

Rising to the challenge

At South Kesteven District Council we sometimes have to deal with the unexpected and I take great pride in the fact that in those circumstances, whenever possible, we simply roll up our sleeves and get on with the challenges we face.

As you are no doubt aware, a large number of Afghan families who worked with British Forces during the conflict in their country are being housed at a hotel in our district while new homes are found for them around the UK.

This resettlement programme is a Home Office project, but it's fair to say that a large burden of responsibility for the families' welfare has fallen on our shoulders.

Our Emergency Planning lead officer, Phil Swinton, along with other members of #TeamSK, have worked incredibly hard to make the necessary arrangements, and co-ordinate with various other agencies, to ensure we have been able to offer a warm welcome on behalf of South Kesteven.

It has been hectic, and sometimes emotionally challenging, for our staff working on this project and I've been really impressed at how they've thrown themselves into the task of making things as comfortable as possible for those families we are helping.

There have, unfortunately, been some distasteful comments made on social media about the whole situation, but the actions of #TeamSK paint a much more accurate picture of the friendly face of our district.

Purdah in place

It's worth noting that we are now in a period of purdah due to the two SKDC by-elections taking place on October 28th. There will also be two by-elections for seats on Stamford Town Council on the same date.

During purdah, normal council business, including the determination of planning applications, can continue so most of what we do is unaffected.

If, however, a particular initiative, proposal, consultation or publication during the pre-election period could reasonably be regarded as giving a candidate or their political party an advantage in the election, then that particular item of business should be deferred until after the election.

The SKDC by-elections are in the Stamford All Saints and Grantham Arnoldfield wards, while the Stamford Town Council vacancies are in the All Saints North and St Mary's wards.

Orchard opening

I was delighted to be among the guests at the opening of the Heroes Commemorative Orchard in Grantham. Also there were Royal British Legion standard bearers, Army representatives and descendants of men who fought in the Battle of Arnhem.

The orchard, in Wyndham Park, is a wonderful living tribute to British forces and our wartime allies and is well worth a visit.

Among my other appointments In recent weeks, I've also enjoyed the chance to visit two important projects in the region – the long-awaited restoration of our Georgian Ballroom at Stamford Arts Centre; and new council housing in Bourne and Stamford, coming as part of our housing strategy to build much-needed homes across the district.

Awards winners

I am delighted to report that South Kesteven District Council was named as runner-up in the Best Efficiency and Transformation category at this year's Association of Public Service Excellence awards.

The award came in recognition of the creation of LeisureSK Ltd, which was set up to deliver leisure services in the District. The same project was also Highly Commended in the Workforce Transformation category of the Municipal Journal Local Government Achievement Awards.

To have been shortlisted in two prestigious national awards schemes is a terrific achievement - successes such as this reflect well on everyone at SKDC and shine a light on the great work that we do.

Significant investment explored for Deepings Leisure Centre

Staying with leisure services, we have been working extremely hard to find a way to save and improve Deepings Leisure Centre and have agreed to explore proposals involving an investment of around £6.3 million to do just that.

The centre is currently closed on health and safety grounds but it has been estimated the investment could not only bring it back into safe operation, it could also improve the facility and secure a good standard of leisure provision for the next 25 years.

After listening to many heartfelt stories and concerns from local people, it is apparent this building means far too much to the community to allow it to close without exploring every possible option.

I am hopeful that the further investigations can deliver the best possible outcome – securing an improved leisure centre in the Deepings for many years to come, as quickly as possible, and retaining a building that means so much to the community.

Safeguarding

I am pleased to report that SKDC has met stringent conditions relating to its safeguarding responsibilities, so much so that we have been used as a best practice example for other areas in Lincolnshire.

This follows a 35-point audit through the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership and relates to our promoting welfare and safeguarding the community.

As a district authority we have responsibilities in relation to children, young people and adults at risk of harm, which also includes the Prevent Counter-Terrorism strategy.

It is a wide-ranging remit and includes employees, volunteers, apprentices and students, as well as those who use our services or are cared for by people who use our services. We must consider those

who work with our staff, elected members, volunteers and key contractors. This is mostly related to Housing and Culture and Leisure services, and through our responsibilities as a licensing authority.