

# Minutes

## Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee



SOUTH  
KESTEVEN  
DISTRICT  
COUNCIL

Thursday, 27 June 2024, 2.00 pm

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

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### Committee Members present

Councillor Bridget Ley (Chairman)  
Councillor Gareth Knight (Vice-Chairman)  
Councillor Ben Green  
Councillor Tim Harrison  
Councillor Gloria Johnson  
Councillor Max Sawyer  
Councillor Lee Steptoe  
Councillor Murray Turner  
Councillor Mark Whittington

### Cabinet Members present

Councillor Ashley Baxter (Leader of the Council)  
Councillor Richard Cleaver (Cabinet Member for Public Engagement and Property)  
Councillor Philip Knowles (Cabinet Member for Governance and Licensing)  
Councillor Rhea Rayside (Cabinet Member for People and Communities)

### Other Members present

Councillor Matthew Bailey  
Councillor Richard Dixon-Warren  
Councillor Graham Jeal

### Officers

Richard Wyles (Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Officer))  
Graham Watts (Assistant Director for Governance and Public Protection, Monitoring Officer)  
Emma Whittaker (Assistant Director of Planning)  
Claire Moses (Head of Service - Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community)  
Gyles Teasdale (Head of Property Services and ICT)  
Debbie Roberts (Head of Corporate Projects, Policy and Performance)  
Carol Drury (Community Engagement Manager)  
Charles James (Policy Officer)  
Megan White (Future High Streets Fund Project Support Officer)  
Amy Pryde (Democratic Services Officer)

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## **1. Public Speaking**

There were no public speakers.

## **2. Apologies for Absence**

All Committee Members were present.

## **3. Disclosure of Interests**

Councillors Bridget Ley, Tim Harrison, and Max Sawyer declared an interest on agenda item 7, as they were RAF veterans. They further declared that they would not benefit from the criteria of the scheme proposed in the report and would remain on the Committee for that item.

One Member queried whether any Councillor's had been 'whipped' on agenda item 7.

## **4. Minutes from the previous meeting**

One Member raised matters arising from the minutes from the previous meeting:

- A query relating to the Cecil Family Trust and how the Council were involved in regard to the St Martins Park development.
- A breakdown of costs on the waste depot.
- Concerns regarding the electricity standing charge on the depot and whether any figures could be provided.
- Clarification over the cost of the waste depot.

The Cabinet Member for Property and Public Engagement informed the Committee that the Cecil Family Trust was not a registered charity, and therefore, would not appear on the Charities Commission website.

The Cecil Family Trust was not involved with the planning permission for the St Martins Park development. The Burghley House Preservation Trust was the only organization that was involved with the development.

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 May 2024 were proposed, seconded, and **AGREED** as a correct record.

## **5. Updates from previous meeting**

All actions were completed.

## **6. Announcements or updates from the Leader of the Council, Cabinet Members or the Head of Paid Service**

There were none.

## 7. Council Tax Support Scheme - Veterans

The Leader of the Council presented the report.

The Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 28 November 2023 requested that:

*'A report to explore the feasibility of providing Council Tax relief exclusively to employed Veterans residing in Band A properties, considering relief rates of 5% and also 10%, yielding two distinct options. The analysis must encompass a detailed examination of the financial implications on South Kesteven District Council, Lincolnshire County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner for Lincolnshire.'*

The primary and most reliable source of data regarding characteristics of veterans in South Kesteven was from the 2021 Census accessed through the Office for National Statistics (ONS). This data was the source of most of the data outlined in the report.

8,691 veterans, across 6,028 households were living within South Kesteven. The ratio of households to residents implied that a significant number of single-person households. 30.90% of veterans live in single-person households compared to 22% of the general resident population. This data supports the financial modelling assumption surrounding Single Person Discount award in Option 2 (paragraph 2.20 of the report).

