

Boston Borough Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Cabinet** held in the Committee Room - Municipal Buildings, West Street, Boston, PE21 8QR on Tuesday 27th January 2026 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Councillor Dale Broughton (Leader), in the Chair.

Councillors Mike Gilbert (Deputy Leader), John Baxter, Callum Butler, Sandeep Ghosh, Chris Mountain, Claire Rylott, Sarah Sharpe and Helen Staples.

Officers:

Chief Executive, Assistant Director - Regulatory, Assistant Director - Communities and Housing Services, Housing, Homelessness and Wellbeing Service Manager, Safer Communities Service Manager, Communications Manager and Democratic Services Team Leader.

40 Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence were received.

41 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

42 Minutes

The minutes and the exempt minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 10th December 2025 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

43 Questions from Members of the Public

No questions were received.

44 Recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny (Standing Item)*

There were no recommendations.

45 Recommendations from the Boston Town Area Committee (BTAC) (Standing Item)

There were no recommendations.

46 Partnership Social Media Policy

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Dale Broughton, presented a report by the Assistant Director – Corporate, supported by the Communications Manager who was in attendance, which sought approval of the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership Social Media Policy. The report explained that the policy had been developed as an addendum to the existing Partnership Communications Strategy and was intended to provide a coordinated, consistent and strategic approach to the use of social media across the Partnership.

Members were advised that the policy responded to the rapidly evolving nature of social media and the increasing reliance on digital platforms as a primary channel for communicating with residents, businesses and stakeholders. The report highlighted national data on social media usage, which demonstrated the continued dominance of Meta-owned platforms, and emphasised the need for the Partnership to focus its resources on channels that delivered the greatest reach and engagement.

The policy set out a clear framework for how social media would be used corporately, including the strategic purpose of each platform, expectations for content planning, and the use of data and analytics to inform decision-making. It also covered governance and operational matters such as published “house rules” for followers, comment moderation, response protocols, guidance for staff use of social media, and security and housekeeping arrangements for corporate accounts. Members were advised that the policy had been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees of each partner council and was now presented for approval.

During discussion, Members welcomed the introduction of a single Partnership-wide policy, recognising the benefits of a consistent approach to tone, messaging and standards across all social media channels. Members acknowledged the high public visibility of social media activity and the importance of managing reputational risk while maintaining open and accessible communication with communities.

The proposed “house rules” and moderation framework were considered in detail, with Members noting that these provided clarity for both residents and officers about acceptable standards of engagement. The emphasis on respectful and relevant interaction was supported, alongside the clear position that abusive, misleading or discriminatory content would not be tolerated. The discussion also acknowledged the challenges posed by anonymous or potentially fake accounts and noted that the policy set out a proportionate approach to managing such issues within the limitations of platform controls.

Members supported the shift towards a more insight-led approach to content, with decisions informed by audience data, analytics and engagement metrics. It was agreed that focusing on quality rather than volume would help ensure that content reflected strategic priorities, highlighted positive outcomes and reduced low-impact posting. The inclusion of regular evaluation and reporting was welcomed as a mechanism for monitoring performance and driving continuous improvement.

Members also considered the guidance relating to staff use of social media, noting the importance of a clear distinction between personal accounts and corporate communication. The principle that key messages should be shared first through official corporate channels, with staff encouraged to amplify rather than originate Council messaging, was supported as a means of maintaining consistency and accountability.

The discussion highlighted the importance of the security and housekeeping provisions within the policy, including the management of access permissions, password controls and the closure of inactive or unauthorised accounts. These measures were recognised as essential safeguards to protect the Council’s digital presence. Members also noted the intention to keep the effectiveness of individual platforms under review, including the continued assessment of engagement levels on X and emerging platforms.

Overall, Members agreed that the policy provided a clear, practical and proportionate framework that balanced effective communication with governance, risk management and efficient use of resources.

The recommendation was moved by Councillor Dale Broughton and seconded by Councillor John Baxter.

