

Boston Borough Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview & Scrutiny - Environment & Performance Committee** held in the Committee Room - Municipal Buildings, West Street, Boston, PE21 8QR on Tuesday 11th February 2025 at 6.30 pm.

Present:

Councillor Claire Rylott, in the Chair.

Councillors Councillor Lina Savickiene, Alison Austin, Neil Drayton, Stuart Evans, Mike Gilbert, Andy Izard, Patricia Marson, Ralph Pryke, David Scoot, Suzanne Welberry and Sarah Sharpe.

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In attendance:

Councillor Richard Austin BEM.

Officers:

Assistant Director - Regulatory, Assistant Director - Culture and Leisure, Group Manager – Insights & Transformation, Community Development Manager, Markets Manager, Museums, Arts & Heritage Manager, Democratic Services Team Leader, Democratic Services Officer and Democratic Services Officer.

81 Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence were received.

82 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

83 Minutes

The Minutes of the previous meeting held 10th December 2024 were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

84 Public Questions

No questions were received.

85 Quarter 2 Performance

The Group Manager – Insights & Transformation presented a report by the Assistant Director – Corporate which provided the 2024/25 Quarter 2 performance update, as up to 30th September 2024. A joint performance management framework had been agreed across the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership for 2024/25 to support the delivery of services. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) had been agreed to capture performance against the strategic priorities of the Partnership and the individual Councils. In total 101 KPIs for Boston Borough Council were set out by priority within Appendix 1, following the adoption of the Sub-regional Strategy.

The Group Manager – Insights & Transformation highlighted the following key points:

Key Performance Indicators:

- Green (On or above target): Majority of indicators
- Amber (Just off target):
 - Occupancy rate at industrial units: 92.86% (target: 95%)
 - Occupancy rate for other investment property: 92.55% (target: 95%)
- Red (Below target):
 - Household waste recycling rates
 - Percentage of calls answered in customer contact
 - Revenues and benefits customer contact

Members' comments included the following:

The team was commended for not having any children in Bed & Breakfast accommodation for any length of time.

Clarity was sought on the reasons behind the difficulties of obtaining data for commercial rent. The Group Manager – Insights & Transformation advised that the difficulty lay in reporting from the financial system, and noted that the information was being managed operationally.

A question was asked as to why there had been a reduction in swimming lessons and swimming. The Group Manager – Insights & Transformation advised that an update would be provided, noting the change in operation at the Geoff Moulder Leisure Centre.

Clarification was sought on a new measurement against estimated annual expenditure from PSPSL. The Group Manager – Insights & Transformation advised that it was a result of the local authority error rate and that further details would be gathered to provide further clarity on the matter. Additionally, clarification was sought in regards to the adjusted or real figures relating to council tax banded dwellings. The Group Manager – Insights & Transformation advised that she would check the information and provide an update.

A query was raised about whether the callback system had reduced or extended the length of time that customers were on hold. The Group Manager – Insights & Transformation advised that she would gather more information and provide an answer.

RESOLVED:

That the performance information be noted

86 Update on Guildhall Action Plan

The Portfolio Holder – Culture, Councillor Sarah Sharpe, presented a report which provided an update on the work programme of activity designed to support service delivery at the Guildhall, Boston.

The Leisure and Culture Division within the Communities Directorate was responsible for developing and delivering the museum service that was offered through the Guildhall.

Noting the importance of the building to the borough of Boston and the need to deliver an efficient service, an action plan had been developed around four themes, which had been approved by Cabinet in February 2024:

- Sustainability and Improving Financial Resilience;
- Historic Site and Collection;
- Exhibition and Event Programming; and
- Promotion and Marketing.

The thematic areas within the plan were supported by key strategic objectives that were linked to 21 actions: 14 were on target, 2 had been completed or were no longer required, 5 required mitigations to stay on plan and 0 were off target.

Councillor Sharpe highlighted the following key points:

- **Progress:** 14 actions on target, 1 completed, 5 with mitigations, and 1 no longer required.
- **Achievements:**
 - Successful recruitment of the Museum Events and Venue Officer.
 - 61% increase in visitors in November compared to the previous year.
 - Installation of a card machine for merchandise and donations.
 - Relaunch of social media accounts.
 - Submission and progress of grant applications.
 - Development of the exhibition program, including notable exhibitions like the Pilgrim Woman and the De Gaulle Exhibition.
 - Upcoming exhibitions and events, including the 900th anniversary of the Mayfair.
 - Benefits from the National Portfolio Organisation Fund for museum display cases and cultural programs.
 - Successful hire events and collaborations with local organizations.
- **Future Plans:** Continued work on grant applications, promotion of the venue for weddings, and development of new exhibitions.

