

Present: Councillor Claire Rylott (Chairman), Councillor Lina Savickiene (Vice-Chairman), Councillors Anton Dani, Neil Drayton, Mike Gilbert, Patricia Marson, Ralph Pryke and Suzanne Welberry

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Sarah Sharpe.

Officers –

Assistant Director - Regulatory, Assistant Director - Leisure and Culture, Interim Cultural Services Manager, Group Manager for Insights & Transformation and Democratic Services Officer

### **32 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were tabled by Councillor Alison Austin with Councillor Richard Austin substituting.

Apologies for absence were tabled by Councillor David Scoot with Councillor Helen Staples substituting.

Further apologies were tabled by Councillor David Middleton and Ralph Pryke and Portfolio Holders Councillors Anne Dorrian, Dale Broughton.

### **33 MINUTES**

The Chairman signed the minutes of the previous meeting as agreed by the Committee.

### **34 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

Councillor Gilbert declared an interest in relation to item three on the agenda in that was a member of the Boston Big Local Panel and had been so when funding decisions had been made historically.

### **35 PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

No public questions were raised.

### **36 JOINT ANNUAL SCRUTINY OF THE SOUTH AND EAST LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCILS PARTNERSHIP.**

Councillor Brewis presented the report on behalf of the Partnership Scrutiny Task Group.

Committee were advised that the Overview and Scrutiny Committees of Boston Borough Council, South Holland District Council and East Lindsey District Council commissioned a joint Scrutiny Task & Finish Panel to undertake a review of the progress on the opportunities identified in the approved business case for the South & East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership. The scrutiny work undertaken was required under the Partnership's Memorandum of Agreement and was an annual commitment, and the report tabled sought committee's notation and comment of the work undertaken, prior to the report being tabled through to Cabinet. Councillor Brewis further thanked all parties

involved in the preparation of the report and all those consulted who offered input, which resolved in majority of the recommendations being agreed unanimously.

Member comment followed which is collated and included:

Questioning the reason for the frequency of use of the term 'Levelling Up' within the report and its relevance to the work of the Partnership a member advised that whilst he was impressed with the Government framework, he felt it a little naive in its intention of achievability. He noted that the Levelling Up needed to be working for the Partnership in its' own right and not aligned with what the Government directed to be achievable. Councillor Brewis and the Scrutiny Officer advised the term had been included in a positive manner, due to the impact and success of the grant funding secured and the outcomes it had enabled which had benefitted the Partnership. The report evidenced the completed scrutiny work over the previous year, the importance of the Levelling Up funding within it and the overall benefit of the funds to the Partnership.

Seeking assurance of what mitigation measures would be in place to ensure the Partnership and smaller Councils would not be eradicated by Devolution, with the potential of funding priorities going to the Greater Lincolnshire Council, a member was advised that indications were there would be no effect on any of the District or the Partnership Council(s) working independently or collectively. Furthermore feedback in respect of the Partnership had been that Central Government had been impressed with its progress and achievements to date.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Brewis for presenting the report.

#### **RECOMMENDED:**

That the Environment and Performance Committee having noted the report tabled endorsed the recommendation therein to Cabinet.

### **37 BOSTON GUILDHALL ACTION PLAN**

The Portfolio Holder presented the report supported by the Assistant Director of Leisure and Culture and the Interim Cultural Services Manager.

Committee were advised that the Guildhall was owned and maintained by Boston Borough Council and was a building of International, National and local significance. The building itself dated back to the 1390's and was testament to the wealth and influence of the Guild of St. Mary at a time when Boston's power as a centre of trade was second only to London. The Guildhall was an important Council asset which was managed within the Leisure and Culture Division of the Communities Directorate and the proposed action plan for the Guildhall had been developed, to provide support for both an economic and efficient structure, together with an effective service delivery moving forward. The Interim Cultural Services Manager further explained Boston's Cultural Quarter Group consisted of the Guildhall, Fydell House, Blackfriars Theatre and St. Botolph's Church all whom met monthly to talk about shared events and activities and, that the lack of this detail within the report had already been highlighted and would be included moving forward.

Member comment followed which is collated and included:

Concerns were noted by a member at the omission of a number of issues within the reporting including no reference to the important role the Guildhall played in pride of place and wellbeing.

