

Boston Borough Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held in the Committee Room - Municipal Buildings, West Street, Boston, PE21 8QR on Thursday 4th September 2025 at 6.30 pm.

Present:

Councillor Paul Gleeson, in the Chair.

Councillors Councillor Neil Drayton, Stuart Evans, Andy Izard, Patricia Marson, Barrie Pierpoint, Ralph Pryke, Lina Savickiene, David Scoot and Suzanne Welberry.

Officers:

Assistant Director - Regulatory and Democratic Services Officer.

24 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Allison Austin, Richard Austin BEM and Emma Cresswell.

25 Declarations of Interest

Councillors David Scoot and Stuart Evans declared their membership of the following outside bodies: Black Sluice Internal Drainage Board and Witham Fourth District Internal Drainage Board. Councillor Ralph Pryke also declared his membership of the Black Sluice Internal Drainage Board.

26 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 17th July 2025 were agreed and signed by the Chairman, subject to it being noted that Councillor Stuart Evans had submitted his apologies for that meeting which had been omitted in error.

27 Public Questions

No questions were received from the public.

28 Highways Update

The Committee noted that the Portfolio Holder for Highways at Lincolnshire County Council had been unable to attend the meeting. It was agreed that the item would be deferred to a future meeting and that Members would be invited to resubmit questions in advance.

The Committee also discussed officer attendance and noted that previous invitations had been declined. It was agreed that a further request would be made for an officer to accompany the Portfolio Holder when the item was rescheduled, to assist with technical matters.

29 Section 19; Flooding Investigation Report; Wyberton West Road / Park Road, Boston

The Committee received a detailed update from the Assistant Director – Regulatory on the statutory Section 19 Flooding Investigation Report commissioned by Lincolnshire County Council (LCC), in its role as Lead Local Flood Authority, and prepared by GeoSmart Information Ltd. The report related to the flooding incident that occurred in Boston in the early hours of 6th January 2025, which resulted in internal flooding to 38 residential properties on Wyberton West Road and Park Road.

Members were advised that the flooding was caused by a combination of factors, including:

- Intense rainfall and snowmelt across the Black Sluice catchment.
- Tidal locking, which prevented discharge from the South Forty Foot Drain into the Haven.
- Overtopping of two low wall sections along the southern bank of the South Forty Foot Drain.
- The decommissioning of the Black Sluice Pumping Station.
- Operational issues with sluice gates at the Black Sluice complex; and
- Settlement and joint failures in flood defence structures.

The Assistant Director explained that Lincolnshire County Council, as Lead Local Flood Authority, had a statutory duty to investigate the incident under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. However, the Risk Management Authorities (RMAs) identified in the report—namely the Environment Agency, Black Sluice Internal Drainage Board, and Lincolnshire County Council—were not under any legal obligation to implement the recommendations. GeoSmart Information Ltd had been appointed by LCC to undertake the investigation and produce a document, which was attached as Appendix A within the report.

The Committee was informed that the Joint Lincolnshire Flood Risk and Water Management Partnership had an informal role in monitoring delivery of recommendations but lacked enforcement powers. This presented a challenge for the Council in seeking assurance that appropriate action would be taken to reduce future flood risk.

The Assistant Director recommended that the Committee adopt a stepped approach, beginning with an invitation to the RMAs to attend a future meeting and explain their response to the report's findings and recommendations. If this did not provide sufficient reassurance, the Committee could escalate the matter through Cabinet and onward to the County Council's scrutiny arrangements, which do have powers to scrutinise the exercise of flood risk management functions.

The Committee was advised that the report included six recommendations, covering both strategic and property-level resilience measures. These included:

- Installation of flood resistance and resilience measures at affected properties.
- Development of a community flood action plan.
- Review and update of hydraulic modelling for the South Forty Foot Drain.
- Improvements to the flood warning service for the area.

- Review of operational procedures for flood defence assets.
- Raising of the low wall sections to prevent future overtopping.

The Assistant Director confirmed that the report had been amended following feedback from the Environment Agency and Black Sluice Internal Drainage Board, and that the final version had been issued on 30 July 2025.

Members were invited to consider how the Committee could use its scrutiny functions to ensure that the RMAs delivered on the recommendations and provided reassurance to residents affected by the flooding.

During discussion, Members expressed concern regarding the lack of accountability and assurance that RMAs would act on the recommendations set out in the Section 19 Flooding Investigation Report. The Committee supported an escalatory approach, whereby the Committee would first invite the relevant RMAs — namely the Environment Agency, Black Sluice Internal Drainage Board, and Lincolnshire County Council — would be invited to attend a future meeting to explain their response. It was agreed that this would enable the Committee to build its understanding before considering any formal recommendations to Cabinet or the Lead Local Flood Authority.

