

## **Boston Borough Council**

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview & Scrutiny - Corporate & Community Committee** held in the Committee Room - Municipal Buildings, West Street, Boston, PE21 8QR on Thursday 6th March 2025 at 6.30 pm.

### **Present:**

Councillor Paul Gleeson, in the Chair.

Councillors Councillor Suzanne Welberry, Richard Austin BEM, Anton Dani, Andy Izard and Barrie Pierpoint.

### **Officers:**

Deputy Chief Executive (Programme Delivery) and Assistant Director - General Fund Assets, Assistant Director – Corporate, Assistant Director - Wellbeing and Community Leadership, Healthy Living Strategic Lead, Group Manager – Insights & Transformation, Democratic Services Officer and Democratic Services Officer.

### **128 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jyothi Arayambath and Chris Mountain.

Apologies for absence were also received from Councillor Anne Dorrian in her capacity as Leader of the Council and Councillor Emma Cresswell in her capacity as Portfolio Holder - Communities (People).

### **129 Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

### **130 Minutes**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2025 were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

### **131 Public Questions**

No public questions were received.

### **132 LGA Peer Review - update on action plan**

The Assistant Director – Corporate presented the report which provided an update on the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Challenge which took place in May 2024. The Chairman indicated that the Committee had agreed to receive a report twice yearly in order to monitor progress.

The Peer Challenge Action Plan had been received in August/September 2024 and had then gone before Cabinet for approval. Since then, the Council had been working to deliver the actions within it. The follow up peer review was scheduled to take place on 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> May 2025.

The Assistant Director – Corporate indicated that one of the key pieces of evidence the peers would look at when they returned was the Action Plan and what the Council had done to deliver against it.

The Assistant Director – Corporate confirmed that the Action Plan contained a number of strands of governance. He advised the process was that the report had been considered by the Senior Leadership Team in terms of its delivery. The report was also presented quarterly to the Leader of the Council and the Assistant Director – Corporate who meets with the Leader to consider the Action Plan page by page. He indicated that the other key line of governance was for the Corporate and Community Committee to receive an update every six months which provided members with the opportunity to scrutinise and challenge it.

The Assistant Director – Corporate indicated that the action plan contained 29 actions of which 10 had been completed. 14 actions were on track and 5 actions, where the original target dates had slipped slightly, had delivery dates. Members noted that there were no “red” items, which was positive. The Assistant Director – Corporate confirmed that an additional action had been added to the plan where it was felt necessary that further consideration should be given, which was the development of a Borough-wide plan that would be presented to the Committee during the meeting.

The Chairman congratulated the Assistant Director – Corporate on the clarity of the report.

Members discussed the reports and commented as follows:

Clarification was sought in relation to the meaning of the word “ongoing” within the report and whether there might be better terminology which would more accurately capture the nature of the work required or would indicate that a review or progress date might be required. The Assistant Director - Corporate advised that for a number of the actions it was appropriate to have the word “ongoing” because, for example, on issues like updating the intelligence hub this would be an ongoing piece of work. He confirmed that any specific dates which were required for progress updates could be included in the future. He added that the evidence column was always “live” and subject to regular review to ensure it was reflective of the action to date. He agreed to review the word “ongoing” and see how it might be tightened. He also provided confirmation that every action in the plan was in any event reviewed at least quarterly.

In relation to page 16 of the report, further information was requested regarding legal advice which had been taken and whether it was confidential. The Assistant Director – Corporate indicated that some advice had been circulated to members previously. He agreed that he would review the action taken but confirmed that some advice had been received in relation to company governance which was being acted upon at present. The Assistant Director – Corporate agreed to provide the information to Councillor Barrie Pierpoint in response to his request for clarification.

Discussion occurred in relation to the PSPS transformation programme and confirmation was provided by the Assistant Director – Corporate that it had been through scrutiny, including a Joint Scrutiny Committee. It had not yet been received by Boston’s Cabinet but because it was a joint plan, it had been through the East Lindsey’s and South Holland’s Cabinets. He confirmed that when the business cases came forward from PSPS for the

projects that were in the plan, they would present opportunities to the Council to consider, including potential efficiency savings within the company and project ideas coming forward for consideration that could benefit customers.