There was no clear plan on increasing the day to day footfall of the site and a lack of intent to rotate / introduce new exhibits into the venue, all of which the member requested be included within the final report. The member further questioned why recruitment of volunteers was not a priority to enable longer opening hours for the venue.

Responding to the comments, the Interim Cultural Services Manager advised that once the venue was fully staffed a development plan would be taken forward to include exhibits and exhibitions. Volunteers were not currently being recruited due a number of factors including the current capacity issues of existing staff and the significant training required for volunteers against the lack of budget. The Assistant Director for Leisure and Culture advised that the budget in question was a Museum, Arts and Culture budget, which went beyond the museum and Guildhall itself.

On requesting the annual cost for the Guildhall the Assistant Director for Leisure and Culture advised that including the Notional costs, the cost was £342,904.00 with £66,261.00 being Amortisation of Intangible Assets and £47,329.00 being depreciation of assets, which would be adjusted at the end of the year and would reduce.

Further concerns noted a lack of publicity for the venues opening times, the reduced and sometimes random opening hours and also the need to close the whole building for wedding events. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that a trifold leaflet was being designed which would house a QR code for easy access. The leaflets would be available in locations including at the train station, the Guildhall, St. Botolph's Church and cafes. The Council website also had a direct link to visitor attractions.

The Guildhall was closed for wedding events due to a number of factors which included the need for the venue to only be used for the purpose of the private hire; the need for a separate room for pre-wedding interviews by the registrar and due to its specific nature and layout with the fire escape routes as designated by the fire service, the venue could not be made available to the public during a private hire function.

Concern was also noted at the lack of reference to the part the Guildhall played in the £1million visitor economy and a member stressed he felt that the staff at the Guildhall needed to be more proactive in expanding the visitor economy. The Interim Cultural Services Manager advised that the staff already worked very hard within the constraints they had, and in a recent report by Historic England the Guildhall received an 80% rating and the staff received a 95% rating for their hard work within the resources they had.

Referencing the significant connections of the Guildhall, along with those of St. Botolphs and Fydell House in relation to 'Western Thought', a member requested a clearer narrative be provided within the plan for Boston's rich heritage, to support and encourage the interest of those interested parties who valued such historic venues and thereby aid increased footfall and the visitor economy.

A further suggestion noted that Boston Massachusetts had a Freedom Trail which connected 16 nationally significant historic sites across a 2.5 mile trail, which could prove to be something to look at for Boston and a way to involve all organisations in the Cultural Quarter and potentially be a project for the College.

A request was made for the average visitor numbers for the Guildhall on a Saturday with the information to be tabled following the meeting.

**RECOMMENDED:**

That the Environment and Performance Committee considered and commented on the proposed Action Plan and supported its development to aid the future economic, efficient and effective delivery of the Action Plan for the venue.

### **38       EVENTS UPDATE**

The Assistant Director of Leisure and Culture presented the review of 2023 Events and 2024 Programme of Events supported by the Interim Cultural Services Manager. Committee were advised that the report was for information purposes and provided a summary of the 2023 events programme supported by the BTAC (Boston Town Area Committee) approved programme of events. The varied programme had allowed a wide range of opportunities for residents and visitors to celebrate Boston's history and heritage and to participate in cultural activities, which enhanced health and wellbeing and increased a sense of community. Large scale events, cultural interventions and external events had provided a wide ranging programme of activity which had been well received by residents and had been supported by good attendance and positive feedback.

The smaller trails utilising Boston Guildhall, Fydell House and Blackfriars brought increased footfall to the key cultural venues with many participants visiting them for the first time. Weather conditions had impacted on two events: the Beach event in Central Park had been affected by rain and Storm Babet in October had severely impacted on the October Fair in Central Park, resulting in severe damage to the site. Whilst the Fair had been held previously at that time of year without any problems, the siting of the event would be reviewed moving forward with other locations being explored.

Member comment followed which included the following:

Referencing the success of the Christmas Event, a member questioned the initial ambition of extending it to a four day event, as it was clear that in the latter two days there had been a significant decrease in attendance. The member suggested that a busy two day event would be more productive for both traders and residents. In response the Assistant Director – Leisure and Culture advised that it had been the wish of the new Council to provide a positive event following the previous years' Christmas provision and that a full de-brief would be undertaken to gain a clear steer on future events. Indications were that it had been very well received despite the poor weather conditions and there had been a positive increase in footfall.

