

## **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 29th May 2025 at 6.30 pm.

### **Present:**

Councillor Paul Gleeson, in the Chair.

Councillors Councillor Neil Drayton, Alison Austin, Mike Gilbert, Andy Izard, Lina Savickiene, David Scoot and Suzanne Welberry.

In attendance:

Councillor Richard Austin BEM.

Officers:

Assistant Director - Regulatory, Domestic Abuse Officer, Group Manager - Organisational Development (virtual attendee), Scrutiny and Policy Officer (virtual attendee), Democratic Services Team Leader and Democratic Services Officer.

### **1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Patsie Marson, Ralph Pryke and Helen Staples.

### **2 Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

### **3 Minutes**

The Minutes of the following meetings were agreed and signed by the Chairman:

- Environment and Performance Committee – 11<sup>th</sup> February 2025;
- Corporate and Community Committee – 6<sup>th</sup> March 2025; and
- Special Corporate and Community Committee – 8<sup>th</sup> May 2025.

In respect of the minutes of the Environment and Performance Committee meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2025, clarification was sought on whether a response had been received to a question previously raised concerning the drop-off in swimming lesson attendance. A further query was raised in relation to the same set of minutes regarding whether the implementation of a call-back system had resulted in a reduction or extension in response times. Officers confirmed that these matters would be followed up and a written response would be issued to the Committee.

Subject to these matters being addressed, the minutes of all three meetings were agreed as a correct record.

### **4 Public Questions**

No questions were received from the public.

## 5 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan

The Group Manager – Organisational Development presented a report by the Assistant Director – Corporate which sought views on the proposed Partnership Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy. The strategy was attached at Appendix A and the High-Level Action Plan was attached at Appendix B within the report.

The strategy set out four key objectives:

1. Understand the needs of our communities and bring local people together.
2. Create a diverse and inclusive leadership team and embed inclusion in decision-making.
3. Ensuring Council services meet the diverse needs of residents and make it easy for local residents to access services.
4. Being an inclusive and fair employer with a diverse workforce at all levels.

The accompanying action plan focused on training and development, policy review, community engagement, and monitoring and evaluation.

Members discussed the report and commented as follows:

- A number of members expressed concerns regarding the practical value and effectiveness of the strategy. It was suggested that such policies often failed to address the root causes of inequality, such as income disparity, class, and political disengagement, and may serve more as a performative exercise than a meaningful intervention.
- Concerns were raised about the language used in strategy, which some members felt was overly abstract and lacked clarity. It was suggested that the document be revised using more accessible and plain English to ensure it was understandable to a wider audience.
- Members queried the accuracy and consistency of demographic data presented in the report, particularly in relation to the 2021 Census. The Group Manager – Organisational Development advised that she would review the figures and provide clarification.

Questions were raised regarding the extent of community engagement in the development of the strategy. In particular, members asked whether representatives from Eastern European communities, such as Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, and Romanian residents, had been consulted. The Group Manager – Organisational Development confirmed that engagement had taken place with a cross-section of staff, councillors, residents, and partner organisations, including Citizens Advice and local community groups. However, members requested that future engagement efforts be broadened to ensure wider representation.

- The legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty were discussed. The Group Manager – Organisational Development clarified that while a formal strategy was not mandatory, the Council was required to publish equality

objectives and demonstrate due regard to eliminating discrimination and advancing equality.

- Members proposed that the strategy be broadened to include additional dimensions of inclusion not covered by the nine protected characteristics, such as economic hardship and political exclusion, which were considered highly relevant to the local context.
- The estimated cost of implementing the strategy was confirmed to be approximately £7,000 for Boston Borough Council, representing a share of a part-time fixed-term post across the partnership.
- Members sought clarification on how the success of the strategy would be measured. The Group Manager – Organisational Development advised that outcomes would be monitored through resident surveys, hate crime data, and feedback from community partners.

The Committee noted the report and acknowledged the statutory context underpinning the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. However, members expressed a strong preference for the draft strategy to be revised prior to adoption. It was recommended that the revised document more clearly reflect local priorities, incorporate simpler and more accessible language, ensure the accuracy of demographic data, and adopt a broader and more inclusive approach that considers local socio-economic realities.

Members further requested that:

- The language be made clearer and more accessible to all audiences;
- The scope of inclusion be expanded to address issues such as economic hardship and political disengagement;
- Greater emphasis be placed on measurable outcomes and the practical relevance of the strategy to the local community; and
- Scrutiny members be actively involved in shaping future iterations of the strategy.

The Chairman thanked Officers for the report. He concluded that whilst the Committee recognised the importance of meeting statutory obligations, it was essential that the final version of the strategy be meaningful, locally grounded, and capable of delivering tangible benefits to the community. The revised strategy would be expected to return to the Committee for further scrutiny.

#### **Resolved:**

- 1. That the draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan be noted;**
- 2. That the strategy be revised to:**
  - **Use clearer and more accessible language;**
  - **Broaden the scope of inclusion to reflect local socio-economic realities, including economic hardship and political disengagement;**
  - **Ensure the accuracy and consistency of demographic data; and**
  - **Place greater emphasis on measurable outcomes and local relevance.**

**3. That the revised strategy be brought back to the Committee for further scrutiny.****6 Joint Scrutiny of the Partnership Enviro Crime Enforcement Contract**

A member of the Partnership Scrutiny Task and Finish Group, Councillor David Scoot, presented a report by the Partnership Scrutiny Task Group which sought consideration of the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group.

