

Present: Councillor Judith Skinner (Chairman), Councillor Judy Welbourn (Vice-Chairman), Councillors Tom Ashton, Alison Austin, Peter Bedford, Katie Chalmers, Paul Goodale, Neill Hastie and Yvonne Stevens

In attendance:

Officers – Assistant Director – Assets, Assistant Director – Economic Growth and Democratic Services Officer.

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were tabled by Councillor Chelcei Trafford and Councillor Anton Dani. No substitute members.

The Lead Officer for the committee the Assistant Director – Regulation also tabled apologies, with the Assistant Director – Assets in attendance as Lead Officer for the meeting.

2 MINUTES

Committee agreed the minutes of the previous meeting held on 27 April 2021

3 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Alison Austin declared that she was a Director of CenterPoint Outreach. Councillor Paul Goodale declared he was the Chairman of the BTAC committee referenced within the report and confirmed he would be speaking on the reference in his role as Chairman of that committee.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions were tabled.

5 STRATEGIC ALLIANCE COVID19 RECOVERY PLAN 2021-2023

The Assistant Director – Economic Growth presented a brief receive of the report to the committee confirming it was tabled at the request Madam Chairman following it being approved implemented at Cabinet on the 31 March 2021.

The Recovery Plan set out a range of practical measures calculated to help the people and businesses of Boston and East Lindsey bounce back from the harm caused to the areas' economies and civil society by the "lockdowns" imposed on local businesses and communities to contain Covid19.

It focused on delivering activities and things that are tangible and useful to local people and businesses. Cabinet and the Executive Board would receive 6 monthly progress reports to help to understand what was working and what was not. This reporting would then allow them to address any issue and identify any potential to implement additional initiatives. It would in addition ensure that spending of the resources provided by Government focused on activities producing the greatest benefit. The first reporting was expected in September 2021.

Committee deliberation followed which included:

Referencing training identified within the welcome back funding a Member asked if the funds would be used to train staff who undertook the cleaning within the town, along with those who helped support the volunteers with grass cutting, planting and the borders. The Member noted that the standard of those operations was not currently to the standard it should be.

The Assistant Director – Economic Growth advised she would speak with the relevant service director and revert with the information.

Advising his role as Chairman of the BTAC committee, the Member questioned the deployment of BTAC operatives, which was noted within the as being the responsibility of the Council, when the deployment was the responsibility of BTAC. The report further implied the deployment was only within the town centre, when their deployment was further afield at the whole of the BTAC area, as well as within the town centre. Referencing the introduction of a new team the Member wondered if it was more a replacement then additional resources with some of the existing resource being removed.

Addressing the reference of the unlawful use of holiday caravans within point 30 of the plan – tackling health inequalities, the Member appreciated that it was specific to ELDC but voiced concern why there was no reference to private sector rented housing. A number of wards with Boston were subject to ongoing overcrowding in HMO's: the Borough currently had 49 registered but HMOs with significantly more needing to be registered. The occupants of such residences predominantly worked within factories with little social distancing, which continued to have very high rates of Covid transmissions with possibly no option of self-isolating. Living in similar conditions with overcrowding only served to spread the infection further. The wellbeing of other residents living in unacceptable conditions in housing needed prioritising alongside those living in caravans.

Responding the Assistant Director – Economic Growth that a partnership approach was encouraged by the Government in respect of the welcome back funding, with ELDC working in partnerships with the town councils and BBC working in partnership with BTAC.

The Leader of the Council offered his assurance that deployment of the operatives employed by BTAC was through BTAC and not through the Council.

Addressing the issue of HMOs the Assistant Director – Economic Growth confirmed they would relay the concerns to the relevant Assistant Director for a response.

The Leader of the Council further advised that negotiations with housing providers to come to members briefing nights to provide a greater understanding of the current situation in HMOs.

Continuing the tackling of health inequalities, a Member asked what measures were in place to tackle the reluctance by various communities to have the Covid19 vaccine.

The Lead Officer for the committee advised that a significant amount of work engaging with those communities had taken place by the community champions and a range of staff employed, including seconded staff from existing Magna Vitae staff, part of whose work had been focusing on engagement with those residents the member had asked about. The Princess Royal Sports Arena vaccination team and public health had also been very active in rolling out sessions in addition to the existing cohorts, with walk-in sessions provided for local communities with relevant speaking support staff in attendance. There is an ongoing work in the Borough supported through the alliance and public health services to really maximise the take up of vaccination by the whole of the Borough community.