Resolved:

That the Partnership's Social Media Policy, attached at Appendix 1 within the report, be approved.

[The Communications Manager left the meeting at 6.16pm, following consideration of the above item.]

47 Trees & Hedgerow Strategy Action Plan

The Portfolio Holder for Green Spaces and Travel, Councillor Claire Rylott, presented a report by the Assistant Director – Regulatory, who was in attendance, which sought approval of the Tree and Hedgerow Strategy Action Plan for the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership. The report explained that the Action Plan had been developed to support delivery of the Tree and Hedgerow Strategy adopted in 2022 and provided a structured programme of activity to progress the Partnership's ambitions to protect, enhance and expand tree and hedgerow cover across the sub-region.

Members were advised that the Action Plan set out a series of short, medium and long-term actions aligned to the three core objectives of the Strategy: Protect, Plant and Participate. The report emphasised that while tree planting was often highlighted as a response to climate change and biodiversity loss, effective delivery required a more considered approach focused on long-term management, maintenance and appropriate siting, applying the principle of the "right tree in the right place".

The report summarised the evidence base underpinning the Action Plan, including baseline canopy mapping which showed that South and East Lincolnshire had lower levels of tree and hedgerow cover than national averages, reflecting its predominantly fenland and agricultural landscape. Members were advised that woodland opportunity mapping demonstrated significant variation across the Partnership area, with greater opportunities in East Lindsey and more limited scope in Boston and South Holland, reinforcing the importance of a sub-regional approach.

It was further noted that the Action Plan had been informed by consultation with external partners and stakeholders, and had been considered and supported by Overview and Scrutiny. The Action Plan did not commit the Council to immediate additional expenditure, but would guide the prioritisation of internal resources and the pursuit of external funding opportunities.

The Action Plan was welcomed as a clear and evidence-led framework that translated the high-level Strategy into practical and deliverable actions. The importance of protecting existing trees and hedgerows, alongside any new planting, was noted, together with the need to recognise and respect local landscape character.

Members reflected on the role of trees and hedgerows in supporting climate resilience, particularly in areas such as Boston where localised flooding had been experienced. It was noted that trees played an important role within flood plains by helping to stabilise soil, improve water absorption and contribute to flood mitigation, alongside their wider environmental benefits.

Support was noted for the emphasis on biosecurity, appropriate species selection and consistent decision-making in relation to tree management on Council-owned land. The value of community engagement, including working with volunteers and local stakeholders, was welcomed, alongside the broader benefits for biodiversity, wellbeing and environmental stewardship.

The alignment of the Action Plan with the Partnership's wider environmental objectives was noted, including net zero ambitions and the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy, and supported the proposal to review the Action Plan once that strategy had been finalised. The importance of monitoring progress and developing informed planting targets over time was also recognised.

The recommendation was moved by Councillor Claire Rylott and seconded by Councillor Chris Mountain.

Resolved:

That the Tree and Hedgerow Action Plan be adopted.

48 South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership Safeguarding Policy

The Portfolio Holder for Communities, Councillor Helen Staples, presented a report by the Assistant Director – Communities and Housing Services, who was in attendance, which sought approval of the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership Safeguarding Policy. The report explained that the policy had been developed following the creation of the Partnership and the move to a single workforce, with the aim of providing a consistent and standardised approach to safeguarding children and adults across all three councils.

Members were advised that the policy set out the Partnership's responsibilities under the Children Act 1989 and the Care Act 2014, and provided clear guidance for Members, officers, contractors and volunteers on identifying, reporting and responding to safeguarding concerns. The report highlighted that the policy emphasised a person-centred approach, professional curiosity, clear reporting pathways and effective record keeping, ensuring that safeguarding remained everyone's responsibility.

The policy also incorporated arrangements for training and awareness, including mandatory safeguarding training delivered through the First4Learning system, supported by face-to-face sessions where appropriate. Members were advised that the policy included provisions for ongoing review, with minor updates to be made as required to reflect changes in legislation or practice, and a full review to be undertaken on a cyclical basis.

