

Meeting of the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee



**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

**Thursday, 16 October 2025, 10.00
am**

Committee Members present

Councillor Nikki Manterfield (Chairman)
Councillor Rhea Rayside (Vice-
Chairman)
Councillor Tim Harrison
Councillor Robert Leadenham
Councillor Habib Rahman
Councillor Lee Steptoe
Councillor Charmaine Morgan

Cabinet Members present

Councillor Philip Knowles

Officers

Richard Wyles, Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer
Claire Moses, Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer Services and
Community)
Carol Drury, Community Engagement & Manager
Ayeisha Kirkham, Head of Public Protection
Joshua Mann, Democratic Services Officer
Nicola Moore, Customer Service Manager

14. Public Speaking

There were none.

15. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor James Denniston,
substituted by Councillor Charmaine Morgan.

Apologies for absence were also received from Councillor Richard Dixon-
Warren.

16. Disclosure of Interest

There were none.

17. Minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2025 were proposed, seconded, and AGREED as an accurate record.

18. Updates from the previous meeting

The Democratic Services Officer confirmed that an update on the Customer Service Update – Outturn 2024/25 action was included within item seven of the agenda.

An update regarding the two outstanding actions from the South Kesteven Health and Wellbeing Action Plan & Age Friendly Communities Update would be provided at the following meeting on 10 December 2025.

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

There were none.

20. Customer Service Update - Quarter 1 (2025/26)

The Customer Service Update – Quarter 1 (2025/26) was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance & Licencing.

The report outlined the different methods and number of customer interactions received into the Customer Services Team during the first quarter of 2025/26, compared to 2024/25. The comparison demonstrated a slight overall decrease in total face-to-face and telephone interactions from 61,866 to 59,487.

Despite this, there was an increase in Grantham face-to-face appointments from 79 to 248, resulting from the relocation of Customer Services in October 2024.

The report demonstrated a significant increase in interaction from digital channels from 388,346 to 513,530.

Incorporating all methods of interaction (telephone, walk ins, appointments, and digital), there was an overall increase in total contact from 452,564 to 573,017.

It was also noted that there had been improvements made in call handling with 83% of calls answered (76% previously) and 17% of calls abandoned (24% previously).

During discussions, Members commented on the following:

- It was confirmed that the abbreviation IVR in table one referred to the system used for callers to press a number on their phone to be transferred to service areas.
- A Member noted concern about the number of website users who selected the option that the webpage they accessed had not been useful. The Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer Service and Community) acknowledged the concern and confirmed that all individuals who left contact details along with their response were contacted.
- It was confirmed that the significant increase in appointments in Grantham was due to the relocation of the Customer Service Centre, and the Customer Service team had encouraged vulnerable or individuals who struggle to access digital channels to attend in person.
- The Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer Service and Community) noted their desire for a more co-ordinated approach to managing the website between service areas.

The Customer Service Update - Quarter 1 (2025/26) was noted by the committee.

21. Welfare and Financial Advice Team Update

The Welfare and Financial Advice Team Update – Quarter 1 2025/26 was introduced by the Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer Service and Community).

For the period 1 April 2025 to 30 June 2025, the initial amount of Household Support Funding allocated to South Kesteven was £458,452, equating to 14% of the district allocation.

Section 2.5 of the report updated on the delivery of this funding on the following areas:

- Lincolnshire Community Foundation (LCF)
- SKDC Administrative + Preventative Measures
- 3rd Party Referrers
- Outreach Work/ Pensioners
- HSF7 Vouchers – Lincolnshire Community Foundation (LCF)
- SKDC HSF7 Vouchers – Welfare & Financial Advice Team

A total of 683 vouchers were issued during the seven week period from 4 August 2025 to 22 September 2025, to the value of £94,898.

The timeline for subsequent voucher distribution was as follows:

October 2025 to December 2025 - open for third party referrals from support agencies and low-income pensioners.

January 2026 to March 2026 - open to public application until funding ends. Assistance predominantly by supermarket vouchers and Energy Vouchers.