Members noted that PSPS had their own transformation programme, which was about delivering reductions in the contract price the Council paid to the company. The Assistant Director – Corporate advised that they were instrumental to the transformation of services through their services such as Human Resources, IT and Finance.

In response to a question, the Assistant Director – Corporate confirmed that the recent departure of two Senior Directors would not have an effect on the Action Plan.

Consideration was given to the length of time which was allowed for delivery of an item in the Action Plan, for example, training for councillors/officers had a timescale of 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024, and the Committee considered the time allowed to achieve an outcome. The Assistant Director – Corporate confirmed that in this respect, the Assistant Director – Governance & Monitoring Officer had indicated that a schedule of training had been agreed, with dates for training being confirmed in March.

**Resolved:**

**That the Action Plan be noted.**

**133 Healthy Living Board**

The Healthy Living Strategic Lead presented the report, supported by the Assistant Director – Wellbeing & Community Leadership. The report provided an update on the work of South and East Lincolnshire Partnership Healthy Living Board, including local opportunities the Partnership had provided in Boston in the last year in response to joint scrutiny recommendations.

In March 2024, the Committee received a report from Joint Scrutiny Panel around the establishment of the Healthy Living Board. The scrutiny was an opportunity for Members to help inform the Board's remit. Membership of the Panel included Councillors Suzanne Welberry, Neil Drayton and Jyothi Arayambath. The scrutiny recommendation had rightly concluded that its role in health and well-being was not statutory or clinical but as a District Council it had a huge understanding of the needs of the community and opportunities to influence better health outcomes.

Recognising the broad scope of healthy living, including all the social and economic determinants of health, the Panel had recommended that the Healthy Living Board prioritise two areas locally and they were outlined in section 2.2 of the report. They were (i) activity and well-being, which included addressing inactivity to help improve opportunities for residents to be active; and (ii) working with communities to leverage unique links at place and engage with communities.

The Healthy Living Board had provided a platform for NHS colleagues, local charities and community groups to come and work with the Board, and it had given partners a way to work with the South & East Lincolnshire Partnership.

The report outlined the nine recommendations made by the Joint Scrutiny Panel from Section 3 within the report and provided an example of local delivery in response to each of those.

The Healthy Living Strategic Lead drew attention to a couple of the recommendations, particularly at section 3.6 around increasing place expansion and activity. She indicated that Sport England had announced place expansion last week and she highlighted this as a good example of an opportunity the Healthy Living Board had given Boston which fulfilled both priorities of strengthening communities and helping people to become physically active.

The Healthy Living Strategic Lead drew attention to section 3.7 of the report and the focus on providing a shift to prevention which was what most organisations were striving for as it would reduce poor health, reduce the risk of exclusion and reduce pressure on local services. This included examples of some of the prevention work, for example, a Lincolnshire based digital inclusion charity which helped people access and navigate support and give them confidence online. In Boston over 100 people had been engaged in those projects by coming to community-based drop-ins which had helped them access digital services and improve their skills and confidence, including data and devices.

The Healthy Living Strategic Lead highlighted the success of the Household Support Fund, which included a large amount of discretionary welfare funding in Boston and the Healthy Living Board had overseen local delivery. She indicated that this had been delivered successfully by working with organisations on the Board to get the funding into the hands of the people in most need of support or help with household essentials.

Since its launch, the Healthy Living Board had administered over £1.6million in small grants for Boston residents directly for help with utilities, food and school uniforms. It had also supported projects with bed poverty, furniture and a huge range of other welfare needs. By the end of the financial year, it was estimated that the fund would have helped in the delivery of around 12,000 small grants and emergency support.

Members discussed the reports and commented as follows:

Clarification was sought regarding the duration of the Household Support Fund. It had been announced in October 2021 as part of the post-COVID response and in response to some of the changes in Universal Credit and welfare gaps. The Household Support Fund had been a local discretionary scheme with funding allocated to Lincolnshire County Council but locally accepted and delivered by the Healthy Living Board.

The Healthy Living Strategic Lead was asked for more information about how projects, such as these, were monitored and asked to highlight some of the major successes. She confirmed that each project had its own delivery plan and that the partnership with Active Lincolnshire and the delivery of funding had been a great success. The Board had been able to demonstrate that they had the ability to deliver, had the governance and the role in the wider community.

