

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 17th July 2025 at 6.30 pm.

Present:

Councillor Paul Gleeson, in the Chair.

Councillors Alison Austin, Anton Dani, Ralph Pryke, Lina Savickiene, David Scoot and Stephen Woodliffe (substitute for Mike Gilbert).

In attendance:

Councillor Emma Cresswell (Portfolio Holder).

Officers:

Assistant Director - Regulatory, Assistant Director - Communities and Housing Services, Community Leadership Manager, Community Safety Manager, Group Manager - Organisational Development, Group Manager – Insights & Transformation and Democratic Services Officer.

15 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Neil Drayton, Mike Gilbert, Andy Izard, Patsie Marson, Claire Rylott, Helen Staples and Suzanne Welberry.

16 Declarations of Interest

No declarations were received.

17 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 17th June 2025 were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

18 Public Questions

No questions were received from the public.

19 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan

The committee received a comprehensive update from the Group Manager – Organisational Development on the revised Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy, attached as Appendix A within the report, for the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership (SELCP) for 2025-2028 following feedback from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 29th May 2025.

Members were advised that the strategy had been developed in consultation as part of a key recommendation from the Local Government Association's Peer Challenge Process. The strategy included a high level action plan, attached as Appendix B within the report, the aim being to implement the strategy effectively.

The purpose of the strategy was to ensure that Council services were accessible, inclusive, and reflective of the diverse communities served. The Group Manager – Organisational Development highlighted that the Committee's previous feedback had been instrumental in shaping the revised version. In particular, members had raised points around:

- **Language and Accessibility:** The strategy had been rewritten in plain English to improve clarity and ensure it was accessible to a wider audience.
- **Broadened Scope of Inclusion:** The revised document now better reflected local socio-economic challenges, including economic hardship and political disengagement, particularly within the Boston area.
- **Data Integrity:** Demographic data had been reviewed for accuracy. While the figures were confirmed to be correct, terminology had been refined to avoid potential misinterpretation.

The Group Manager- Organisational Development emphasised that the updated strategy and action plan reflected the Council's ongoing commitment to fostering an inclusive environment for both its workforce and the wider community. The action plan included practical steps to support implementation, such as training, policy review, and community engagement initiatives.

The Committee was invited to consider the revised documents and provide further feedback ahead of their submission to Cabinet for approval.

Members welcomed the revised report and reflected on the improvements made since the initial draft was reviewed in May, acknowledging the clearer language, broader scope, and refined data presentation..

Members discussed the importance of effective communication in ensuring the strategy reached and resonated with all parts of the community. It was acknowledged that while the policy was well-intentioned and comprehensive, its impact would depend heavily on how successfully it was communicated and understood by residents. There was a shared view that improved communication could significantly enhance engagement, particularly within Boston's diverse population.

The Committee discussed the broader issue of community integration and the barriers that some residents face in accessing services or participating in civic life. Members noted that political disengagement remained a concern in certain areas and suggested that engagement might be more effective in places with a town or parish council structure, where the link between elected representatives and the community tends to be stronger.

The Chairman took the opportunity to remind members of the ongoing consultation on the establishment of a Parish / Town Council for Boston, encouraging participation and promotion of the consultation within their wards.

The Group Manager – Organisational Development provided further insight into the Council's efforts to address political disengagement. She highlighted recent outreach work by the Democratic Services Team in local schools, where pupils had been introduced to the principles of local democracy through mock elections and party-based activities. This initiative aimed to raise awareness and understanding of political processes from an early

age, with the hope that such engagement would extend into families and the wider community. The officer also referred to the action plan's commitment to supporting community engagement through training and the development of inclusive practices. It was noted that the strategy was not only about compliance but about fostering a culture of openness, participation, and respect.

The Chairman thanked the Group Manager – Organisational Development for the work undertaken to revise the strategy in response to the Committee's earlier feedback. He expressed confidence that the revised policy now aligned with the aspirations of the partnership and would provide a strong foundation for future work.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

[The Group Manager – Organisational Development left the meeting following consideration of the above item at 6.53pm.]

20 South and East Lincolnshire Council's Crowdfunding Scheme - Two Year Progress

The Committee received a presentation on the two-year progress report of the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Crowdfunding Scheme from the Portfolio Holder for Communities.

The scheme, known as the South and East Lincolnshire Crowd, was described as an innovative platform designed to enable community groups to raise funds for local projects. It was emphasised that the model relied on community buy-in from the outset, with projects only progressing where there was demonstrable local support. Community groups were eligible to receive up to £5,000 from the Council's funding pot, with the remainder of the project costs raised through public contributions.

The Committee was informed that, over the two-year period, the scheme had supported ten projects across the partnership, with a combined value of £105,000. Of this, £59,000 had been raised directly from the community, demonstrating a strong return on the Council's investment. It was noted that six additional projects were currently in the crowdfunding phase, three of which were based in the Boston area.

The report highlighted a range of positive outcomes, including improvements to community buildings, the delivery of new cultural events, increased community engagement, and a rise in volunteering opportunities. These outcomes were seen as aligning closely with the Council's priorities around safe and resilient communities.

Members discussed the scheme's effectiveness in fostering community involvement, noting that its success depended on genuine buy-in from local residents. The model was praised for encouraging grassroots participation, with projects only progressing where there was demonstrable support from the community.

The Committee welcomed the strong return on investment, with £59,000 raised by the public against a total project value of £105,000. It was noted that ten projects had been successfully supported to date, with six more currently in progress—three of which were

based in Boston. Members viewed this as a positive indicator of local engagement and interest.

The discussion also highlighted the broader benefits of the scheme, including improvements to community buildings, the delivery of cultural events, increased volunteer opportunities, and enhanced community cohesion. Members recognised the scheme's alignment with the Council's strategic priorities, particularly around safe and resilient communities.