A Member sought further information on a number of points: The crime and initiative success in Manchester, the employment ready/re skilling programme and the kickstart programme. The Member further asked for confirmation that the Princes Trust was still active in Boston also why was Boston Citizens Advice not included within the report when ELDC Citizens Advice was. Concluding, the Member asked for an update report in respect of the empowering healthy communities programme.

The Assistant Director – Economic Growth confirmed a follow up response to all the questions and confirmed an update report on the empowering healthy communities programme.

The Lead Officer for the committee advised that the recovery plan was as an alliance wide plan, however, both Councils' were still at different stages on different elements. The alliance model is to share learning, for example, the excellent work undertaken with Boston Citizens Advice has been used to inform work in East Lindsey with East Lindsey models of other work equally informing recovery in Boston.

A Member voiced strong concerns at the lack of uptake by residents for existing job opportunities, stating that in their professional role within the recruitment industry, they had never known so few people applying for jobs. Employers were desperate for employees. There were many low and middle range jobs available, that continued to be unfilled leaving employers struggling to cope. A key area for the lack of take up of the jobs was that of affordable child-care to support the workers. The priority of the Council should be that of why people were not taking up the available jobs, not the amount of people unemployed.

The Assistant Director – Economic Growth agreed the concerns and advised that it was a problem reflected through the County and beyond. The Councils working collaboratively with the LEP needed to get people into the much-needed jobs, including the great demand within the hospitality service. Plans needed to be adaptive moving forward and an update report on the plans progression could be tabled at a future meeting

Referencing the importance of the initiatives for the Food Valley and the Port a member sought reassurance that Greater Lincolnshire Enterprise Partnership fully supported Boston.

The Assistant Director – Economic Growth confirmed they could provide the reassurance that the Deputy Chief Executive – Place, who was lead in both initiatives was in constant contact with the GLEP and confirmed they would provide a more detailed response in respect of funding after the meeting.

The Member further questioned the targeted acquisition of vacant and under-used premises for redevelopment into residential accommodation, stating Boston town centre had many under-used upper-floor accommodation which if converted would encourage people to live in the town helping to sustain businesses. The member questioned what vehicle to take the initiative forward, noting that whilst ELDC had their own development company, Boston did not. Furthermore, noting the reference to the promotion of a more practical use of car parks, the Member voiced caution stating that increased town living would require car parks as little residences had parking available on site.

The Assistant Director – Economic Growth confirmed that an audit of vacant property in Boston had been completed that has been used to form a basis for levelling up proposals recently submitted. Recent press releases for the proposal for the town centre had referred to a new way of living with contemporary, retail uses housing maximising the use of vacant sites. There was an opportunity for Boston as part of the strategic acquisition of the bid to enable the development of the vacant properties moving forward.

RESOLVED:

That the Environment and Performance Committee considered and questioned the Recovery Plan.

To Feedback to Committee Members:

The Assistant Director – Economic Growth to:

1. Seek further information in respect of training for the town centre operatives in respect of the welcome back funding.
2. Provide more detailed information in respect of the crime initiative in Manchester
3. Provide more information in respect of the employment ready/re skilling programme and the kickstart programme.
4. Provide confirmation as to whether or not the Princes Trust was still active in Boston.
5. Notify the respective Assistant Director of the request for an update report in respect of the empowering healthy communities programme
6. Provide a more detailed response in respect of the funding in respect of the Food Valley and Boston Port and further clarification of the partners involved.

The Lead Officer to:

7. Ascertain a response from the relevant Assistant Director in relation to HMOs in Boston being considered within the tackling health equalities alongside the unlawful use of caravans in ELDC

6 VERBAL UPDATE ON THE MEMBER WORKING GROUP - FLY TIPPING

Councillor Judith Welbourn presented the work confirming that the Clean Sweep would take place in September. Suggestions raised by the Group included lobbying for increases in charges for fly tipping. That the Police from neighbouring Authorities share information in respect of fly tipping to allow sight of activity elsewhere. That a trade agreement be given to two DVLA registered metal dealers, as there were a number of vans going round collecting waste but there were not all registered. A further suggestion was for a countywide group to share information to monitor incidents. Referencing the deposit paid the group had suggested that part of that deposit should include a deposit for waste that would be non-refundable if the tenants failed to adhere to the correct disposal methods. The tenant would be asked to sign agreeing to the waste deposit and agreeing to dispose of waste in the correct manner.

The group also suggested the introduction of a separate licensing committee solely for HMOs.

As part of the Council's Empowering Healthy Communities programme, a multi lingual officer has been employed to engage with landlords and tenants of HMOs and other privately rented homes to provide education, advice and support about a range of issue including how our various bins should be used; the officer will also gain insight into ongoing issues in order the help shape future work, engagement and intervention.