The benefit of the local delivery of the Household Support Fund was also highlighted, with strong engagement with the third sector and other partners and the ability to get the funds out quickly.

Deliberation included the importance of green spaces, their promotion and the need to make better use of green spaces to maximise health benefits. Councillor Richard Austin pointed out the need for more active promotion of the eight large country parks within four miles of the centre of Boston as well as Central Park in the centre of Boston. The deliberation also included the need to provide better and more prominent signposting of green spaces on the Borough Council website. The Healthy Living Strategic Lead agreed to review the availability of this information on the Council website with IT and to consider what increased promotion with partners could be achieved, for example, with some of the local primary care networks and GPs who had started thinking about walking maps around their areas. Councillor Austin agreed to provide details of the information that he thought should be included in enhanced promotion of green spaces.

Members discussed housing conditions, including Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and homelessness. The relationship between poor housing and homelessness on health outcomes was considered.

Adopting healthier eating habits and increased child poverty was also considered. The Healthy Living Strategic Lead confirmed that the issue of housing standards and poverty was in the remit of social and economic determinants. Economic inclusion and reducing poverty were other strands which were specifically being updated on the recommendations made by the Joint Scrutiny Panel. She confirmed that the Healthy Living Board had a rolling agenda to consider a range of issues, including those raised during the meeting. Each time that the Panel met it picked a different theme to bring partners to together and agreed to consider the feedback of the Committee, particularly around food insecurity and the pressures on healthy eating.

Confirmation was provided by the Chairman that the Committee would be receiving a briefing on HMOs in due course.

In relation to the role of parish councils, it was confirmed that Parish Councils had not historically been involved in the work of the Healthy Living Board but the Healthy Living Strategic Lead confirmed that under Councillor Cresswell's Portfolio, she had now established a regular meeting with them, which occurred three times a year.

The position with local government reorganisation was considered and the importance of local communities leading the way in determining the needs of their communities. This had been taking place in the form of the creation of a volunteer team, supporting events, which included direct interaction with communities and strong relationships with Parish Councils.

The need for communities to come together was considered, including where communities may be harder to reach. The Assistant Director – Wellbeing and Community Leadership confirmed that there were a variety of mechanisms to do this through small focus groups and bringing smaller communities together. This also occurred through larger events as well, for example, through the Boston Christmas celebration. The services of the Communications Team at Boston Borough Council were highlighted as an important strand of this work and included their networks in terms of the social media groups that were set up with a vast variety of different community groups. Relationships with key and well-established community leaders were also identified as an important part of communicating with communities as was the work of Portfolio Holders. Doctor's surgeries, supermarkets and school networks were also used.

The Assistant Director – Wellbeing and Community Leadership indicated that Councillors were well-placed in their wards to reach out to communities and she agreed to accept any new information from them whereby the Panel might be able to engage with in the future, including employment agencies.

The position with mental health needs was considered. The Healthy Living Strategic Lead confirmed that the Panel was part of the Boston Mental Health Partnership, which was led by NHS Lincolnshire Partnership Foundation Trust. Their work also included prevention work to reduce mental anxiety, particularly around money and cost of living pressures.

The Chairman requested an update in the summer on the work being done to improve the website with information about green spaces and work to improve the profile of the Panel's work.

**Resolved:**

**That the report be noted.**

**134 Boston Plan 2040**

The Group Manager – Insights & Transformation presented the report including the draft consultation document for the Boston Plan 2040. She explained that it included a shared vision for the entire borough, all 19 parishes and the town. It also linked to the LGA Peer Review updates which had been discussed earlier.

The Group Manager – Insights and Transformation confirmed that the Plan expanded on the town centre strategy to cover the whole borough. The Plan had been out for public consultation, in January and February, which included with residents, local businesses, schools and Parish Councils. There had also been public interaction at events, including Celebrate Boston and Boston Brilliance. Members were invited to consider the draft plan and feedback their views so that they could be added to the consultation, which would then be reported to Cabinet on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2025.

High-level priorities included a thriving economy, community cohesion and resilience, and a healthy and sustainable borough. If the plan was approved, an action plan would be put together at the next stage, which would include the response to the consultation and the Committee's views which would feed into the action plan that would be delivered by multi-agency working groups for each of the priorities. The Committee would also receive reports on progress, as would the Cabinet, and reports would be provided to the Parish Council liaison meeting to ensure their involvement.