Members were further advised that the adoption of a single safeguarding policy would improve clarity, strengthen governance and support effective partnership working with Lincolnshire County Council and other relevant agencies.

The introduction of a single Partnership-wide safeguarding policy was welcomed, and the significant amount of work undertaken was acknowledged by the Portfolio Holder and officers to develop a comprehensive and robust framework across the Partnership. The complexity of aligning safeguarding arrangements across three councils within a single workforce was recognised, and Members noted the importance of the collaborative approach taken to achieve this.

The strong emphasis on early identification of concerns was supported and the clear message that safeguarding issues should be shared and not retained by individuals. The focus on professional curiosity, clear reporting routes and robust record keeping was noted as particularly important in supporting effective safeguarding practice.

The inclusion of mandatory training and ongoing monitoring of completion was welcomed, alongside the recognition of the need to support both staff and Members through supervision, guidance and regular discussion of safeguarding matters. Members noted that the policy provided clarity around roles and responsibilities and would help ensure confidence and consistency in responding to safeguarding concerns.

The discussion highlighted the benefits of a standardised approach in strengthening governance, reducing the risk of inconsistency and ensuring continued compliance with statutory duties. Members also welcomed the provision for regular review, recognising the need for the policy to remain responsive to legislative change and emerging best practice.

Overall, Members agreed that the policy reflected a high standard of work and provided a clear, proportionate and effective framework to support safeguarding across the Partnership.

The recommendation was moved by Councillor Helen Staples and seconded by Councillor Sandeep Ghosh.

Resolved:

- 1. That the joint SELCP Safeguarding Policy be adopted;**
- 2. That authority be delegated to the Assistant Director in consultation with the Portfolio Holder to make minor amendments to the policy, ensuring it remains up to date with legislative changes and operational requirements; and**
- 3. That the Assistant Director undertake a full review of the policy every four years, with any proposed revisions presented to Cabinet for approval to maintain strategic oversight and governance.**

[The Assistant Director – Regulatory left the meeting at 6.21pm, during consideration of the above item]

49 Revised Housing Allocations Policy BBC/ELDC

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor John Baxter, presented a report by the Assistant Director – Communities and Housing Services, supported by the Assistant Director – Communities and Housing Services and the Housing, Homelessness and Wellbeing Service Manager who were in attendance, which sought approval of the revised Housing Allocations Policy for Boston Borough Council and East Lindsey District Council. The report explained that the policy had been reviewed in response to recent changes in national legislation and statutory guidance relating to social housing allocations, and to ensure that the shared policy remained legally compliant, transparent and fit for purpose.

Members were advised that a key driver for the review was the introduction of the Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Victims of Domestic Abuse and Care Leavers) (England) Regulations 2025, which required local authorities to remove local connection and residency requirements for specified groups. The revised policy therefore incorporated changes to ensure that victims of domestic abuse who needed to relocate, and care leavers up to the age of 25, could not be excluded from the housing register on the basis of local connection.

The report outlined a number of further amendments designed to clarify and strengthen the policy, including refinements to banding and priority, additional preference categories, financial capacity thresholds, housing-related debt provisions, and clearer guidance on sensitive and direct lettings. Members were advised that the review had taken a comprehensive approach rather than making isolated amendments, and had been informed by legal advice, consultation with the Portfolio Holder and engagement with internal and external stakeholders.

It was further noted that the revised policy had been considered by Overview and Scrutiny and that an Equality Impact Assessment had been undertaken as part of the review process.

The revised policy was welcomed, and the significant amount of work undertaken was acknowledged by the Portfolio Holder and officers to produce a clear, robust and legally compliant document. The complexity of balancing statutory requirements with local priorities and housing pressures was recognised, particularly given the high demand for social housing across both districts.