Members' comments included the following:

A question was asked about how closely the Guildhall was linked with local schools, and how many weddings were held at the venue. Councillor Sharpe advised that schools did visit regularly, with one visit scheduled at the end of February 2025. Additionally, it was noted that six weddings had been held last year.

The approach taken to track the sales and profit margins of branded merchandise was queried. The Principal Museum Arts and Heritage Officer advised that the profit margin was approximately 120%. An audit process was in place to ensure sales were tracked and profitable.

A question was asked about ways that the booking situation could be improved and how limitations like the single toilet and parking could be addressed. The Principal Museum Arts and Heritage Officer advised that promoting the venue was key and that temporary toilets could be considered for larger events, as considering any permanent changes

would be challenging due to the building's listed Grade I status. A further query was raised on whether connections had been made with Boston, Massachusetts for potential shared exhibitions. The Principal Museum Arts and Heritage Officer advised that there was a link with the Massachusetts State Library, and that further connections were being explored, particularly with Rhode Island.

The Chairman emphasised the importance of understanding the financial resilience of the Guildhall and requested further detailed financial figures. The Principal Museum Arts and Heritage Officer presented the financial report for the last two years, which reflected a total overall income increase by 2% compared to the previous year.

A question was asked about the possibility of the Guildhall being opened for more days, including Sundays. The Principal Museum Arts and Heritage Officer advised that more opening days would require additional resources. It was noted that a growth bid could support this, and that aligning with town-wide initiatives could be beneficial.

The potential collaboration with Fydell House for facilities and joint bookings, particularly for weddings, was queried. The Principal Museum Arts and Heritage Officer advised that collaboration with Fydell House was ongoing, and that their facilities had been used for events. Further strategic collaboration was an aspiration.

A question was asked about the possibility of the Guildhall being promoted to schools within a 50-mile radius, with leaflets being placed in hotels for tourists. The Portfolio Holder – Culture and the Principal Museum Arts and Heritage Officer advised that promotion to schools, for trips, was limited by funding however wider promotion was possible. Leafleting in hotels was not currently being carried out, but online promotion was being enhanced.

Clarification was sought about whether the 400th anniversary of the founding of Boston, Massachusetts was being addressed by the Corporate & Community Committee. Councillor Sharpe advised that a six-month consultation period was taking place in which different stakeholders were taking part, and that information was being gathered prior to presenting it to scrutiny.

The possibility of improving signage for the Guildhall and the use of banners for events was suggested. Councillor Sharpe advised that signage improvements had been planned as part of the National Lottery Heritage Fund bid. The idea of a banner across the road was well-received.

A question was asked regarding ways in which financial resilience for the Guildhall could be ensured. The Principal Museum Arts and Heritage Officer advised that external investments and novel ways to increase resilience without Council investment were being explored. Visitor analysis was needed to target strategies effectively.

The Chairman invited Councillor Richard Austin, attending as a public speaker, to address the meeting. Councillor Austin queried the possibility of making the Guildhall the centre of the visitor economy. The Principal Museum Arts and Heritage Officer advised that the Guildhall was to play a core role in the visitor economy, especially leading up to Boston 400 in 2030. Exhibitions and collaborations were being planned. Councillor Austin suggested the possibility of capitalising on national stories like those about Thomas

Cromwell. The Principal Museum Arts and Heritage Officer advised that the Team was working closely with the Communications Team for such stories to be promoted as a priority. Councillor Austin also queried the possibility of local industries like agriculture and food packing to be featured in exhibitions. The Principal Museum Arts and Heritage Officer advised that exhibitions on those topics were being planned, supported by the National Portfolio Organisation Storytellers.

The Chairman noted the excitement of the Boston 400 event in 2030 and the prospect of all the work being done. She emphasised that further work needed to be carried out by officers in respect of the financial figures.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

87 Boston Markets Policy Report

The Markets Manager presented a report which provided an updated on the Markets & Severe Weather Policies, in line with the review and development of the Markets Service. He advised that he was new to the role, as having started in October 2024.

