

Minutes

Cabinet

Tuesday, 7 November 2023



**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

Decision implemented date (provided no call-in) - 23 November 2023

The Leader: Councillor Richard Cleaver, Deputy Leader of the Council (Chairman)

The Deputy Leader: Councillor Ashley Baxter, Leader of the Council (Vice-Chairman)

Cabinet Members present

Councillor Rhys Baker, Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste (jobshare)

Councillor Patsy Ellis, Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste (jobshare)

Councillor Philip Knowles, Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Licensing

Councillor Rhea Rayside, Cabinet Member for People and Communities

Councillor Paul Stokes, Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture

Non-Cabinet Members present

Councillor Ben Green

Councillor Tim Harrison

Councillor Charmaine Morgan

Councillor Ian Selby

Councillor Elvis Stooke

Councillor Mark Whittington

Officers

Karen Bradford, Chief Executive

Richard Wyles, Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer

Nicola McCoy-Brown, Director of Growth and Culture

Adrian Ash, Interim Assistant Director of Operations

Graham Watts, Assistant Director (Governance and Public Protection) and Monitoring Officer

Karen Whitfield, Assistant Director – Leisure, Culture and Place

George Chase, Waste and Recycling Operations Manager

Julie Martin, Head of Housing Technical Services

Claire Moses, Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits Customer and Community)

Debbie Roberts, Head of Corporate Projects, Policy and Performance

James Welbourn, Democratic Services Manager (Deputy Monitoring Officer)

42. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Phil Dilks.

43. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

44. Disclosure of Interests

There were no disclosures of interests.

45. Swimming Pool Support Fund (Phase One – Revenue)

Purpose of report

To consider an offer of external funding from the Swimming Pool Support Fund.

Decision

That Cabinet approves the receipt of £344,659 from the Swimming Pool Support Fund, the funding being utilised to offset the management fee of £500k provided to LeisureSK Ltd. for the financial year 2023/2024.

Alternative options considered and rejected

To not accept the funding.

Additional funding streams were being explored to improve both the energy and carbon efficiency of the District's leisure centres.

Reasons for decision

In line with the Council's Financial Regulations the level of funding secured required approval by the Cabinet.

The costs of running the Council's leisure facilities had increased significantly during the current financial year, particularly in relation to utilities and pool chemicals.

In recognition of national issues the Swimming Pool Support Fund was launched by central government in March 2023. It had been necessary to support LeisureSK Ltd. with a management fee in the current financial year; to cover the increases in utilities and pool chemicals that had previously been unbudgeted.

Note: Both Councillor Charmaine Morgan and Nicola McCoy-Brown left the Council Chamber during the debate and vote on this item, as they were Directors of LeisureSK Ltd.

The following points were raised during debate of this item:

- Both Stamford and Grantham Meres Leisure Centres would benefit from this funding. There was no funding available for Bourne Leisure Centre. It was reported that there were only five leisure centres across Lincolnshire that

received this funding, so it was a huge success for the Council to receive support for two of their sites.

- LeisureSK Ltd. would present their proposal for the upcoming financial year at a future Culture & Leisure Overview and Scrutiny meeting.

46. Provision of Domestic Battery Recycling Service

Note: Councillor Charmaine Morgan and Nicola McCoy-Brown returned to the Council Chamber.

Purpose of report

This report provided information regarding options for the introduction of a domestic battery recycling service along with the recommendation by the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 3 October 2023.

Decision

That Cabinet:

1. Noted the report and the outcome and agreed recommendation from the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 3 October 2023:
 - a) *Noting the contents of the report.*
 - b) *Recommended that option D - Kerbside Collection -The implementation of a kerbside scheme with residents providing their own bags as the most cost efficient and sustainable method’.*
2. Agrees and approves the recommendations by the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee, namely that a kerbside scheme be implemented with residents providing their own bags as the most cost efficient and sustainable method.