Some data was unavailable, e.g. average veteran weekly wage; and median household income of veterans. Data is available for both metrics for the general population and for the median household income down to quite granular geographies. This was best used as a measure of the general area level of affluence rather than the performance of particular demographics. For example, the average modelled gross household income (2020) in Bourne West is £45,600. It is not known how the 378 veterans living in Bourne West are performing relative to that figure. Some likely have a higher household income, others likely have a lower.

The Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community) drew the Committee's attention to information within the equality and diversity section of the report. There was an inequality with regards to the eligibility whereby veterans would have to be employed and reside in a Band A property to be eligible for the scheme.

The requirement of veterans being employed can mean that certain veterans that were retired or disabled may not have the employment status to be eligible for the scheme, which was over 50% of the veterans living within South Kesteven.

An amendment to the recommendation was proposed and seconded:

*For the following questions in the upcoming consultation about the Localised Council Tax Support Scheme for 2025-26:*

- a) *Do you support providing targeted council tax relief for employed veterans in Band A properties? Yes or no?*
- b) *If yes, should the relief for employed veterans in Band A properties be 5% or 10% off their annual council tax bill?*

*Recommendation two of the reports before us, ‘that no further work is undertaken on the development of a Council Tax Support Scheme for Veterans’, would be nullified.*

It was queried as to whether the content of the 2023 consultation on the Council Tax discount was available. It was noted that previous consultation questions related to the discount for Veterans.

The Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community) clarified that the question included within the consultation for the Council Tax Support Scheme in 2023 was ‘whether or not the consultees would support the introduction of a Council Tax discount for Veterans’.

260 out of 370 respondents to the consultation in 2023, said that they would support the introduction of a Council Tax discount for Veterans. Respondents were then asked ‘what level of discount they felt veterans should be entitled to’: 8 of the 260 said 5%, 42 of the 260% said 10% and the rest were a variable of between 15-25%.

One Member emphasised that more questions may prevent veterans wanting to complete the consultation. It was noted that all nuances should be included within questions asked of veterans.

It was noted that the Armed Forces Covenant outlined that Council’s were not obliged to financially aid veterans. It was not in place to offer benefits to veterans, it was to ensure that they were treated with fairness and respect in the community, economy and society, and that they face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in provision of the public and commercial services.

One Member felt that the decision for a discount for veterans to be put in place would go against the advice given in the Armed Forces Covenant, due to disadvantaging those citizens to the effect of the veterans.

Paragraphs 1.2 to 1.8 in the report would be relevant in relation to the amendment proposed, in terms of the Inclusion and Equality Act implications. Lincolnshire County Council had raised concerns and objections to the introduction of a veteran scheme as part of their consultation response in 2023, due to it being seen as discriminatory.

One Member highlighted that the consultation for council tax discount schemes was completed annually. It was clarified that the amendment proposed would include the 2 questions to be asked, as part of the annual consultation.

As part of the Council's statutory consultation, the proposed scheme for 2025/26 would be presented to the Committee at the next meeting in July 2024. Following that meeting, the discount scheme would go out to stakeholder consultation, with the addition of the 2 questions proposed, if the amendment was approved.

One Member highlighted that whether the scheme discriminatory or not, it may be unlawful, which meant the guidance received by Lincolnshire County Council should be followed.

The Community Engagement Manager clarified that under the Equalities Act 2010 and the Armed Forces Act 2022, if the Council were to discriminate or disadvantage a veteran, this would be a lawful matter, whereby the Council could be challenged in Court.

If this amendment was taken forward, robust evidence to show reasoning behind the criteria proposed and whether the Council should introduce the scheme in its proposed form should be explored and whether the scheme would be disadvantaging those veterans that may not fit into the criteria.

This proposal fell.

Councillor Richard Dixon-Warren made the following statement, in his capacity as the Armed Forces' Champion for South Kesteven District Council, it was requested that the statement be included within the minutes of the meeting (see appendix).