Following the implementation of the Boston Markets Development Plan, agreed by Cabinet on 27th March 2024, the Markets Service had undergone a full-service review in line with the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership's (SELCP) Annual Delivery Plan. The review had highlighted the need to evaluate the Market and Severe Weather Policies as a priority, as the service evolved, in order to ensure that the market was operated efficiently, consistently, and safely.

The report detailed the draft revised and new policies for the service. The current Market Policy was attached as Appendix 1, the draft Market Policy was attached as Appendix 2, and the draft Severe Weather Policy was attached as Appendix 3 within the report.

The Markets Manager indicated that the market policies were reviewed annually in order to update fees/charges and minor changes to wording but, following the review of the service, it was determined that a wider review of the policy was also required. The review had been undertaken with extensive research and drew on best practice. It also gave consideration to the increased number of traders in which English was not necessarily their first language, and therefore aimed to make the policy terms clearer, using uncomplicated wording and less jargon, where possible.

The following principal changes to the draft Market policy were highlighted:

- A new requirement for new traders to provide risk assessments if using their own stalls and equipment.
- New incentives had been added to the casual traders and traders that had not traded at Boston for over 12 months.
- Charity stores would be allowed a stand for free once a quarter instead of once a year.
- A debt repayment warning would be added to the policy to remind traders of timely invoice payments, with late payments strictly monitored and with disciplinary procedures for those who breached the policy.

- Holiday entitlement would increase by one day and had been made clearer with inclement weather day entitlement doubled.
- Changes had been made to disciplinary procedures and the conduct section.
- Information on selling second hand goods had been added to the policy.
- Erection and dismantling times for the new gazebos would be added, with trading hours reduced by 30 minutes. A strict compliance to not pack away until 30 minutes prior to the core trading hours had ended would be introduced in response to feedback from the traders due to customer behaviour having changed over the years, with most customers attending the market earlier.
- Emergency procedures had now been added to the policy along with a health and safety inspection form for the market officer, dismantling instructions for Council staff had been added and trader application forms would be removed from the main body of the policy to make it clearer.
- The severe weather policy would be removed from the main body of the policy and would become its own document, as advised by the health and safety manager.

The following principal changes to the draft Severe Weather Policy were highlighted:

- Setting out how the markets team would determine when and how a decision to restrict or close the market was taken.
- Acknowledging the disruption, financial and logistical impacts for all concerned, a decision-making matrix would be shown within the policy for traders to view.
- A new, more formalised severe weather policy had been drafted in collaboration with the health and safety manager.
- The policy would set out clear conditions for traders using equipment during a restricted market.
- The policy would provide a stated time and date when decisions for the market would be made.
- Only the Met Office weather app would be used to ensure a fair and consistent approach to decision making.
- It maintained the principle that the key priority was to protect the safety of the public, traders and staff as well as the reputation of the Council in the event of severe weather.

Members comments included the following:

In relation to the extent of the feedback sought from traders, the Markets Manager indicated that he had visited the market himself, liaised with the market officer and had spoken with all the traders directly regarding their concerns, which were focussed mainly on the severe weather policy.

Clarification was sought regarding the advance notice given to traders in the event of operating the Severe Weather Policy, including the accuracy of weather warnings. It was confirmed that a decision would be made by 2pm the day before the market and an explanation was provided to the Committee. The issue of whether there was a contingency if the forecast was incorrect was considered. At present, there was no contingency if the weather forecast changed after 2pm on the day before a market as stalls were set out the day before. However, that would change when the new gazebos were introduced, as set up would be between 6am and 8am on the morning of the market. Additionally, in the new policy, at the present time for traders that used their own equipment, stalls or gazebos, if

the weather did change overnight, it would be reassessed at 7am on the morning of the market for those traders. The Markets Manager indicated that this was a disadvantage to those that used the Council stalls. However, he added that traders who brought their own equipment should not be penalised.

Information was provided regarding the difference between the current stalls and the new blue and white gazebos which were to be introduced. Steel framed stalls were used at present, with a sheet on top. The stalls were coming to the end of their life, which explained the introduction of the gazebos, that were now in the Council's possession. Erection of the gazebos would be carried out by two people, and public feedback on the appearance of the gazebos had been positive. There had been some negative feedback from the current traders and as a result the new gazebo stand which had been erected recently for the traders to see. Other traders were prepared to trial them to consider the logistics of their stall layout and a plan was in place to mitigate any concerns.