Alternative options considered and rejected

a) **Status Quo** - Continue as currently, with residents using the take back scheme and household waste recycling centres.

No Additional Cost

b) **Communications Campaign** - Carry out a managed communications campaign promoting the “take back” scheme through social media, the Council’s website and other communication channels to raise the profile and benefits of recycling batteries safely.

Cost - up to £5,000 depending on the type, timescale and extent of campaign.

c) **Kerbside Collection** - Implement a kerbside scheme with bags provided for residents’ use (supply of 4 bags per annum but has an ongoing cost)

Cost £71,800

d) **Kerbside Collection** - Implement a kerbside scheme with residents providing their own bags and run alongside a communication campaign. Retrofit Vehicles £8,000, Communication Campaign £5,000

Total Cost £13,000

Summary of Estimated Costs

Item	Option (a) Status Quo	Option (b) Comms Campaign	Option (c) Year 1 Bags Provided	Option (c) Year 2 etc. Bags Provided	Option (d) Residents providing own bags
Retrofitting of 32 vehicles	£0	£0	£8,000	£0	£8,000
Annual letter delivery and supply of WEEE Bags (4) to all households (70,000 @ £0.84) (Ongoing Costs)	£0	£0	£58,800	£58,800	£0
Comms campaign / ongoing	£0	£5,000	£5,000		£5,000
Total	£0	£5,000	£71,800	£58,800	£13,000

Reasons for decision

A number of reasons behind the decision were set out in the report, and repeated below:

- Local Authorities were not required to collect used batteries from households.
- The collection of batteries showed commitment from the Council for recycling additional items safely.
- The introduction of a battery recycling scheme would not necessarily eliminate incidents of waste collection vehicle conflagration.
- The waste freighter fire at Ingoldsby in March 2023, where rubbish from a bin lorry had to be dumped onto the road to be extinguished was the only recorded incident of this type for the Council.
- There were varying costs for each of the options above which the service would need to absorb.
- Retailers and distributors had responsibilities if they sold or supplied 32kg or more of portable batteries per year, in terms of providing free collection points for the 'takeback scheme'.

- The 'takeback scheme' aligned with producer responsibility as identified in the Environment Act – 'producer pays'.
- There was a significant number of retailers within walking, cycling and driving distance of residents in South Kesteven who provided containers for the deposit of batteries - Morrisons, Asda, Sainsbury's, Waitrose, Tesco, Lidl, Co-op along with other independent retailers.
- Batteries can also be taken to the local Household Waste Recycling Centres.
- The Introduction of the scheme would show South Kesteven Council's Commitment to:
 - a responsible sustainable recycling management system
 - a commitment to protecting the environment.
- Collection of batteries from households may eliminate any issue for rural communities who may not have any readily available collection points and for those whom travel is difficult.
- Other authorities have introduced similar schemes e.g. Rushcliffe Borough Council, South Cambridgeshire, Kings Lynn and West Norfolk.

A motion on domestic battery recycling was agreed with a cross-party consensus at the Full Council meeting held on 20 July 2023. A significant rise in the consumption of batteries had been seen, but the safe disposal of these batteries had not necessarily kept pace with this. Improper disposal of batteries posed an environmental hazard and a threat to health and safety due to the potential leakage of harmful chemicals.

The following points were raised during debate:

- Whilst supermarkets did provide a battery recycling service in store, it was not necessarily through choice. Free collection of used or waste batteries must be offered if a seller supplied 32kg or more of portable batteries per year.
- It was hoped that the collection scheme for battery recycling would be in place by March 2024; however advice on its rollout was still being sought from colleagues at the Lincolnshire Waste Partnership.
- Communications related to the battery recycling scheme would be released in due course, but efforts were currently being concentrated on the issue of twin stream recycling.

47. Relocation of the Customer Services Centre – Grantham

Purpose of report

This report set out the progress made in the proposals for a new Customer Service Centre at Grantham and sought a number of resolutions in order to enable the delivery of the project.