*(Councillors Max Sawyer, Tim Harrison, Lee Steptoe and Bridget Ley voted in favour of the recommendation).*

*(Councillors Mark Whittington, Gloria Johnson and Ben Green voted against the recommendation).*

**ACTION: For the Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Officer) to provide the Committee with up-to-date costings on work undertaken by Officers on veterans.**

It was queried whether the Council were advertising options available to veterans living in poverty, as well as organisations that they could be referred to.

The Community Engagement Manager informed the Committee that information was available on the Council's website relating to the support available to Armed Forces, Veterans, and their families. A directory for all support for Veterans was being worked on across the County.

The Cabinet Member for People and Communities suggested that information on support available for Veterans be sent out weekly.

The Community Engagement Manager confirmed that in terms of Armed Forces, flag raising and events took place all around the District.

At the next Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2024, an overview of the work taken place would be heard.

**It was proposed, seconded and AGREED that the Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee:**

- 1. Notes the contents of the report and provides feedback on the modelling undertaken and proposed scheme eligibility.**
- 2. Requests that no further work is undertaken on the development of a Council Tax Support Scheme for Veterans.**

*(Councillors Max Sawyer, Tim Harrison, Lee Steptoe and Bridget Ley voted in favour of the recommendation).*

*(Councillors Mark Whittington, Gloria Johnson and Ben Green voted against the recommendation).*

## **8. Corporate Plan 2020-23 Key Performance Indicators End-of-Plan and 2023/24 End-Year (Q4) Report**

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Licensing presented the report. The report outlined the District's performance against the Corporate Plan from 2020 to 2023, which would be the last indicators for the former Corporate Plan.

The Corporate Plan 2024-27 was adopted by Council in January 2024. The report was in two parts (Q4 for 2023/24 and a summary overview of the Council's performance in 2020-23).

The Corporate Plan 2020-23 listed twenty-two actions across the priorities Healthy & Strong Communities, Growth & Our Economy, and High Performing Council, which fell within the remit of this Committee. These actions set the Council's agenda for the life of that Plan.

The first round of performance reporting in 2020/21 introduced a series of criteria for what successful delivery would look like. This criterion has been used as the standard to judge the Council's overall performance against the twenty-two actions. Out of the twenty-two actions, the Council had achieved eighteen of them.

The performance for Q4 for 2024, nine of the actions were rated green, two of the actions were rated amber and none of the actions were rated red.

A new KPI suite had been agreed by the Committee in March 2024. The first report for the new KPI suite would be presented in Q3 of 2024.

It was noted that some of the twenty-two actions were stated as achieved, however, they had not been achieved, for example it was felt the below actions had not been fully achieved:

- The regeneration of Grantham Town Centre
- Working with education providers
- The People Strategy
- Strategies and Plans for Commercial Transformation
- The implementation and usage of an IT investment roadmap.

It was highlighted that a report going to a forthcoming meeting of the Employment Committee revealed turnover of staff in 2022/23 was 23%, the turnover of staff for 2023/24 had reduced to 14%. The predominant reasons for Employee's leaving was due to career advancement and new opportunities.

The Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Officer) confirmed that the Council's website had recently been upgraded and was one of the best examples in East Midlands. Officers welcomed any user feedback on articles, in the event the website needed to be reconfigured.

It was noted the criteria set for 2020-23, was set by a different administration. The criteria evidence for satisfactory actions could not be commented on. The criteria and actions for the new Corporate Plan were measurable, specific and objective.

One Member queried the 'achieved' action on maximising the value of the Council's own spend by utilising local suppliers, wherever practical and possible. Further information was requested on the action.

It was confirmed that contract procedural rules and procurement law was a priority over decisions. There were certain thresholds to save money, however, to ensure the best products possible. It was noted this may be a local contractor or a contractor outside of the local supply chain. The definition of a 'local supplier' was discussed and whether it should be based on a postcode or more regionally.

A 'minor works framework' was being established which would maximise the opportunity for local trade businesses to benefit from work which would be small value, which would be a north/south classification.

**ACTION: The Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Officer) to provide examples of local, small suppliers/traders procured by the Council in the last 3 years, during the duration of the old Corporate Plan.**

It was suggested that local contractors be contacted to assist with the turnaround of Voids.