The joint environmental crime enforcement contract with Kingdom Services Group had commenced in March 2023 for a three-year term, with an option to extend for a further two years. The contract covered enforcement of environmental offences such as fly-tipping, littering, and dog fouling, and included CCTV operations. The report of the Task and Finish Group was attached as Appendix 1 and the Agreed Project Scoping Document was attached at Appendix 2 within the report.

Members noted that Boston Borough Council had performed particularly well under the contract, partly due to its prior working relationship with Kingdom. The Task and Finish group had reviewed the contract's performance across the three partner councils and made 13 recommendations.

Members discussed the report and commented as follows:

- Members engaged in a detailed discussion on the performance and public interface of the environmental crime enforcement contract with Kingdom Services Group. A key focus was the accessibility and effectiveness of public reporting mechanisms. Members queried whether reports submitted via the FixMyStreet app were integrated into Kingdom's operational workflow. The Assistant Director – Regulatory clarified that FixMyStreet was a Lincolnshire County Council platform and was not directly linked to the councils websites for the most efficient response. Whilst it was acknowledged that some FixMyStreet reports may eventually be redirected to the appropriate authority, it was not considered to be the most effective method. Members emphasised the importance of residents providing contact details when using FixMyStreet in order to receive updates, and noted that the app was effective when used correctly.
- Several members highlighted the convenience of apps such as FixMyStreet, particularly for younger and more digitally engaged residents, and suggested the development of a Boston-specific reporting app to improve accessibility and responsiveness. The Assistant Director – Regulatory confirmed that Recommendation 3 within the report addressed the need to improve public reporting mechanisms and he acknowledged the value of adopting best practice from other authorities.
- Members raised long-standing concerns regarding wheelie bins being left on public footpaths, particularly in the context of the forthcoming Boston 400 celebrations. The visual impact on the town and the obstruction caused to pedestrians, including disabled residents and those with pushchairs, were highlighted. Members discussed the potential for enforcement officers to be tasked with addressing this issue and suggested exploring longer-term solutions, such as reopening rear alleyways to facilitate bin storage. The possible use of Town Deal funding to support such improvements was also raised.

- A committee member shared positive experiences using the ClearWaste app, which allowed users to report fly-tipping with photographic and location data. It was noted that reports submitted via ClearWaste were typically resolved within 48 hours and that the app communicated effectively with Boston Borough Council.
- In addition, members commented on the broader utility of FixMyStreet for reporting issues to other public bodies, including Network Rail and the NHS, and cited examples of successful outcomes. The importance of public education and communication was emphasised, with members recommending that the Council do more to publicise successful enforcement actions and promote community engagement in tackling environmental crime.
- Members noted the potential for Town Deal funding to support infrastructure improvements that enhance the town's appearance and accessibility, particularly in the context of the forthcoming Boston 400 celebrations.

The 13 recommendations of the Task and Finish group, as set out within the report, were endorsed by the Committee. The Chairman thanked members of the Task and Finish Group and Officers for the report.

**Resolved:**

**That the report be noted and that the associated recommendations be agreed.**

**7 Work Programme**

The Assistant Director Regulatory presented the Work Programme and asked members if they wished to add any additional items into the programme.

The Committee considered the Work Programme, which consolidated items previously scheduled under the former Environment and Performance (E&P) and Corporate and Community (C&C) Committees.

The Chair proposed holding an informal workshop in June or July to allow members to discuss potential topics in a more open and collaborative setting, which would enable members to raise ward-level issues and shape the work programme around local priorities.

The Chairman proposed two immediate additions to the work programme:

- An invitation to the Chief Constable of Lincolnshire Police to attend a future meeting to discuss the findings of the latest PEEL inspection report and outline plans for improvement; and
- A scrutiny session with Lincolnshire County Council Highways to address concerns about unresolved maintenance issues, including persistent flooding at the South End/John Adams Way junction and the general condition of roundabouts and verges.

The accessibility of licensing and planning application processes was raised, particularly for non-English speakers. It was suggested that the Committee review the clarity and

usability of application forms and consider whether improvements could be made to support greater engagement.

The issue of wheelie bins obstructing narrow streets was revisited, with members considering the options around establishing a Task and Finish group to explore long-term solutions, including the reopening of rear alleyways and the use of Town Deal funding to support infrastructure improvements. The impact on accessibility and the town's appearance ahead of the Boston 400 celebrations was emphasised.

Members discussed the importance of pre-scrutiny, particularly in relation to upcoming changes to waste collection services. It was agreed that this would be a suitable topic for early consideration at the proposed workshop.

The Committee also noted the inclusion of a forthcoming report on the "Plan for Neighbourhoods" within the Forward Plan. Members requested that this item be brought to a scrutiny meeting prior to its consideration by the Cabinet in July, in order to allow for early engagement and input.

The Committee agreed to proceed with the proposed workshop and to incorporate the suggested topics into the work programme. It was noted that the effectiveness of the new single-committee scrutiny structure would be reviewed after six months.

The Assistant Director – Regulatory advised that he would liaise with the Chairman to determine the most appropriate course of action for addressing the matters raised.

**Resolved:**

- 1. That, subject to the addition of the above items, the work programme be noted; and**
- 2. That an informal workshop session be scheduled for Scrutiny Members to support member-led topic development.**

The Meeting ended at 7.38 pm.