Decision

That Cabinet:

1. Approves the delivery of a new Customer Service Centre at Unit 1 The Picture House Grantham.
2. Approves a budget of £350,000 to deliver the new Customer Service Centre.
3. Approves an in-year budget amendment of £150,000 from the Local Priorities Reserve towards the required capital allocation.
4. Approves the movement of £200,000 from the SK House Refurbishment budget in order to provide a funding contribution towards the Customer Service Centre project.
5. Approves the commencement of the procurement process in order to appoint a contractor to undertake the fit out works.
6. Delegates to the Deputy Chief Executive in consultation with the Cabinet Member for People and Communities and the Cabinet Member for Property and Public Engagement to enter into a construction contract in order to undertake the necessary works.

Alternative options considered and rejected

In order to provide a full and varied options analysis, a number of locations had been explored; the focus had primarily been on Council owned locations in an attempt to avoid incurring any new unnecessary external costs. This analysis reviewed the follow sites:

- **Unit 1 & 2– St Catherine’s Road**
This location was considered for the previous partnership option, but that proposal incorporated both vacant units into one single space. This would be over and above the space required for the new Customer Service Provision and would not be financially viable as sole occupants.
- **Witham Room – South Kesteven House**
Consideration had been given to reconfiguring the current meeting room in SK House, the Witham Room, into the Customer Service Centre. This would have resulted in the loss of further meeting space available to the Council and

would have incurred significant cost associated with reconfiguration of the space.

- **Newton Room – Guildhall Arts Centre**

The current temporary Customer Service Centre was located in the Guildhall Arts Centre; therefore options had been explored for keeping it in this building but in a different larger space. This room however did have disadvantages as it was a heavily used room by external companies, the Arts Centre, and the Council itself.

- **Museum – Ground Floor**

The Museum was currently underutilised, so the option was explored to share this space with the museum trust. The space was too large for SKDC Customer Service provision alone and following discussion with the Museum Trust representatives it was evident the space available via a partnership would be insufficient for the Council's needs.

- **Former Customer Service Centre – Abbey Gardens, St Peters Hill Office**

This would have involved returning to the former Customer Service Centre, however the space was larger than the Customer Service Provision needed, and the building had now exchanged contract of sale.

- **Bus Station – Tenant Resource Centre**

Officers had also explored the Tenant Resource Centre, as it is in the centre of town and is already in a building we already lease. There would however be significant costs to reconfigure this site into what we need, and due to the size of the room available, the Council would not be able to fit all of the minimum requirements needed for the Customer Service Centre in here.

- **Arts Centre – Current Temporary Location**

The current arrangement for the Customer Service Centre in the Arts Centre was considered to be temporary, however thought had been given to remaining here, and operating as currently. There had already needed to be significant compromises in this space, which had been acceptable on a temporary basis, but would need addressing if we were to move to a more permanent solution.

An assessment had been undertaken and signed off due to the temporary location, however it was unlikely the current location would be approved as permanent location without significant reconfiguration of the space at a cost. There was currently some customer confusion as to where the Customer Service Centre was located, and utilising the room on a more permanent basis would result in a loss of income for the Arts Centre.

For all other options, data security needed to be considered. Currently teams received information from customers, which was taken back to the main offices, scanned, and returned to the customer. There would need to be a secure way of transporting this data from any building to the current SKDC offices at The Picture House.

For a number of the other options, installation of IT Infrastructure to connect to the SKDC network would be required. IT is reliant on third party broadband / fiber connection. Reliance on an internet line which is dependent on strength, could result in a drop in connection – particularly where staff were using multiple applications.

Reasons for decision

The Council's ambition remained to provide a front facing customer service function as it was essential that residents of South Kesteven District had the opportunity to access direct and face to face support with Customer Service staff. This remained the ambition following the closure of the previous offices in Grantham.

The existing space at the Guildhall Arts Centre was constrained with limited scope for alteration or improvement and therefore could not accommodate all the desired service function to meet future operational needs. There was also a lack of waiting space available in this location.