Members supported the changes required to comply with national legislation, noting the importance of ensuring that vulnerable groups, including victims of domestic abuse and care leavers, were not disadvantaged by local connection criteria. The introduction of clearer banding rules, additional preference categories and defined financial and debt thresholds was welcomed as a means of improving transparency and consistency in decision-making.

The discussion noted that the revised policy would provide clearer information for applicants and officers alike, helping to manage expectations while ensuring that housing need continued to be prioritised appropriately. Members also recognised that the policy would support more efficient assessment processes and improve the overall customer experience.

Members noted the importance of ongoing monitoring to ensure the policy operated as intended and continued to deliver fair outcomes, and welcomed the delegated authority for minor amendments to enable the policy to remain responsive to legislative or operational change.

Overall, Members agreed that the revised policy represented a balanced and thorough review, strengthening the framework for allocating social housing across Boston Borough Council and East Lindsey District Council.

The recommendation was moved by Councillor John Baxter and seconded by Councillor Sandeep Ghosh.

Resolved:

- 1. That the revised Housing Allocations Policy 2025 be approved; and**
- 2. That authority be delegated to the Assistant Director – Communities and Housing Services in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder to make minor changes to the policy that would not require a consultation exercise as per legislation.**

50 Housing Standards Policies

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor John Baxter, presented a report by the Assistant Director – Communities and Housing Services, supported by the Assistant Director – Communities and Housing Services and the Safer Communities Service Manager who were in attendance, which sought approval of a suite of Housing Standards Policies. The report explained that the policies had been developed to provide a consistent and robust framework for regulating housing standards across the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership and to ensure alignment with current legislation, guidance and best practice.

Members were advised that the report covered three key policy documents: the Empty Homes Policy, the Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing Policy, and the Housing Standards Enforcement Policy. Together, these policies were intended to support improved housing conditions, bring long-term empty properties back into use, strengthen regulation of HMOs, and provide a clear, proportionate and transparent approach to enforcement activity.

The report outlined that the policies had been developed collaboratively across the Partnership, reflecting the move towards a more consistent approach to housing standards, enforcement thresholds, fees and penalties. Members were advised that the policies would support early intervention and engagement where possible, while also providing a clear escalation framework where compliance was not achieved.

Members welcomed the suite of Housing Standards Policies and acknowledged the significant amount of work undertaken by the Portfolio Holder and officers to bring forward comprehensive and well-structured documents. Members also noted the Portfolio Holder's thanks to his counterpart Portfolio Holders at South Holland District Council and East

Lindsey District Council for their collaborative work and support in developing the policies across the Partnership.

The importance of a consistent approach across the Partnership was recognised, particularly in relation to enforcement standards, fee structures and decision-making processes. Members noted the benefits of the Empty Homes Policy in supporting the return of long-term vacant properties to use, helping to address housing pressures while reducing the negative impacts of empty homes on local communities.

The discussion also highlighted the role of the HMO Licensing Policy in improving housing standards, protecting tenants and supporting responsible landlords through clear expectations and consistent regulation. Members welcomed the clarity provided around inspection regimes and enforcement measures.

Members supported the Housing Standards Enforcement Policy, noting that a clear and proportionate enforcement framework would provide transparency and consistency, while ensuring that serious or persistent non-compliance could be addressed effectively. The emphasis on early advice and support, alongside firm enforcement where required, was welcomed.

Overall, Members agreed that the policies provided a strong and balanced framework to support improved housing standards, protect residents and strengthen the Council's regulatory role across the Partnership.

The recommendation was moved by Councillor John Baxter and seconded by Councillor Sarah Sharpe.

Resolved:

That the draft Empty Homes Policy at Appendix 1 within the report, the draft HMO Policy at Appendix 2 within the report, and the draft Housing Standards Enforcement Policy at Appendix 3 within the report be approved.

51 Exclusion of Public and Press

Due to the Committee's approval of the exempt minutes under the Minutes item, this item was not required.

52 Exempt Minutes

Due to the Committee's approval of the exempt minutes under the Minutes item, this item was not required.

The Meeting ended at 6.37 pm.