It was confirmed local trade fayres would be held, where local suppliers would be invited to attend. The Council would need to ensure the contractor was compliant, met all health and safety requirements and passing the right checks prior going into Void properties. The financial viability of utilising local suppliers would be considered, in line with the Council's contract procedural rules.

One Member noted that 2 years of lockdown may have impacted certain actions being achieved.

It was noted the word 'achieved' in terms of actions stated meant that the Council had started works in achieving the action, rather than the action being completed and fulfilled.

**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 2020-23 priorities and outcomes.**
- 2. Use this report to inform and support the ongoing work programme of the Committee.**

**9. Progress Update in respect of the construction of the Waste Depot, Turnpike Close Grantham**

The Cabinet Member for Property and Public Engagement presented the report.

The Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee had previously been presented with an update on the depot project on 8 May 2024. It was agreed the Committee would be provided with regular updates during the project delivery phase.

The report outlined the latest status of the projects and provided details of the activities since the last update.

A dashboard had been developed which provided a high-level summary of the project. The dashboard concluded the value engineering had been developed, undertaken in conjunction with Lindum's but within the parameters of already approved planning permission of the development. The detailed design was the next phase in the project.

The report included movement on the original provisional dates due to the additional time it had taken to secure the value engineering savings necessary to reduce the project costs. This had taken additional time to ensure the scheme quality and operational practicality was not compromised and also to ensure any design changes did not conflict with the approved planning permission. Only when the value engineering review had been completed, could the project move to the next stage (stage 4 design) so any slippage on the value engineering phase would have a direct impact on the subsequent project phase. The summary timetable

does show, however, that the current expectation was the operational go live date could still be achieved and there would be opportunities to claw back the time which had currently slipped.

A query was raised on paragraph 2.3 of the report. The value engineering had concluded with £350,000 worth of savings to reduce construction costs down to £7.9million. Clarification was sought around the figures presented.

The Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Officer) highlighted there were 2 elements to the project: project cost (delivering the project) at £8.8million and then a construction cost (direct cost incurred to Lindums for the construction of the depot) at £7.9million. £8.2million was the bid received by Lindums which went to Cabinet in April 2024. The value engineering brought the £8.2 million down to about £7.9 million, headroom of £900,000 between the cost of the construction and the overall budget of £8.8m, this difference would be used to fund the other costs associated with the delivery of the project.

It was further queried whether budget items for the outfitting and for enabling the depot to open and the full cost would not exceed £8.8m and the final cost may come in under the budget due to

It was clarified the budget for the depot was £8.8m, the construction costs were being driven down by value engineering to achieve the lowest cost possible (£7.9m), which was providing £900,000 headroom between the construction budget and the overall project budget. The £900,000 would need to be used to fund the project management, unforeseen costs, mobilisation and the fit out.

**ACTION: For financial figures to be included within the dashboard, which would be brought back to every Committee.**

**ACTION: A breakdown of costs of each main heading of the project be included within the dashboard.**

It was queried whether the £8.8m was included within the actual purchase price of the land.

The Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Officer) clarified the £8.8m was not included within acquisition of the land. The £8.8m was from the point of the project going forward to deliver a waste depot, not from historical costs from the Council acquiring the site in the first instance.

It was noted £350,000 worth of savings from the value engineering phase had been identified. It was further queried what that materially entailed for the project and whether the planning permission would be affected itself or the delay the timeline of delivery.

The report confirmed the value engineering items secured did not conflict with the planning permission.

Following the two bids received from contractors, one bidder had stated that the delivery would take 36 weeks, however, the successful bidder had stated they would require 51 weeks to deliver the project. There was a 10 week design phase being undertaken. Officers were confident that lost time due to the value engineering would be recovered through subsequent phases of the scheme.

It was emphasised the depot would be mobilised and operational by April 2026, which is when the food waste legislation required the Council to incorporate additional rounds for the collection.

