of work had been undertaken by Officers to develop the Local Plan which accompanies the South Kesteven Health and Wellbeing Action Plan.

The responsibilities of the Council was discussed and how they could be managed.

Members welcomed certain areas of the strategy and that Housing and Homelessness was a key element of the action plan.

Clarification was sought around the meaning of economic inclusion.

The action plan detailed each of the lever areas. Economic inclusion was reducing economic inequalities and alleviating poverty as a fundamental driver for improving mental and physical health and wellbeing.

Concern was raised on the report stating that there were no financial implications.

The Deputy Leader of the Council clarified that the comments of the Officer within the report would usually be based on whether the Committee were being asked to utilise any money specifically, as part of the production of the report. It was likely that there would be financial implications when achieving actions of the plan in due course.

Members welcomed the report and thanked Officers for the detailed report.

One Member queried how the action plan would be managed and monitored moving forward.

It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED** that the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

1. **Endorses the South Kesteven Health and Wellbeing Action Plan aimed at achieving improved health and wellbeing outcomes for the residents of South Kesteven.**
2. **Agrees to receive an update report in six months' time on the delivery of the actions identified.**

39. Work Programme 2023-24

The Committee noted the Work Programme 2023-24.

The following item was added to the Work Programme for the meeting being held on 28 March 2024:

- Rural Crime Update

One Member requested that referrals and a breakdown of levels of concern in regard to Safeguarding be discussed by the Committee.

Another Member requested that a response from the Health Trust be discussed by the Committee at a future meeting.

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

The Chairman wished the Committee a Merry Christmas.

41. Close of meeting

The Chairman closed the meeting at 15:45.

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