Members highlighted the emotional and practical impact of the flooding on residents, noting that many had experienced significant distress and disruption. The discretionary grant scheme offered by the Council was discussed, with clarification provided that 24 of the 38 eligible households had applied. Members acknowledged the Council's visible role in the recovery effort and noted that public perception had unfairly placed blame on the authority, despite its limited responsibility for flood infrastructure.

Concerns were raised about the adequacy of flood modelling, particularly in relation to tidal conditions, and the lack of clarity around the installation of new lock gates at the docks. The Assistant Director confirmed that the flooding event under discussion was unrelated to the Boston Barrier or lock gates but offered to facilitate a future Members' Briefing on the lock gate project if required.

The Committee agreed that questions for the invited RMAs should be prepared and shared in advance to enable meaningful scrutiny. It was further suggested that residents be invited to submit questions via Members to ensure their concerns were represented.

Members discussed the broader implications of flood risk across the borough, including the potential for similar incidents in other areas. Reference was made to structural changes at County level, including the dissolution of the dedicated flooding committee, and the need to maintain pressure on RMAs to prioritise flood resilience. It was noted that one recommendation had already been actioned, with the introduction of a new flood warning service for the affected area.

Resolved:

- 1. That the contents of the Section 19 Flooding Investigation Report relating to the flooding incident at Wyberton West Road and Park Road, Boston be noted.**

2. That a stepped approach to scrutiny be agreed, beginning with an invitation to the relevant Risk Management Authorities—namely the Environment Agency, Black Sluice Internal Drainage Board, and Lincolnshire County Council—to attend a future meeting to explain their response to the report’s recommendations.
3. That Members be requested to submit questions in advance of the meeting to enable meaningful scrutiny, and that Members invite affected residents to contribute questions via their ward councillors.
4. That, subject to the outcome of engagement with the Risk Management Authorities, the Committee consider making formal recommendations to Cabinet and/or the Lead Local Flood Authority to seek further assurance and action; and
5. That officers be requested to explore the status of the lock gate installation project at the docks and, if appropriate, arrange a future Members’ Briefing to provide an update.

30 Work Programme and Forward Plan

The Committee considered its current Work Programme and the Council’s Forward Plan. Members noted that several items were listed as pending confirmation and requested that indicative dates be assigned to these items to assist with forward planning and ensure a balanced workload across the remainder of the municipal year.

It was observed that the programme appeared light between January and April 2026, and Members suggested that scheduled items be distributed more evenly across meetings to avoid gaps in Committee business. Officers were asked to review the pending items and provide an updated schedule showing when each item was expected to be brought forward. The Chairman confirmed that this would be taken forward as an action.

Members were reminded that the next meeting would include attendance from Anglian Water and the Lincolnshire Road Safety Partnership. The importance of submitting technical questions in advance was reiterated, to ensure that external guests were able to provide informed responses at the meeting and to avoid reliance on post-meeting correspondence.

As part of the work programme discussion, the Chairman of the Town Centre Task and Finish Group provided an update on the group’s progress. Members were advised that the group had met on several occasions and had compiled a working list of issues and potential recommendations relating to the town centre. These included concerns about the definition of the town centre boundary, the number of vacant premises, the condition of signage and street furniture, and the lack of promotional materials for visitors.

The group had identified a number of areas for further exploration, including:

- Incentives to encourage reoccupation of empty retail and commercial units;
- Availability of grant funding for building improvements;
- Improvements to signage, lighting, and public realm;
- Enhanced promotion of Boston in neighbouring towns and visitor hubs;

- Better integration of transport information, including bus and train services;
- Measures to improve traffic flow and reduce congestion.

It was noted that the group had redrawn the town centre boundary to reflect Members' understanding of the area, which differed from the definition used by officers. The group intended to share this revised boundary with officers for consideration.

Members were advised that the group aimed to bring forward a report to the Committee before the end of the calendar year, with a view to submitting recommendations to Cabinet before the end of the financial year.

The Committee welcomed the update and expressed support for the group's work. Members emphasised the importance of improving the town's visibility, marketing, and visitor experience, and noted the need for coordination across departments and external partners.

The Portfolio Holder for the town centre confirmed that work was ongoing to streamline governance arrangements and reduce duplication across various boards and initiatives. It was noted that the Town Centre Strategy Board would be rebranded and continue to meet under a revised structure.

No additional items were proposed for inclusion in the Work Programme at this time.

Resolved:

That the content of the current Work Programme and Council Forward Plan be noted.

The Meeting ended at 7.27 pm.