One Member raised concern on what may happen, if the depot was not operational by April 2026.

The Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Officer) confirmed it was unlikely for the depot to not be operational by April 2026. However, the licence of the existing site had a restriction on the amount of vehicles that can be on the location. If the new depot was not functional by April 2026, the Council would then have to mobilise an off-site storage area, where freighters could be housed.

Clarification was sought around the project planner and the budget allocation of £500,000 for professional fees, fitting and other enabling costs.

The risk table was discussed. It was noted the value engineering was stated as 'not achieved' and was set as a medium risk. Value engineering had been completed; therefore, it was queried as to why it was set as 'not achieved' and a medium risk.

It was suggested a further breakdown be included within the table for key milestones and dates, including crucial milestones, whereby the next milestone could not be completed until the current milestone was completed.

The dashboard was produced on 6 June 2024, at that point, the value engineering exercise had not been completed. As of 27 June 2024, the value engineering phase had been completed and the project had moved into design phase. The next phase of the scheme would be within the design phase, whereby the value engineering risk would be removed.

It was suggested that the cost of the land should be included within the overall cost of the depot for reporting purposes.

The Chairman noted that previous reports to the Committee had included detailed information in regard to the cost of the land in the beginning and figures going forward. The acquisition had previously been to Full Council and all information was in the public domain.

**Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the current position with respect to the delivery of the new Waste Depot Turnpike Close Grantham.**

**10. Progress update on the Economic Development Strategy for South Kesteven 2024 - 2028**

The Leader of the Council presented the report providing an update on the development of the Economic Development Strategy. The Committee were requested to agree for a Workshop to be held for Committee Members on 17th July 2024.

During consultation, Officers wrote directly to Stakeholders introducing the consultation process for the Economic Development Strategy and asked them to visit the Council's website to make representation. This Stakeholder group included over 250 public sector partners, Town and Parish Councils, business club representatives and citizens 58 who had expressed an interest in Planning, Economic or similar consultation exercises.

The consultation had received over 50 responses, an early review of the responses had identified several themes: connectivity around the District, consideration to commercial business premises to meet demand, identify and key sectors which were most likely to drive the economy and further consideration to productivity drivers and inclusion of plans to address them.

One Member noted that the Strategy would be in use from the years 2024-2028, however, it would not be heard by Cabinet until 8 October 2024. It was suggested the Strategy be in place from 2025-2029.

It was clarified that if the strategy was adopted on 8 October 2024, it would be in place from that point onwards.

One Member shared their disappointment on the lack of responses to the consultation. It was felt that a 5-year plan had now turned into a 3.5 year plan.

The Chairman informed the Committee that the workshop would be to discuss the responses received from those 50 respondents.

The Assistant Director of Planning highlighted the workshop would be useful and valuable in assisting Officers understand any concerns and arrive at final decisions.

**That the Committee:**

- 1. Notes the content of this report including the revised timetable for the Economic Development Strategy set out in Table 1 of the report.**
- 2. Agrees a Workshop be held for FEOSC Committee Members on 17th July 2024 to consider feedback from the consultation and its impact on the development of the strategy.**

## 11. Grantham High Street Heritage Action Zone Completion Report

The Cabinet Member for Property and Public Engagement presented the report.

The High Street Heritage Action Zone in Grantham was funded by Historic England and the Council over 4 years, beginning in May 2020 and completing on 31 March 2024.

The report outlined successes, challenges and lessons learnt from the delivery of the programme and the additional associated cultural programme funded by Historic England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, which ran from 2021 to March 2024.

Further details were provided within the appendices of the report. The Committee's attention was drawn to the following key points

- The programme delivered successfully shopfront, building regeneration projects to seven properties.
- Supported significant restoration works to Westgate Hall in Grantham, whereby ongoing repair and restoration of the building for future plans to reopen as a restaurant in 2025.
- The total grant received from Historic England over the 4-year programme was £672,719 which was matched by £284,652 in funding from the Council.
- The total private sector match funding directly leveraged by grant funding through the scheme was £307,000, which was 3 times the value of the private sector match targeted in the original 2019 bid.
- The recorded added value leveraged through or as a direct result of the scheme was over £370,000, which included the value of additional non grant-funded works carried out on building which received a grant and other buildings encouraged by the involvement of the scheme elsewhere but had no direct grant involvement.

