

Minutes

Cabinet

Tuesday, 4 March 2025

Date of publication: 13 March 2025

**Call-in expiry: 20 March 2025, decisions
can be implemented 21 March 2025 (if no
call-in)**



**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

The Leader: Councillor Ashley Baxter (Chairman)

The Deputy Leader: Councillor Paul Stokes (Vice Chairman)

Cabinet Members present

Councillor Rhys Baker, Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

Councillor Richard Cleaver, Cabinet Member for Property and Public Engagement

Councillor Phil Dilks, Cabinet Member for Planning

Councillor Philip Knowles, Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and
Licensing

Councillor Virginia Moran, Cabinet Member for Housing

Non-Cabinet Members

Councillor Tim Harrison

Officers

Karen Bradford, Chief Executive

Richard Wyles, Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer

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

Emma Whittaker, Assistant Director of Planning and Growth

Karen Whitfield, Assistant Director of Culture, Leisure and Place

Alison Hall-Wright, Director of Housing and Projects

Chris Prime, Communications Manager

David Scott, Assistant Director of Finance and Deputy Section 151 Officer

James Welbourn, Democratic Services Manager (Deputy Monitoring Officer)

Nick Hibberd, Head of Economic Development and Inward Investment

Patrick Astill, Communications Officer

Amy Pryde, Democratic Services Officer

119. Introductory Comments

The Cabinet Member for Housing informed Cabinet that the turnaround time on void properties had reduced to less than 100 days over the past few months. The turnaround time of less than 100 days was set as a target for the end of the financial year. It was highlighted that work on major void properties was on average

in excess of 200 working hours. Approximately 40 days would be taken up from the property being handed back to the Council, inspections taking place and advertising of the property.

The Cabinet Member for Planning congratulated the Cabinet Member for Housing, the Housing team and all senior officers involved.

It was further noted that the loss of rental income had reduced by 25%. 6 months ago, £2,000 was being lost, whereas the loss was now at £1,500.

Previously one main contractor was given 40 properties in 1 month to work on. Work was successful; however, the contractor was not addressing the backlog.

Another company has now been contracted to work on 40 properties each month. Two other main contractors who carried out normal repairs would assist with 10 void properties each per month, subject to their workload.

120. Public Open Forum

There were no comments from members of the public.

121. Apologies for absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Rhys Baker.

122. Disclosure of Interests

There were no disclosures of interests.

123. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 February 2025 were agreed as a correct record.

The Leader of the Council informed Cabinet Members that an Extraordinary meeting of Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee would take place on 13 March 2025 to discuss Grantham Meres Leisure Centre Gym Refurbishment Proposals.

124. Damp and Mould Policy

Purpose of the report

To seek approval from Cabinet for the adoption of the updated Damp and Mould Policy, as recommended by the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of 20 January 2025.

Decision

- 1. Approves the adoption of the updated Damp and Mould 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

To not update the Repairs and Maintenance Policy. This option was discounted for the reasons given in paragraph 2.1 of the report.

Reasons for the decision

This report was presented to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20 January 2025. This policy replaced the current Damp and Mould Protocol document which formed part of the Council's previous Repairs and Maintenance Policy. This standalone Damp and Mould Policy was in line with good practice.

Social landlords must adhere to several regulations relating to damp and mould. A lack of compliance could place a landlord at risk of prosecution or financial penalty. It was therefore essential that the Council had a Damp and Mould Policy in place which meets regulatory requirements.

125. Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy

Purpose of the report

To seek approval from Cabinet for the adoption of the updated Repairs and Maintenance Policy, as recommended by the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of 14 November 2024.

Decision

- 1. Approves the adoption of the updated 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

To not update the Repairs and Maintenance Policy. This option was discounted for the reasons given in paragraph 2.1 of the report.

Reasons for the decision

The current Repairs and Maintenance Policy had been reviewed and updated to reflect the recommendations made by BDO (the Council's internal auditors) following an internal audit of the Repairs Service in 2023/24.

The updated Policy included the proposal endorsed by the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 19 September 2024. It was noted that whilst there were outstanding requests for access to properties to complete essential inspections/surveys, the Council would refuse to undertake non-emergency reactive repairs if tenants were refusing access for essential inspections and surveys.