A member questioned the aspirations of the Health and Wellbeing data within the Levelling Up Fund measures in the report, which he stated were the Government's aspirations and were not specific to Boston. The member asked if the data could be tailored to Boston and the Assistant Director – Culture and Leisure advised he would review the matter to see if was possible to amend the data specific to Boston.

Noting the damage to Central Park and that eleven of the events throughout year had taken place on the site, a member questioned possible consideration of alternative sites for the events moving forward. The damage had been substantial and the grass which had been re-sown would take a long time to recover. The Assistant Director – Leisure and Culture confirmed that alternative sites were being considered for the autumn events, but the spring and summer events would remain in Central Park and that was the agreed location.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

That the Environment and Performance Committee noted the report and commented on the outcomes of the events during 2023.

That the Assistant Director – Leisure and Culture would review the remit of the Levelling Up White Paper aspirations with a view to ascertaining the possibility to make them more specific to Boston.

### **39 QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE.**

The Groups Manager for Insights and Transformation presented the Performance Report. Members were reminded that some sections were trend only data, although trend data could not have a target, it could support in showing whether support was needed in different areas.

Member comment and officer responses included:

A request was tabled for the visitor economy to be considered for inclusion within the performance monitoring.

Members were advised that sickness was set as a trend as it could not be set as a target due to officers not being able to actually set a sickness figure. The trend enabled officers to identify specific areas relating to sickness to be addressed.

Responding to concerns in relation to the reduction in market occupancy the committee were informed that the Council was looking at an improvement plan for the overall market provision which would be tabled to Scrutiny in the future.

Addressing the indicator for Planning Extensions the Insights and Transformation Manager advised that applicants often required an extension, as it was in their best interest to enable them to address matters over a longer period of time. The indicator would be dropped from the performance monitoring in the next Municipal Year as it was something over which the Council had little control.

Confirmation was provided that the food safety performance indicators were for both established and new businesses.

Questioning the lack of income noted for FPN's issued, a member was advised that the figures would be different for the next quarter as there were various timing issues in respect of payments of the fines. Some were paid at varying times from receipt of the notice, whilst others including those going through to prosecution would take longer to be received. A request was tabled for data identifying how many fines remained unpaid due to the culprit not being found at the address given.

### **RECOMMENATION:**

- Committee noted the report.

### **40 WORK PROGRAMME**

Councillor Dani provided an update on the Member Working Group which was reviewing carparks and road signage. Committee were advised that the first meeting had been held and the scope agreed and a schedule of meetings implemented for the review.

Member comment and questions followed which is collated and included:

Referencing a previous request for a report in respect of the PRSA (Princess Royal Sports Arena), a member reiterated their wish for the current leaseholder to be

scrutinised, following representation he had received from the Boston Athletics Club in respect of the lack of athletics provision currently provided at the PRSA.

The Chairman advised that they would agree such a report, but that they were unsure what the committee could actually scrutinise, bearing in mind the new leaseholder had not long been in place, and as such, it seemed only fair to allow them to settle in to their new role and give them time to structure their plans and way forward, prior to asking them to come to the committee. The Assistant Director for Leisure and Culture advised that the Council were liaising with the new leaseholder in the initial stages of the new contract, but felt sure that representatives of the organisation would welcome the chance to attend after their initial period. By that time they would be able to provide greater information on their way forward. An initial member briefing would allow an open dialogue and then should members feel that there was a need for greater scrutiny on any aspect of the facility, a more detailed form of scrutiny could then take place.

A further member requested a report in respect of the GMLP (Geoff Moulder Leisure Pool) be provided to update members on the changes to the site following the change of ownership. Again the Chairman stated that it would be difficult to seek any form of report in the early days of the changeover and felt it prudent to allow a few months for the new organisation to develop, before asking them to come and report to the committee.

**RECOMMENDED:**

That a member briefing be scheduled for attendance by representatives of the PRSA.

That an update report on the activity of the GMLP be schedule onto the work programme for the next municipal year.

The Meeting Closed at 8.30 pm