Challenges faced from the programme were Historic England's restriction on preventing the rollover of underspending to following years of the programme. This impacted the delivery on historic buildings on delivery scheduled works.

In 2022, Historic England changed their policy with regards to programme alterations, and as a result programmes no longer had the flexibility to reallocate funding from areas which were under performing to new projects. This limited the ability of the programme to utilise funding where projects delivered under budget, or where the delivery was unsuccessful, resulting in underspend.

The scheme was a great opportunity for learning, and some of the numerous lessons learned through the delivery of the programme are outlined in the formal Closure Report produced for Historic England, which has been included with this report as Appendix A.

A common criticism of the scheme was that the majority of the funding for shopfront regeneration grants was awarded to one or two larger organisations within the town centre, and it was hard for independent property owners to access funding.

In some instances, this was due to the significant increase in cost of shopfront regeneration projects through the duration of the scheme, which made projects unviable for many independent property owners even with the grant support available.

All potential applicants were offered in person support in understanding the application process and completing the application. However, following a review of the scheme during the closure process, ways that any future scheme could be made more equitable and transparent for applicants were identified.

The HSHAZ Shopfront Regeneration scheme was an open programme, with no fixed deadlines for applications. Applications were accepted for projects up until the point that all grant funding had been allocated, essentially on a first come first served basis for eligible projects. This was in line with the operation of the previous shopfront scheme.

It was noted that the most successful was the capital project and the least successful was community engagement.

The Committee were provided with a presentation of photographs on successful projects, as a result of the scheme.

Concern was raised on professional bidders were able to secure grants for shopfronts before independent traders. Members were pleased that something had been put into place to negate this.

Comments were raised on the vacant units in The George shopping centre in Grantham and whether the owners were involved in other successful aspects of the scheme.

The report noted the largest threat to the regeneration of the town centre heritage was the continued reduction in resources and funding of local authorities and partner organisations which persist undermining of regeneration which could be achieved. It was felt that the bigger threat was getting a higher footfall for Grantham and for people to spend money when in the town to stimulate business growth.

*(Councillor Ben Green declared he worked for the Woodland Trust, however, the closure report would not benefit the company or himself, as the work had already taken place).*

A query was raised on how the Council were proactively engaging with the owners of The George shopping centre in Grantham and further investments could be envisaged for the future options of the centre.

The Cabinet Member for Property and Public Engagement highlighted the frustration on lack of legal powers to enforce landowners to complete certain projects when the land is being underutilised.

Further concern was raised on the lack of works being completed The George shopping centre in Grantham. It was felt that any development of the centre could be completed within 10 months.

**That the Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee:**

- 1. Reviews and endorses this report.**
- 2. Is invited to share any comments they may have on this report with the programme board.**

**12. Grantham Future High Streets Fund: Market Place Footfall Activity**

The Leader of the Council presented the report.

The Market Place, Grantham works started on site on 7 May 2024 and included the reconstruction of the road from a tarmac surface to York stone sett paving, whilst also raising the current road height to deliver a single level structured and interconnected space. The scheme was scheduled to conclude on 19 August 2024.

The contractors have mobilised which had caused some consternation among shopkeepers who feel that the works were having a detrimental affect on businesses.

The reports of reduced footfall were potentially overstated, as presented in the graphs shown to the Committee. The report was centred around mitigation and action to be taken during the works and following the works.