The updated Policy also addressed the requirement from the Housing Regulator to set out clear timeframes for carrying out reactive repairs.

The Regulator of Social Housing regulates local authorities and housing associations, including setting Consumer Standards which housing providers must follow. Within the Consumer Standards was the Safety and Quality Standard which became effective from April 2024.

Section 3 of the report provided details of the requirements of the safety and quality standard that the Council.

Section 6 of the report provided detail of the consultation that was undertaken with tenants for the adapted policy. Tenants were supportive of the new policy and provided comments regarding the performance of the service which could be summarised into general themes:

- Length of time for repairs to be completed.
- Communication.
- Quality of works.

All concerns have been considered by the Housing team and would be further addressed as part of the service improvement plan.

A point was raised relating to:

- Whether clarity would be provided through Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) in the future on housing repairs and maintenance.

As part of the work, several Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) were being drafted and would be considered in the future.

126. Future High Streets Fund

Purpose of the report

To seek approval to enter into contracts to deliver projects as part of the Future High Street Fund. The grant distributor, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) had agreed an extension to the delivery timescales for

the projects, however all contracts needed to be in place by 31 March 2025. The Chairman of the Council agreed to waive the call-in period for this item due to the time critical nature of the decision.

Decision

The Cabinet is recommended to:

- 1) Delegate authority to the Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Leader of the Council to enter into contracts to secure the works necessary to deliver the following projects as part of the Future High Street Fund:**
 - i. Authority to enter into contract with National Grid in relation to the installation of power in Grantham Market Place and Westgate.**
 - ii. Authority to enter into contract with Lindum Construction in relation to works to Grantham Museum.**
 - iii. Authority to enter into relevant contracts following the completion of necessary procurement for all other projects within the Future High Street Fund extended programme as outlined in this report.**

Alternative options considered and rejected

The Council could have done nothing and not entered into contracts to deliver the remaining elements of the programme. However, in this instance the remaining funds would have needed to be returned to Government. This option was therefore discounted.

Reasons for the decision

In 2020 the Council was successful in securing £5.2 million in grant funding from the Future High Streets Fund for regeneration work in Grantham town centre. In the subsequent years the programme had successfully delivered a programme of public realm improvement in Grantham Market Place, and improvements to the five-arm junction at Station Approach; as well as awarding grants to support the conversion of vacant upper floor retail space into high quality residential accommodation.

In an update to the Future High Street Fund board (9 January 2025) Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) Highways Officers confirmed that there was an underspend on the project of £882,000. The £882,000 had been allocated in risk and contingency budgets for the two public realm projects delivered through the scheme (Grantham Market Place and Station Approach/ five arm junction improvements). It was confirmed by LCC that, following completion of those works, this portion of the funding was not required and would be released as underspend within the scheme.

Officers, supported by the FHSF project board, have negotiated with the funding body, MHCLG, to secure agreement for the funding to be used to deliver additional works to support and increase the outputs of the original scheme.

MHCLG required that any additional works had clear links to the previously delivered elements of the programme and were not considered as 'new projects'. Furthermore, they required that the Council contractually committed to all additional works prior to 31 March 2025.

A project adjustment request was submitted to Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government on 7 February 2025, seeking their permission to utilise the programme underspend on seven defined projects, plus funding to support a project officer staff position.

Formal approval of the project adjustment request was received on 14 February 2025.

The Chief Executive thanked the team for their extensive work carried out on the Future High Streets Fund project.

127. Cabinet Forward Plan

The Forward Plan was noted.

The Chief Executive highlighted that the Cabinet meeting on 6 May 2025 would need to be rearranged, due to the pre-election period for local elections.

128. Open Questions from Councillors

Question 1 - Councillor Tim Harrison

Councillor Tim Harrison asked if the Council could secure any funding for speed awareness measures within Grantham.

The Cabinet Member for Property and Public Engagement explained that the Lincolnshire Road Safety Partnership would need to be involved. Town and Parish Councils were asked to fund speed awareness kits for relevant groups once they were established.

The Chief Executive noted a cross-party group was being established to explore road safety and speeding. SKDC were unable to fund road safety measures, however, the Council would encourage Town and Parish Council's to bid for funding through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for 2025/26.

129. Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 14:30.