The existing space was constrained by alternative tenancies and uses with multiple occupations within the Guildhall Building.

Relocation to Unit 1 The Picture House would provide open and collaborative space for staff and customers and would be in close proximity to the existing Council Offices. Design teams were working on the fit out of the space.

There would be a positive reputational impact in bringing the building into use with the unit having been vacant since construction in 2019, whilst providing a positive response to customer feedback and creating a positive impression for corporate visitors.

The space can be used by other 3rd party organisations – this would open up opportunities for third sector and other partners to take occupancy of space and develop 'themed' days such as joint initiatives including cost of living, debt support and housing advice.

The following points were raised during debate:

- The other vacant unit underneath the Picture House continued to be marketed; expressions of interest for the unit were being sought. The unit was also sited on the 'One Public' agenda which enabled other local authorities to identify an interest.
- Most of the budget for the work was being moved from the budget line for the South Kesteven House refurbishment works. Whilst refurbishment works were needed at South Kesteven House, it was felt that the priority lay with the Customer Service Centre. Not all of the activity behind the works was within the gift of the Council, all parts of the supply chain would need to be operationally ready in order to meet the timescale suggested.

- The indicative timescale within the report for moving to the new unit was felt to be accurate; however every effort would be made to tighten this timescale.
- There were no issues with the current temporary location of the Customer Service Centre, it fulfilled the needs of residents and was fit for purpose. Risk assessments were carried out regularly and this would continue to be the case until staff were moved out of the Guildhall.
- Many of the external costs related to bringing the unit into use as a Customer Service Centre were not related to fixtures and fittings.

48. Housing Repairs & Maintenance Policy

Purpose of report

To seek approval from Cabinet of the adoption of the new Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy which sets the framework for the delivery of the repair service.

Decision

That Cabinet:

1. Approves the adoption of the new Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy.
2. Delegates authority to the Chief Executive to make minor alterations and amendments to the Policy post adoption as required by changes to regulations and expectations by the Regulator for Social Housing.

Alternative options considered and rejected

Continue without an adequate policy or procedure.

Reasons for decision

The clarity provided by the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy enabled staff working in the service to make operational decisions efficiently and consistently. This in turn provided greater transparency and understanding for tenants of the standards and activities the repairs and maintenance service would deliver.

The policy was considered and recommended to Cabinet by the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July 2023.

The Council was still on the path to improving its housing offer, and this can be seen through the consideration of policies such as this, and the fact that the Regulatory Notice had been lifted after three years in special measures.

Having a Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy that people could look at and understand would make it easier to explain to tenants when and why repairs were being carried out.

The following points were raised during debate:

- Housing officers would not expect their contractors to be 'cold-calling' tenants. Contact with tenants would be picked up through contractor meetings where possible.
- There were a number of properties where adaptations had been made for families with disabilities. The Aids and Adaptations Policy supported this.
- Housing Overview & Scrutiny had an upcoming agenda item on issues surrounding the Housing Revenue Account. There had also been a series of workshops for members; the next scheduled workshop was on the issue of repairs.

49. Health Cash Plan

Purpose of report

To report a recommendation from the Council's Employment Committee that Cabinet does not support the introduction of a Health Cash Plan as a benefit for South Kesteven District Council's employees.

Decision

That Cabinet notes that Employment Committee has recommended against introducing the proposed employee Health Cash Plan which it was asked to approve.

Alternative options considered and rejected

The report was for noting only.

Reasons for decision

At the meeting of the Employment Committee on 6 September 2023, the following points were highlighted by Members in consideration of the Medicash proposal:

- Questions raised as to whether employees would have to fund private medical healthcare initially without confirmation that they would be reimbursed at a later date.
- Complex cases were not necessarily straightforward according to feedback from similar plans.
- There appeared to be a capped limit on the amount of financial assistance available. Employees on lower incomes would not necessarily benefit in comparison to those on higher incomes.
- Questions raised as to whether Medicash presented the best Health Cash Plan available.
- 24/7 access to a virtual GP service was considered beneficial. Complex health issues were questioned as potentially costly.
- The proposal had the potential to reduce absenteeism and enhance the quality of remuneration to retain staff.
- The proposal provided an opportunity to invest in the workforce, both in their physical and mental health, as a priority.