Furthermore, the total value of additional wrap around support awarded by the Welfare and Financial Advice Team totalled £123,305.

The action plan for additional activities to be undertaken by the Welfare and Financial Advice Team during 2025/26 were detailed within appendix one of the report.

During discussions, Members commented on the following:

- Members praised the Welfare and Financial Advice Team for their tireless work following referrals made by Members.
- It was confirmed that the type of vouchers issued were largely at the request of the user and so officers anticipated an increase in energy vouchers over the winter months.
- The provision of carpets was confirmed not to be within the remit of the Household Support Fund, but the suggestion was made that this could be considered by the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- The Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer Service and Community) was confident that the full funding allocation could be distributed within the allocated time the delayed experienced in quarter one was due to the delay in the release of eligibility guidance.

The Welfare and Financial Advice Team update was noted by the committee.

22. Customer Experience Strategy 2025 to 2029 - Action Plan

The Customer Experience Strategy 2025 to 2029 – Action Plan was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Licencing.

The Customer Experience Strategy 2025 to 2029 was intended to provide a framework for the continued development of the Council's customer focus, to meet the principle of Effective Council, as outlined within the Corporate Plan 2024-27.

The strategy provided a single corporate document that outlined the Council's vision and ensures point of reference, accountability and governance to a Council-wide approach to customer experience.

The Strategy also set out the Customer Charter which defined the Council's responsibility to customers, as well as what the Council would like from customers.

The Customer Experience Steering Group was developed with insight and support from all front-facing service areas and consists of representatives from each of these service areas. The individuals in the group since became Customer Experience champions for their service area who had embed the Strategy within their teams, supporting the launch during National Customer Service Week (6 to 10 October 2025).

The Action Plan included within appendix two of the report outlined the approach taken to support the implementation of the strategy and the priorities encapsulated within. These activities included within the action plan were linked to relevant service plans, staff appraisals, and detailed the financial implications.

During discussions, Members commented on the following:

- Members praised the customer focused, forward thinking of the Customer Service Team and all officers involved in producing the strategy.
- A Member urged officers to ensure that the strategy was inclusive for vulnerable individuals. The Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer Service and Community) confirmed the strategy had been designed with all service areas to be user friendly and user groups had stress tested the design. It was also noted that individuals could still come visit the Customer Service Centre for in-person support.
- In addition to the staff training outlined within the Customer Experience Strategy and Action Plan, it was suggested that an outline of Member training could also be incorporated in the document.
- It was confirmed that feedback from complaints had been utilised when designing the strategy.
- It was also confirmed that the provision of site visits was determined on a service-by-service basis.
- It was queried whether any other locations were being considered in addition to the Grantham and Bourne sites. Following research undertaken by monitoring the postcodes of individuals visiting the sites, officers did not believe there to be significant demand for extra sites in other areas. However, this would continue to be monitored.

The Customer Experience Strategy 2025–2029 – Action Plan was noted by the committee.

23. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Position Statement 2024

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Position Statement 2024/25 was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Licencing.

The Council's commitment to equalities was underpinned by the Corporate Plan (2024-2027) which stated that equality objectives would be supported by a delivery plan as part of the People Strategy.

The 2024/25 Annual Position Statement included the Council's current Equality Objectives which covered the period 2024-2027. The document also contained a snapshot of the actions taken against these objectives to provide Members with an overview of achievements.