Mitigations were provided within the report, which particularly looked into enhancing communications, social media, improving signage, developing an events programme, monitoring footfall data and indicative budget for future activities, which included:

- Extended event programme to deliver further events within the town centre between January and May 2025, to deliver a mixture of weekend and midweek activities, with a focus on larger scale events to be delivered during school holidays and or spring bank holidays.
- Voucher/ loyalty card scheme for businesses within the Market Place area, to run for 12 months with monthly prize draws offering cash rewards or vouchers for town centre experiences.
- Long term promotional activity to highlight Grantham as a destination in general, and Grantham businesses specifically. The focus of this promotion will be to audiences outside of Grantham i.e. surrounding towns and potentially railway routes. This would build upon short- medium term

- marketing and promotional activity which will be delivered by the Grantham Engagement Manager and Town Team from the existing budget.
- Incentives schemes including:
  - free parking on Market days/ mid-week to encourage shoppers,
  - grant scheme for businesses to access marketing support,
  - Financial incentives for new market traders taking up stalls, While the budget requirements for any/ all of these schemes would likely be high, further feasibility work will be required to determine
  - Financial incentives to support rent costs for new town centre businesses,
  - Provision of free buses to Grantham from outlying regions/ other towns for market days.

The Committee were provided with footfall figures and diagrams to show the geofences of Grantham town centre.

The footfall for 2023 in the month of May was compared with May 2024. It appeared that the footfall was higher at the end of May 2024, than it was in 2023. Increases in footfall were Tuesday's, which seemed a common day for people to commute to work and Saturday's, which was Grantham's market day.

Footfall data within the geofence was measured by smartphones having their location enabled on Apps. This data was gathered and would be used to inform graphs.

The technology was able to compile data on how many people had travelled into Grantham, from outside of Grantham.

It was queried whether the data compiled was pedestrian specific or whether it would pick up individuals in vehicles too.

The Leader of the Council confirmed the technology was based on mobile phones which were travelling at less than 4mph.

Clarification was sought on whether 1.56 million people went through the centre of Grantham in the month of March, which equated to 56,000 people per day. It was noted the population of Grantham was 48,000.

The Assistant Director of Planning highlighted that the Council were using a company which specialised in visitor insights and platform terrain. The Council would be exploring further data available from the company, including other towns within the District.

It was clarified that if visitors were in a vehicle and had stopped at a traffic light, the technology was advanced enough to pick up that the vehicle had moved again at speed, therefore, the journey would be discounted.

The technology was able to provide maps of where people were coming into Grantham from and the time stamp of hours of when people arrive and leave Grantham.

One Member discussed other ways to support local businesses around the marketplace, alongside saving money on the £10,000 budgeted.

The possibility was raised of an individual having multiple phones.

It was highlighted the technology only provided confirmation that a person had visited Grantham, rather than what activities the person was partaking in and which shops/events were visited.

One Member requested whether moving averages on the graphs could be reduced, to highlight trends more clearly.

**ACTION: For the Council to liaise with the software providers to request the possibility of a further breakdown of the data in terms of streets, hotspots and comparisons with Grantham and other areas.**

It was noted that the technology was the best available to measure footfall.

One Member urged that the initiative schemes were not delayed, which may affect local businesses further. The Council had £210,000 of allocated funds, which was an opportunity to accelerate the deployment of those funds.

Further concern was raised on the figures produced from the footfall data, which provided there had been no significant decrease in the number of visitors to the area. Some local businesses around the marketplace had stated that this had not been the case.

It was highlighted the geofence of the Grantham town centre included 2 large supermarkets, the residential area from the train station to the A52. It was felt the geofence boundaries needed altering.

Members suggested that the software be brought to the Committee to understand how the figures were compiled.

The Assistant Director of Planning confirmed a demonstration of the software could be brought to the Economic Strategy workshop. It was clarified that geofences could be altered.

**ACTION: For a demonstration of the software to be brought Economic Strategy workshop.**

It was clarified that the town centre geofence included the railway station, meaning commuters were accounted within the footfall.

The narrow Westgate Grantham market had a total of 152,000 visits a month, meaning under 5,000 per day, which equated to 500 an hour for 10 hours of the day.