The current stalls measured 10 feet, and the gazebos measured 3 x 3 metres, so they would have the same footprint but there would be discretion to extend the site depending on safety issues. There would also be a change whereby hanging items from the gazebos would not be permitted, which was being considered with traders in advance of implementation.

Health and safety issues were considered, including the risk of slips and trips and cables at head height which, in response to questioning, the Markets Manager indicated would be investigated.

It was clarified that charities with a stall must also have public liability insurance; and that car boot sales were not within the remit of the markets team.

The recommendation was moved by Councillor David Scoot and seconded by Councillor Stuart Evans.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That report be noted; and**
- 2. That feedback be provided to Cabinet on 19th February 2025 and Full Council on 3rd March 2025 as part of the Annual Budget report.**

88 Boston Market Development Plan Report

The Markets Manager presented a report which provided progress against the Boston Market Development Plan, as agreed by Cabinet on 27th March 2024. He indicated that the report provided an overview on how Boston's regular Wednesday and Saturday markets had been performing and proposed actions for the further development of the service in order to deliver a sustainable market service and to become financially resilient.

The partnership annual delivery plan included two projects for the Boston Market Service to undertake during the 24/25 financial year which were to review the market's policy and

to undertake a review of the market service with an aim to deliver savings, whilst also growing the service.

By way of an update, since the Environment and Performance Committee meeting on 13th February 2024, a dedicated Markets Manager was now in place, across the partnership.

A successful capital funding bid of £47,750 had been made for the replacement van, gazebos and equipment. There had been a reduction in the store erector team and hours of operation in Quarter 3 and savings had been built into the 25/26 budget. Road closures had been introduced for Saturday markets following a consultation in Quarter 2. Final consultations were currently ongoing to apply for a road closure on Wednesday market days in Quarter 4. Markets had been integrated into events such as the Christmas Festival and the Boston College Food Festival.

Members noted that the teenage market events had continued to develop and had now been focused into eight months of the year instead of twelve, taking best practice from East Lindsey District Council, which ran a very successful teenage market programme. It had also recently been confirmed with the Portfolio Holder that there would also be charity stalls with the teenage market, as a pairing to bring more visitors for that day.

A new makers and farmers market would be held monthly between March and October, which had been created with the assistance of Councillor Suzanne Welberry and would begin in March 2025. Development of the social media presence, particularly on Facebook, had continued and was being expanded to other platforms such as Instagram and Google. The Boston Market Facebook page had been revamped with new content and an extensive number of local groups had now joined. Year on year from January 2024/25, there were 1410 views with an increase of 64.1%. New professional photos of the market had been taken, that had been posted on the Boston Market Facebook page, which had received fantastic feedback from followers and traders.

The new branded gazebos had been bought in readiness for a move to their introduction for the 2025/26 financial year, with new guttering having been ordered to enable traders to join the gazebos without their stock being damaged. The Markets Manager indicated that although Boston's pitch fees were similar to some of the markets in the area, they were considered high when local demographics were factored in. The proposal within the budget programme for 2024/25 was for the Council to freeze the fees to keep the rates competitive. An increase of 50p had been introduced for the market traders' vehicles. Market occupancy rates had increased by 1% year on year for Quarter 1 and 2 with an 8% decrease for Q3 due to several markets being restricted due to the Met Office yellow warnings.

The Markets Manager advised that the markets team was in the early stages of working towards a Process Data Quickly (PDQ) machine/payment system to enable traders to pay their pitch fees on the day of the market. This would prevent any traders developing debt moving forward. Positive action was being taken regarding the traders' current debt and new debt collectors instructed for traders no longer engaging.

New barrier covers were being used for the road closures, advertising the market and how to become a trader, and new banners to advertise the market opening time times around

Boston had been introduced. Additionally, new banners for the makers and farmers market had been introduced, including artwork for notice boards around the town centre. Bunting would also be introduced over the next few weeks and the market's logo had changed to represent the colours of Boston Council.

Traders' meetings had been introduced with the aim to hold them every six months to seek their feedback and to ensure constant consultation. There would also be initiatives such as a selfie square and "trader of the week".

