

Boston Borough Council

Minutes of a Special meeting of the **Cabinet** held in the Committee Room - Municipal Buildings, West Street, Boston, PE21 8QR on Thursday 31st July 2025 at 6.30 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, Interim Finance Director and S151 Officer, Director of Economic Development, Assistant Director - Regulatory, Group Manager - Climate Change and Environment, Business Intelligence and Change Manager, Head of Finance Delivery - BBC (PSPSL), Democratic Services Team Leader and Democratic Services Officer.

1 Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence were received.

2 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Chris Mountain declared an interest in agenda item 3 'Home Energy Advice and Retrofit Team' as an employee of Cadent Gas. While there was no direct relation to the policy under discussion, the declaration was made in the interest of transparency due to the item relating to gas properties.

3 2024/25 Q4 Finance Update

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Councillor Sandeep Ghosh, presented a report by the Interim Director of Finance (S151 Officer) which set out the final outturn position for the Council's finances for the financial year ending 31 March 2025. Details on the full year financial performance as at 31st March 2025 were attached as Appendix A within the report.

Cabinet was advised that the Council had closed the year with a revenue surplus of £1.015 million, representing a significant improvement on the Quarter 3 forecast of £627,000. The surplus was attributed to disciplined underspends across service directorates, totalling £746,000, with notable savings in IT staffing and deferred projects. Additionally, investment income had performed strongly, with a net favourable variance of £711,000 against the budget of £1.587 million. After transferring £53,000 of S106 interest to the balance sheet, the net benefit stood at £658,000.

It was noted that while most service areas contributed positively to the outturn, overspends were recorded in Governance and Monitoring and General Fund Assets. In terms of service income, planning and cremation fees underperformed by £91,000 and £92,000 respectively, though this was partly offset by an increase in car parking income of £56,000.

The Portfolio Holder reported that the Council had delivered £656,000 in efficiency savings against the £846,000 target, equating to 78% achievement. Although no additional savings were recorded in Quarter 4, the overall service underspends had contributed positively to the surplus position.

Cabinet was further advised that the Council had received £431,000 in government support to offset Internal Drainage Board (IDB) levy pressures. Engagement with the Local Government Minister was ongoing to seek sustainable long-term solutions, although funding arrangements for 2025/26 had not yet been confirmed.

The revised capital programme for the year was set at £20.814 million, with actual expenditure reaching £15.070 million by year-end, reflecting significant momentum in Quarter 4 and a commitment to progressing key infrastructure and service improvement projects.

The Council's treasury position remained strong, with cash investments closing at £34.832 million and property fund investments valued at £15.237 million. Borrowing costs remained within budget at £111,000. Total reserves increased by £3.343 million to £19.345 million, with the General Fund reserve remaining stable at £2 million.

During discussion, Cabinet welcomed the report and commended the strong financial management demonstrated throughout the year. It was acknowledged that investment performance had been particularly positive, and Members expressed support for the continued monitoring of interest rates and investment opportunities. The importance of maintaining robust reserves and delivering efficiencies was also noted.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Sandeep Ghosh and seconded by Councillor John Baxter.

Resolved:

- 1. That the final revenue position of a £1,015,000 underspend for 2024/25, as detailed in Table 1, be noted;**
- 2. That Full Council approve the transfer of the £1,015,000 surplus to Volatility Reserve; and**
- 3. That the final BTAC revenue position of £86,000 and the transfer of the surplus to BTAC Reserve be noted.**

4 Quarter 4 24/25 Performance and Risk Report

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Dale Broughton, presented a report by the Assistant Director – Corporate which provided an overview of the Council's performance and risk management position as at the end of Quarter 4, covering the period to 31st March 2025. Details on the Quarter 4 Performance were attached as Appendix 1 and details on the Quarter 4 Risks were attached as Appendix 2 within the report.

Cabinet was advised that overall performance remained strong, with the majority of key performance indicators (KPIs) rated green, indicating that they were on or above target.

Only one KPI was rated red at year-end, relating to the average answer rate for Revenues and Benefits. This underperformance was attributed to an increase in the duration and complexity of calls. In response, opening hours and call lines had been extended to mitigate the impact, and further detail was provided within the report commentary regarding the nature of calls and the effectiveness of the callback system.

In terms of risk management, Cabinet was informed that both strategic and partnership risk registers had been fully reviewed during Quarter 4. It was noted that the overall risk rating relating to the depot had been reduced following the agreement of a new lease. Additionally, the risk concerning staff retention had been identified as a cross-cutting issue and was now duplicated in the Partnership Risk Register. As such, it was recommended that this risk be removed from the individual Council register to avoid duplication and ensure consistency.