The 2024/25 Annual Position Statement was included within appendix one of the report and encapsulated the following:

- Profile of South Kesteven
- Demographics and workforce comparisons
- Census statistics: disabilities
- Census statistics: religion
- Census statistics: sexual identity
- Supporting SKDC staff
- Ensuring equality and inclusion in the workforce
- Ensuring equality and inclusion for customers and communities

During discussions, Members commented on the following:

- Given some of the data used was from the 2021 census, Members queried whether this data risked presenting an outdated demographic of the district. The Community Engagement Manager confirmed that these were the most recent statistics in this level of detail, however, ONS Mid Year Population Estimates were also used which contained more recent Office for National Statistics information. This however did not provided the same level of information across all the protected characteristics.
- It was noted that SKDC could not mandate the workforce to answer demographical questions, hence why 45% of the SKDC workforce had not provided information about sexual identity.
- It was confirmed that providing an equality, diversity, and inclusion annual position statement was a legal duty under the Equality Act 2010.
- Members noted that they were pleased to see accessible versions of the documents were available. It was noted that this was the case for all official council documents.

Following discussions, it was proposed, seconded, and AGREED to note the full support of the Rural and Communities OSC in the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Annual Position Statement 2024/25 and to recommend that the Leader of the Council publishes the information at the earliest opportunity.

24. Corporate Enforcement Policy

The Corporate Enforcement Policy was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Licencing.

This Policy applied to functions carried out within the following Regulatory

Services:

- Public Protection (this includes Environmental Health, Environmental Protection, Private Sector Housing, Community Safety (Neighbourhoods) and Licensing)
- Development Management
- Building Control
- Finance
- Tenancy Services.

The Policy also incorporated three other South Kesteven District Council Enforcement Policies as specific content within the appendices:

- Enviro Crime Enforcement Policy (adopted April 2018)- now Appendix A to the policy titled Environmental Crime and Antisocial Behaviour- Fixed Penalty Notices.
- Environmental Services Enforcement Policy (dated February 2017)- now Appendix B to the policy titled Environmental Health Approach to Investigation and Enforcement.
- Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy (dated November 2018) - now Appendix C to the policy titled Private Sector Housing Approach to Investigation and Enforcement.

The enforcement options listed within the Policy ranged from no action to prosecution, and identified that when deciding whether to prosecute, South Kesteven District Council would have regard to the provisions of The Code for Crown Prosecutors as issued by the Director of Public Prosecutions. This Code provided two tests that must be satisfied when deciding to prosecute, these were the following: Evidential Test and the Public Interest Test.

During discussions, Members commented on the following:

- It was confirmed that the value of fines and fees were reviewed annually.
- Regarding fly tipping, a range of enforcement options were followed, and officers were looking to introduce a fly tipping matrix to allow enforcement options to be flexible and proportionate. Any fly tipping above 20 tonnes was the responsibility of the Environment Agency, and this would usually result in prosecution.
- It was confirmed that additional funding had been requested for cameras in common rural fly tipping areas.
- It was queried whether different departmental interpretations would cause inconsistency in the enforcement actions. The Head of Service (Public Protection) noted that the vast legislation meant that an overarching approach had to be taken. However, reassured Members that internal processes were in place to ensure consistency.
- It was noted that SKDC officers had been leading a Lincolnshire-wide response to fly tipping via the Environmental Crime Partnership.

- A Member highlighted the issue of anti-social behaviour in public parks by individuals aged under-18. They queried whether a multi-agency approach was being taken to tackle this. The Head of Service (Public Protection) confirmed that individual processes were in place to deal with these instances such as the Young Persons Protocol.
- It was confirmed that the penalties for Landlords renting out sub-standard properties were set by central government.

The Corporate Enforcement Policy was noted by the committee.

25. Work Programme 2025 - 2026

It was requested that the Armed Forces Champion be invited to the 10 December 2025 meeting for the Armed Forces Update.

The Chairman confirmed their intention to liaise with the Chairman of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) to ensure they were happy with Members of the Rural and Communities OSC being invited to their 13 January 2026 meeting to observe the presentation by the Grantham Canal Partnership.

The Head of Service (Public Protection) requested for the following to be added to the Work Programme:

- Updated Street Trading Policy,
- Food Health and Safety Enforcement Workplan.

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

A Member noted that a number of reports within the agenda pack had only been for noting and suggested that alternative wording should be considered within the recommendation to lean into the scrutiny function of the committee.

The Chairman concluded the meeting at 11.20am.