A good relationship had been forged with Father David Stephenson at St Botolph's Church and consideration was being given to how best to encourage and utilise the footfall from the 90,000+ visitors a year. International markets to celebrate Boston's diverse community were also being considered.

Members' comments included the following:

Information had been provided about how many stall holders there were currently. It was confirmed that there were 10-15 at present and in the summer, there would be 20-30 stall holders in place. Consideration had been given to how far traders were travelling, with confirmation that the majority lived in or near Boston. Information was provided, advising that there were 54 market pitches available, with space to extend for particularly niche events.

Consideration was given to the trader charges which had been applied, including whether they could be reduced, and comparisons to other local areas was discussed. The Markets Manager confirmed that he had been advised by accounts colleagues that a price reduction was not possible and instead a price freeze had been implemented. Discussions about the future charging policy were ongoing which was a "live" issue, with a business plan being prepared. In response to questioning, it was confirmed that although stall charges in some neighbouring areas were lower, the evidence showed that many traders choose Boston to trade as it suited their business needs.

Questions were asked in relation to car parking charges for traders (set at £2) in comparison to other areas, with confirmation being provided about how this compared. Market traders had indicated that one advantage which Boston offered was the ability to take vehicles up to the market stall when setting/packing up.

Questioning also took place regarding the willingness of traders to travel across wide geographical areas which meant that consideration should also be given to the charges in other parts of the region and whether they were comparable to Boston. The Markets Manager confirmed that this was part of the work being undertaken by, for example, joining social media groups for markets which were in a wider geographical area in order to promote the availability of Boston's market. Questions were asked about whether past traders might be invited to return as part of the efforts to enhance the market's offering.

Issues of supply and demand were considered, with a focus on the changing nature of demand and the demographics of the area. Retail analysis was suggested to obtain a sense of how much money there was in the local economy, how it was being spent and how it impacted on the markets. The Assistant Director – Culture and Leisure confirmed

that he would talk to economic growth colleagues about this but that it was known, via licence information, what traders were selling to meet local demand and that the issue was the extent to which the Council could increase and diversify its traders to meet demand.

Questions were asked about the demographic profile of market shoppers and whether any information could be obtained in this respect in a way which was helpful to the future success of the markets.

Consideration was also given to importance of coach tours from the Lincolnshire coast to Boston which had in the past brought shoppers into the town. The Markets Manager indicated that this was something which he wished to see expanded on, including consideration of discounts if coach companies were running tours to Boston.

Consideration was given to whether or not market shoppers were aware of the availability of toilets at St Botolph's Church. The Assistant Director confirmed that shoppers were aware. He also confirmed that profile-raising work was being undertaken by the Communications Team within Boston and across the two other local authority partners. This included better use of social media. The Markets Manager confirmed that the improved social media presence of the markets both for shoppers and traders was an important way in which communication was helping to address many of the issues which had been raised by the Committee.

It was confirmed that the return of the auction at the market was under consideration but that it was a challenging environment in view of the development of online sales such as Vinted, Facebook Marketplace and eBay.

Consideration was given to whether road closures on a Wednesday (in the way they occur on a Saturday) might be a way in which to improve the number of shoppers using the market as it was felt that the road closure had contributed to a more vibrant experience. It was confirmed that there were a number of logistical challenges and that the views of Father David Stephenson at St Botolph's Church were important, given the proximity of the Church and the way in which road closures might impact on its work. Discussions with Father David Stephenson and Lincolnshire County Council would continue to be held.

The recommendation was moved by Councillor Mike Gilbert and seconded by Councillor Andy Izard.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the report be noted; and**
- 2. That feedback be provided to Cabinet on 19th February 2025 and Full Council on 3rd March 2025 as part of the Annual Budget report.**

89 Work Programme and Forward Plan

The Assistant Director – Regulatory presented the work programme.

It was noted that the Enviro Crime report was to be presented to the Committee and a request was made for attention to be given to it, as it demonstrated that Boston performed well compared to other Councils, particularly in handling fly-tipping and littering.

The Chairman mentioned that a suggestion had been made for the Committee to conduct scrutiny on the flooding issue. However, advice had been given not to proceed at present, as Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) was currently conducting its own review, with a report expected in June. Additionally, it was noted that interesting information had been received during the Black Sluice Drainage Board meeting, indicating that numerous questions were likely to arise.

The Meeting ended at 8.31 pm.