A technical query was raised regarding the classification of the ICT infrastructure risk (BBC11), which was currently rated as high. It was suggested that, given the Council's strong ICT performance, the risk score might be more appropriately rated as medium. In response, it was explained that while the Council was indeed in a strong position, the inherent impact of a potential ICT failure remained high. The mitigation measures in place had successfully reduced the likelihood of occurrence, and the target risk score had been achieved. However, due to the nature of the risk, the overall rating remained high. It was confirmed that the risk would continue to be reviewed by the relevant officers and delivery teams.

Cabinet welcomed the report and acknowledged the consistent performance across services. Members expressed their appreciation for the efforts of officers in maintaining high standards and delivering against key objectives. The importance of robust risk management and continuous improvement was also noted.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Dale Broughton and seconded by Councillor Sandeep Ghosh.

Resolved:

That the quarterly performance and risk monitoring information for Q4 of 2024/25 be noted.

5 Home Energy Advice and Retrofit Team

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities presented a report by the Assistant Director – Regulatory which sought Cabinet approval for the operational arrangements for the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership (SELCP) delivery of the Warm Homes Local Grant and the Home Energy Advice Service.

Cabinet was informed that funding totalling £5,639,974.60 had been secured from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero to support the delivery of energy efficiency grants across South and East Lincolnshire over the next three years. Approximately 22% of this funding was allocated to the Boston area. The report proposed that the experienced team based at East Lindsey District Council continue to deliver the grants on behalf of

Boston and South Holland residents, building on the successful approach adopted during the previous two funding rounds.

In addition, a further funding award of £362,720.15 had been secured to extend the Home Energy Advice Service into Boston and South Holland. This service, delivered in partnership with the charity PECT, would provide residents with energy efficiency advice, support, and wider social signposting. The extension followed a successful pilot in East Lindsey and would include the deployment of a mobile electric energy advice vehicle.

Cabinet noted that the programme would be overseen by a Programme Monitoring Board with Portfolio Holder representation from all three councils. The report outlined the eligibility criteria for the grant programme, with a key change being the reintroduction of funding eligibility for properties with mains gas. Additionally, landlords would be eligible for one fully funded property, with subsequent properties requiring a 50% financial contribution. The Energy Advice Service would be open to all residents seeking support with energy bills and information on available funding.

During discussion, Cabinet welcomed the continuation of the programme and the expansion of services into Boston. Members expressed strong support for the inclusion of on-gas properties, recognising the significant benefit this would bring to residents in Boston town. The introduction of mobile advice services was also praised, particularly for its potential to reach rural communities and those unable to access fixed locations. The inclusion of a training budget to support local volunteers as community energy champions was noted as a positive step in strengthening community engagement.

Cabinet acknowledged that while the level of grant funding was lower than initially anticipated, the programme would nonetheless deliver meaningful improvements to energy efficiency and resident wellbeing, particularly in advance of the winter period.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Chris Mountain and seconded by Councillor Callum Butler.

Resolved:

- 1. That the principle of East Lindsey District Council acting as the lead authority and accountable body for the Warm Homes – Local Grant programme and the Home Energy Advice Service on behalf of Boston Borough Council be approved;**
- 2. That the entering into of an appropriate written agreement between East Lindsey District Council and Boston Borough Council for delivery of the two programmes, subject to legal advice, with delegated authority given to the Assistant Director Regulatory in consultation with the Portfolio Holder to agree the terms of the agreement be approved; and**
- 3. That the continuation of a Programme Monitoring Board for Warm Homes – Local Grant, and for the Board to receive updates in relation to delivery of the Home Energy Advice Service as outlined in paragraph 2.13 within the report, be approved.**

6 Update on Plan for Neighbourhoods

The Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor Mike Gilbert, presented a report by the Director of Economic Development which provided an update on the Plan for Neighbourhoods and sought approval for the use of capacity funding to support its development. Details on the funding profile were attached as Appendix 1, a map of the details of the Boston intervention area were attached as Appendix 2 and details of the current Town Board membership were attached as Appendix 3 within the report.

Cabinet was advised that the Plan for Neighbourhoods was the latest funding initiative made available to Boston Borough Council by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The programme would provide £20 million over a ten-year period from 2026 to support regeneration and infrastructure improvements in the borough. In order to access this funding, the Council was required to undertake extensive consultation and develop a comprehensive regeneration plan aligned with government criteria.

The report outlined the availability of interim capacity funding to support the consultation and plan development process. Cabinet was informed that the funding would enable the Council to engage with residents, businesses, and stakeholders, including the Town Board, to shape a programme of interventions and projects. The themes set out by government and the Neighbourhood Board were referenced in the report.