- Early intervention with routine health issues could reduce longer-term problems alongside access to mental health services.
- Employee's children are included in the plan and receive 50% of the entitlement of the employee.
- The current opt-in scheme is not highly utilised.

Upon voting on the proposal, four members of the Employment Committee voted in favour and five voted against. The Employment Committee therefore recommended that the Council did not implement the proposed Health Cash Plan for its employees.

The following points were raised during debate:

- The proposal on the table at Employment Committee in September was not the right one for the Council at that time. This did not mean that the proposal would not come back to Cabinet in some form at a later date.
- Members wished to convey to staff that they had in mind their best interests as an employer.
- A lot of work was carried out on this issue by staff, senior management and the unions and this should not be ignored. It was clear that there were reservations from Members about the scheme, but it was highlighted that the Plan had been supported by the trade unions, but rejected in its current form by Members.
- The Cabinet Member for People and Communities had contacted the Chairman of the Employment Committee to hold a meeting on the Health Cash Plan and its future. It was the firm hope that a proposal would be formed during this meeting that would come back for consideration by Members at a later date.

50. Updated Climate Action Strategy for South Kesteven

Purpose of report

Following a public consultation conducted, a revised Climate Action Strategy had been developed setting out South Kesteven District Council's aspirations to reduce carbon emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change within the District.

Decision

That Cabinet approves the adoption of the revised South Kesteven Climate Action Strategy.

Alternative options considered and rejected

There was no statutory obligation to monitor or report on carbon emissions which arose from Council operations or from the wider District. Nevertheless, by doing so and setting out how the Council proposed to address these, it was acting in alignment with its climate emergency declaration of 2019.

Cabinet could have amended the South Kesteven Climate Action Strategy and propose an alternative approach for addressing climate change within the District.

Cabinet could have rejected the South Kesteven Climate Action Strategy and have chosen not to progress work on climate change within the District.

Reasons for decision

The 'Strategy' set out a robust framework for action and how the Council was able to respond across different areas to the problems presented by climate change and the need to reach net zero emissions by 2050.

The Strategy was a key document in addressing the climate emergency. Three-quarters of UK authorities have already declared a climate emergency.

In March 2023 the Environment Overview and Scrutiny met and agreed that a consultation on the Strategy would take place in July 2023 for a period of four weeks. 73% of respondents the commitments made by the Council in 2019 (when they declared a climate emergency).

Valuable feedback had been gathered from the consultation exercise, particularly around the need for guidance and support for residents. Also highlighted was the ambition for tackling climate change, and concerns around climate change adaption.

The updated Strategy was the first stage of a two-step process. Detailed plans around eight strategy themes would be presented in a subsequent Climate Action Plan.

The revised Climate Action Strategy was presented to Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 3 October 2023. The Committee recommended to Cabinet to approve the adoption of the revised South Kesteven Climate Action Strategy whilst undertaking to engage with the wider community to further inform the development of the Climate Action Plan.

The following points were highlighted during debate:

- Emergency planning was taken very seriously. It was important to encourage Parish Councils to formally sign up to the Local Resilience Forum to be part of this.
- The Terms of Reference were being finalised for the Climate Change Working Group.
- New obligations were being placed on Councils by the Environment Act. The government had put the onus on Councils to consider biodiversity net gain within Planning from January 2024.
- A future report would be required on what was intended for the biodiversity action plan, and to report what was already happening in relation to grounds and open spaces.

51. Cabinet's Forward Plan

The Forward Plan was noted.

The meeting closed at 3:28pm.