Committee deliberation followed including:

A Member voiced concern at the suggestion for greater involvement by the Police. The Member stated that what a member of the public perceived to be a big problem, may be perceived by the Police as a trivial matter. The Police who deployed their resources as a matter of need and urgency.

In reference to the suggestion of the deposit to include a deposit for correct waste removal, a Member stated they felt it to be unreasonable and questioned where the tenant would get the additional money. The Member further voiced concern at the continual reference to HMOs being responsible for the bulk of fly tipping asking what evidence the Council had to substantiate it. They further commented that 24 hours opening at the Household Waste Recycling Centre and the allowance of vans would stop the problem as most people had vans.

In response, a Member stated that it was unreasonable to expect members of the public to have to continue paying for clearance on the ongoing fly tips. Continual incidents at the same sites of known and registered HMOs clearly evidenced that they were creating the majority of the fly tipping incidents within the town. The Recycling Centre was a Lincolnshire County Council facility, and the Council had no control over its operation and a Member doubted it would resolve the problem as those in quick turnover houses would continue to tip.

Members questioned how the suggested additional licensing committee would work as the existing committee was subject to national licensing laws with no provision for licensing of HMOs with the current decision in respect of HMOs an operational decision. Councillor Welbourn said it could be something along the lines of the previous Rogue Landlord scheme but agreed that the group would need to take advice.

The Chairman stated that the group needed to be very careful when making suggestions that required asking somebody to sign a contract and confirming they understood the contents. If it was a non-indigenous person to the town and they were unable to understand what they were signing, there could be a breach of equality. Should a landlord chose to implement such a scheme and seek the signing, it would be there responsibility.

The Lead Officer stated at this point that he would liaise with colleagues to provide a single point of email contact – similar to that used to report the fly tipping incidents – to enable members to report any possible address where they had reasonable concerns about the welfare of residents and that the dwelling was potentially operating as an HMO.

To take any action clear evidence and intelligence was required. Officers could investigate when there were legitimate concerns but any person reporting had to be very careful and not just report because the residents were non-indigenous to the town. The Lead Officer concluded by advising he would issue an email reminding Members of the definition of a HMO.

The Leader of the Council stated at this point that in the meeting that he would like a member briefing convened on housing to pick up all the issues raised.

Referencing surveillance a member questioned if the Council still had capacity to carry out operations. If it did, was the surveillance town centric or was it used in the rural areas that were subject to ongoing fly tipping activity in a number of lay-bys and gateways.

The Lead Officer advised that the Council had a contract with a company who undertook overt surveillance on their behalf and monitored activity at hot spots within the town but he would seek further information on the operation and feedback to members.

RESOLVED:

The environment and performance committee received and questioned the update reporting

To Feedback to Committee Members:

The Lead Officer to:

1. To liaise with officers to provide a single point email address for reporting any possible address where they had reasonable concerns about the welfare of residents
2. Issue and email reminding Members of the definition of a HMO.
3. Provide a more detailed response in respect of the current surveillance within the town for littering / fly tipping.
4. Schedule a member briefing on housing.

7 WORK PROGRAMME

The Lead Officer presented the following updates from the previous meeting:

1. The request for member training to be recorded and published on the website is going to the Councillor Development Group at its next meeting as it sits within their remit to determine.
2. Recommendations 12 and 13 from the Task and Finish Group Review, for determination by BTAC:

That committee agreed:

That Option 1 be approved, as set out in paragraph 4.3 of the report, to employ security personnel with the appropriate competency and training to open and lock the gates of Central Park on a daily basis for a one-year period.

That the Assistant Director Regulation be delegated authority, in consultation with the Chairman of BTAC, Leader Portfolio Holder and Section 151 Officer, to implement this option with Members to be consulted on the details.

That the Assistant Director Regulation undertakes an immediate recruitment process to acquire one CCTV operator, to be focused on the BTAC area

3. That the Transformation Manager provide information in respect of the differential between the net and gross figures in respect of the business rates.
4. Comments and suggestions relating to Fly Tipping Issues were fed back to the Member Working Group

Addressing the work programme the Lead Officer confirmed that:

papers members will see that:

1. The next meeting on September 7 has a busy agenda. The report in respect of the provision of public conveniences would be tabled along with the annual ASB and CCTV reporting.
There will be further updating on the Member Working Group and the work programme would include the new formatted quarter performance monitoring, to aide committee's in identifying reporting.
2. The subsequent meeting in October already has 2 reports:
 - The first is the Draft Climate Change Strategy
 - The second is the update on the Climate Change Assembly.

The Meeting Closed at 8.00 pm