Cabinet was asked to approve five recommendations relating to the acceptance and use of the capacity funding. These included delegating authority to the Director of Economic Development to manage the funding in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth and, where necessary, the Director of Finance and the Town Board. The funding would support the development of both a ten-year regeneration plan and a four-year investment plan, which were required to be submitted to government by 28th November 2025.

During discussion, Cabinet welcomed the report and the opportunity to build on the success of previous funding programmes such as the Towns Fund and Levelling Up Fund. It was noted that while the funding must be spent within the built-up area of Boston town, the consultation process would be open to all residents across the borough. Members encouraged participation from parish areas and emphasised that the town belonged to everyone.

Cabinet also highlighted the importance of community engagement, noting that consultation was a recurring theme throughout the report. The role of the Town Board as a consultative body comprising local businesses, organisations and community representatives was acknowledged as a key strength in ensuring the plan reflected local priorities.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Mike Gilbert and seconded by Councillor Sandeep Ghosh.

Resolved:

- 1. That all revenue capacity funding provided by Central Government be accepted and released in order to support the development of a new ten year regeneration plan for Boston;**
- 2. That authority be delegated to the Director of Economic Development to agree and expend all capacity funding provided by Central Government, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth and a steer from the Town Board;**
- 3. That authority be delegated to the Director of Economic Development to approve and enter all of the necessary contractual arrangements to progress the submission of a ten-year Regeneration Plan and four year investment plan for Boston in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth and a steer from the Town Board;**
- 4. That authority be delegated to the interim Director of Finance in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth and the Director of Economic Development, to draw down up to £170,000 from the Economic Growth Reserve in order to meet proposed spend for 25/26 outlined in section 3.3 within the report; and**
- 5. That authority be delegated to the interim Director of Finance in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth and the Director of Economic Development to draw down additional sums from the balance sheet account up to £52,000.**

7 Local Government Re-organisation - support for 'A Greater Lincolnshire for All'

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Dale Broughton, presented a report by the Assistant Director – Corporate which sought Cabinet's agreement for Boston Borough Council to become a formal partner in the development of a proposal for local government reorganisation (LGR) in Greater Lincolnshire. Details of the LGR – interim plan was attached as Appendix A, a copy of the letter from the Minister for Local Governance was attached as Appendix B and details of the initial feedback to the LGR was attached as Appendix C within the report.

Cabinet was advised that Greater Lincolnshire had been invited by the Minister for Local Government to submit a proposal for reorganisation. East Lindsey District Council and South Holland District Council had submitted a joint interim proposal to government in March 2025. At that time, Boston Borough Council had opted not to submit an interim proposal, instead choosing to review all options before determining its preferred course of action.

On 10th July 2025, East Lindsey and South Holland Councils announced their intention to proceed with the development of a final proposal, entitled A Greater Lincolnshire for All. The proposal set out the creation of two new unitary councils: a northern unitary comprising the City of Lincoln, West Lindsey, North Lincolnshire and North East

Lincolnshire; and a southern unitary comprising Boston Borough, East Lindsey, South Holland, South Kesteven and North Kesteven.

Cabinet was informed that the leaders of East Lindsey and South Holland had invited Boston Borough Council to become a partner in the development of the final proposal. The report recommended that the Council accept this invitation, recognising the strong and positive working relationship already established through the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership.

It was noted that the final proposal must be submitted to government by 28th November 2025, with implementation of new arrangements anticipated in April 2028. To support the Council's involvement in the development of the proposal, Cabinet was asked to approve the allocation of up to £42,000 from the Funding Volatility Reserve.

During discussion, Cabinet expressed broad support for the proposal. It was acknowledged that while local government reorganisation was being driven by central government, the Council had an opportunity to influence the outcome by actively participating in the development of a model that best served the interests of Boston's residents and businesses.

Members noted that the proposed southern unitary offered a balanced and viable structure, avoiding the creation of economically unequal areas. The importance of maintaining local identity and ensuring service delivery in rural areas was emphasised. Cabinet also welcomed the commitment to consultation and transparency throughout the process.

It was recognised that the Council's involvement would ensure that the voice of Boston was heard and that the borough's priorities were reflected in the final submission.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Dale Broughton and seconded by Councillor Sarah Sharpe.

Resolved:

- 1. That Boston Borough Council become a partner in the 'A Greater Lincolnshire For All' proposal for Local Government reorganisation; and**
- 2. That a sum of up to £42,000 be available to support the development of the proposal.**

The Meeting ended at 6.59 pm.