The Council were recruiting for a Town Manager role whereby they would be responsible for building a town engagement programme with shopkeepers and business owners where the voucher scheme could be discussed.

The indicative budgets recommended for the scheme were outlined within the report. It was noted that some UKPSF funding may be utilised for the scheme.

**That the Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee:**

- 1. Considers the contents of this report.**
- 2. Provides feedback on the proposed additional mitigation measures and recommends a budget for this activity.**

It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED** that the Committee's preferred option was:

**Option 3: In addition to the activities outlined in option two, to complete feasibility works and costed proposals for long term/ permanent suggestions to support the town centre, including the removal of parking charges, implementing a rental support or financial incentive scheme for new businesses and/ or market traders, providing additional bus services on Market days, and funding grants to town centre businesses to deliver additional marketing/branding/promotional activity. Subsequently to bring these fully costed proposals to a future meeting of the committee for allocation of additional budget.**

**13. Work Programme**

The Committee noted the Work Programme 2024-25.

An update was requested on St Martins Park to be brought to the Committee in September.

**14. Any other business, which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstance decides is urgent**

There were none.

**15. Close of meeting**

The Chairman closed the meeting at 17:00.

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## SKDC Armed Forces' Champion Comment

I am grateful, Madame Chair, and I sense that I am swimming against the current...

I am SKDC's Armed Forces Champion. I am also Chair of the Lincolnshire Armed Forces Community Covenant Board and I will be briefing the Board on this discussion and decision when the Board next meets.

I wrote to members of this Committee on 18 July 2023. I said that I was delighted that the proposal to extend the Local Council Tax Support Scheme to Veterans had been approved. I thought that the proposal showed fine initiative and that the vote reflected SKDC's commitment to honour the Armed Forces Covenant and support the Armed Forces Community, and to advocate that support, as it is required to do.

I noted the exhaustive and meticulous consultation process that would take place and anticipated that potential costs would be explored in detail. I expressed the view that this decision reflected well on the Committee.

I think the consultation was, indeed, exhaustive and meticulous and potential costs have been explored in detail. The proposal has been adapted and refined and costs are now far better understood now than they were. This was concurrent with visceral resistance to the proposal in meetings, in emails and in social media exchanges.

Resistance that disregarded the fact that 70.3% of those who responded to the consultation agreed with the introduction of a Veterans' Council Tax discount against 17.5% who did not. Resistance that ignored the fact that it is the views of those who respond to surveys that count, however many or few, not those who do not.

Resistance that looked for ways<sup>1</sup> to implement the proposal as it was developed rather than ways to make it work. Resistance that included comments about 'discounts for retired brigadiers'.

As the Independent Review of UK Government Welfare Services for Veterans in July 2023 noted, the Veteran welfare system is a complex ecosystem, built up over the last century, with services bolted on over time. It is difficult to understand the full scope of the system and its connections and interfaces, and it can feel almost impenetrable for those outside the system seeking support.

Therefore, in seeking to provide an additional and targeted element of support to a specific group of Veterans, complexity is a given. The comprehensive report before the Committee acknowledges this complexity. And I agree with the Leader's comments and echo his thanks in that respect.

I was deeply dismayed by the recommendation that 'no further work is undertaken on the development of a Council Tax Support Scheme for Veterans. It would not be the only scheme that applies to some people and not others, nor would it be the first to be complex, convoluted and difficult to understand.

MoD's Armed Forces' Covenant Team said that it was excellent that we are considering other ways to support the Armed Forces Community.

And the Chair of the East Midlands Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committee said that this was a laudable proposal that might provide a concrete example of the Covenant not being a ceiling but actually a floor for improvements in outcomes for those who have served; a practical offer to address in-work poverty within the Veteran community. Approval would send a very strong signal about how important the Veteran community is perceived to be in the district. Stifling the scheme now would, I suspect, send an equally strong signal.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> **Note:** Cllr Dixon-Warren has made it clear that he intended to say "...Resistance that looked for ways not to implement the proposal....".

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