The Group Manager – Insights and Transformation indicated that there were two key areas that had already been identified from the consultation, which would be included in the next draft submitted to Cabinet. The first area was around the potential impact of local government reorganisation. The report will indicate that it was a "living document." The second area was regarding conversations with individual councillors about the potential for a rural strategy. She confirmed that rather than proceed in that way and have a separate one, the aim was to pull that together into the Plan, so that all areas were covered.

The Group Manager – Insights and Transformation advised that requests from by the Committee in respect of the Healthy Living Board report would be included in the Boston Plan 2040 so that it could incorporate the links with health and in particular reaching out to communities. Confirmation was provided that there would be more in-depth consultation and engagement on those actions themselves to include the Committee's suggestions.

Members discussed the reports and commented as follows:

Consideration was given to information in the report about the potential disparity between lower rates of unemployment locally as against the national average and the higher number of people on out of work benefits. The Committee discussed how a probable explanation was that the disparity may have arisen as a result of the number of people who were economically inactive and not claiming out of work benefits. Another explanation may also have been that some claimants of Universal Credit were in work and on low wages. The Group Manager – Insights & Transformation agreed to provide clarification.

Strategic aim 1.5 within the report was considered in terms of whether "attracting inward investment" could be more clearly expressed with positive examples of how it was working. The Group Manager – Insights and Transformation confirmed that additional information would be added, with examples. Deliberation included the need for strong promotion of all that Boston Borough had to offer in terms of growth and investment and the need for businesses to be approached to see what their expansion programmes might be and whether businesses could be encouraged to locate in the area. The benefits of having a more pro-active approach from the Council on this issue was considered as well as more "user-friendly" Council services.

The attractiveness of the Borough's green spaces as a reason to locate in the area was considered.

Strategic aim 1.4 within the report was considered, including the role of the Local Plan as one of the key drivers for housing and economic growth within the borough. Particular consideration was given to the need for infrastructure to support housing growth and whether there could be a more detailed explanation of the types and extent of infrastructure. The Group Manager – Insights and Transformation confirmed that the references to infrastructure could refer to any kind of infrastructure, depending on the development, and might include roads, shops and broadband. She advised that more details about the types of infrastructure would be added into the Action Plan.

Deliberation occurred on the timescale for delivery of the Plan and whether many of the ambitions in the plan were longer term and whether many of the objectives were achievable in the nearer term. The role of local government reorganisation was also considered and the need to ensure that the work done on the Plan could be carried forward and implemented whatever the outcome of any reorganisation. The Group Manager – Insights and Transformation advised that the Plan was a "living document" which would develop over time. The reference to 2040 was to give a longer vision to be able to look ahead, including on net zero plans and not only what was in the near term. She confirmed that the action plan was very detailed, with specific actions in the forthcoming year to be included in the annual delivery plan each year. She added that there would be very clear deliverables with dates, review dates which would be reported back to Committee.

Consideration was given to the potential benefits to the Borough of Boston from the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Boston, Lincolnshire giving birth to Boston, Massachusetts and the need for a stronger priority for this issue in future plans.

The Chairman thanked the Group Manager – Insights and Transformation for the clarity of the report, and those who had prepared and presented the earlier reports.

### **135 Work Programme**

The Assistant Director – General Fund Assets presented the Work Programme.

The Chairman confirmed that there would be an additional meeting of the Committee on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2025 in respect of a review of the current scrutiny arrangements, particularly as over the next two years there would be changes in terms of local government reorganisation which provided the Committee with an important role in both scrutinising the changes and enabling members to bring forward ideas.

The Assistant Director – General Fund Assets reminded members that a briefing would take place, either prior to or at one of the Committees forthcoming meetings in relation to Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). This would provide an opportunity to gain a shared understanding of what an HMO was, what a licensable HMO was and what licences did and did not do. The presentation would enable the Committee to consider the issues presented by HMOs and to consider what particular issues relating to that area of the Council's work that the Committee wanted to scrutinise in more detail in the next municipal year. The Chairman confirmed that he would be inviting all non-executive members to the briefing.

The Meeting ended at 7.48 pm.