There was general support for the continuation of the scheme, with members expressing interest in how it might be further promoted and expanded to reach a wider range of community groups. The Committee acknowledged the importance of ensuring accessibility, particularly for groups that may be less familiar with digital platforms or online fundraising.

The Chairman thanked both the portfolio holder and the presenting officer for their work in delivering the scheme and preparing the report. The Committee endorsed the report and supported the ongoing delivery of the crowdfunding scheme.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

[The Portfolio Holder, The Assistant Director – Communities and Housing Services and the Community Leadership Manager left the meeting following consideration of the above item at 7.08pm.]

[Councillor Pryke left the meeting at 7.08pm and returned at 7.09pm following consideration of the above item.]

21 South & East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership Body Worn Video (BWV) Policy 2025

The Community Safety Manager presented a report on the proposed Body Worn Video (BWV) Policy, which had been developed as part of the Council's ongoing commitment to the health, safety and welfare of its staff, service users, and others affected by its activities. The policy, attached within the report as Appendix A, had been introduced as a new partnership-wide framework, intended to standardise the use of BWV devices across the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership.

Members were advised that the policy would enable frontline officers to utilise BWV devices in circumstances where it was lawful, reasonable, justifiable, and proportionate to do so. The policy had been designed to ensure compliance with data protection principles and to embed appropriate technical and organisational safeguards into the Council's operational procedures.

The Community Safety Manager explained that the BWV devices provided a high standard of evidence when used in regulatory and enforcement activities. However, they the policy set out clear guidance on when and how devices should be used, including procedures for collecting, downloading, processing, presenting, and retaining video and audio evidence.

The BWV would only be deployed where necessary—either to reduce aggression towards officers or to support evidence gathering in accordance with legal requirements and best practice.

Members were invited to comment on the policy and associated documents, and the officer confirmed he would be happy to respond to any questions raised.

The Committee engaged in a detailed discussion on the proposed Body Worn Video (BWV) Policy. Members welcomed the clarity of the policy and its emphasis on lawful, proportionate, and justifiable use of BWV devices by Council officers.

Members discussed the practical benefits of BWV use within Boston, particularly in relation to officer safety and the deterrence of aggressive behaviour. Members considered the potential for BWV to support enforcement activity, including the collection of evidence in cases such as fly-tipping. It was suggested that the availability of BWV could empower councillors and officers to respond more confidently in situations where anti-social behaviour or environmental offences were witnessed.

Members raised questions regarding the operational life of the BWV devices. While the officer was unable to provide a definitive lifespan, he explained that the cameras were robust and came with protective features to extend their usability. Members expressed support for the use of BWV and discussed the procedures for data retention and disposal. The officer provided an overview of the data handling protocols, including the 30-day retention period for non-evidential footage and the secure storage of evidential material..

The Committee explored the legal rights of individuals captured on BWV footage and were informed that subject access requests could be made under data protection legislation. The officer explained the procedures for handling such requests, including redaction of third-party data and the safeguards in place to protect privacy.

Members discussed the potential use of AI and Face Recognition technology. It was confirmed the current BWV devices did not support facial recognition, and there were no plans to implement such functionality at this time.. The Committee also considered the accessibility of reporting mechanisms for members and the public. The officer confirmed that an online reporting form was available and could be used to submit incidents or concerns related to BWV usage.

Further discussion took place on the scope of BWV deployment across the borough. Members queried whether the devices could be used by councillors or other staff. The Community Safety Manager clarified that, at present, BWV devices were intended for use by enforcement officers only, although future expansion of use could be considered.

The Chairman concluded the item by thanking the Community Safety Manager for a well-written and comprehensive report. He noted that the policy was another example of effective partnership working and endorsed its submission to Cabinet for approval.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

[The Community Safety Manager left the meeting following consideration of the above item at 7.32pm.]

22 Quarter 4 24/25 Performance and Risk Report

The Group Manager – Insights and Transformation presented the Quarter 4 2024/2025 Performance Report which covered the period up to the end of March 2025. It was noted that the report had previously been considered by the Environment and Performance Committee to support its work programme, but was now being brought to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee following the merger of scrutiny functions. The purpose of presenting the report was to highlight areas of performance that might warrant further scrutiny or be considered for inclusion in the Committee's future work programme.

Members were advised to consider whether any specific indicators required more detailed examination. The officer drew attention to the performance summary on page 134, which included a pie chart showing that the majority of performance indicators were on target (green). Only one measure was reported as off target (red), which related to customer contact.

The Committee was invited to review the report and identify any areas of concern or interest for future scrutiny.

Reference was made to page 135 of the agenda, which contained responses to questions raised at a previous meeting. The first related to swimming participation figures. It was noted that numbers had declined in Quarter 2 and continued to do so in Quarter 4. The Leisure Services Officer had attributed this to seasonal variation and changes in reporting methodology, particularly regarding school and ongoing bookings. Additionally, the appendix outlined several service outages at the leisure centre, which had further impacted figures. Members were informed that a further decline was expected in Quarter 1 due to ongoing building works. This area was suggested as a potential item for the work programme or for future feedback from the relevant officer.

The second question concerned the local authority error rate for housing benefit claims. Officers explained that the Department for Work and Pensions reimbursed the Council for housing benefit payments, covering 100% of costs where payments were accurate. It was acknowledged that some level of error was anticipated and accounted for within the system.

Members were informed that a new approach to performance reporting was under consultation, with a shift in terminology from "trend measures" to "contextual metrics." This term was welcomed by officers, as it more accurately reflected indicators that provided background context rather than direct performance outcomes. It was noted that such metrics were useful for understanding service trends over time, though they did not necessarily indicate positive or negative performance in isolation.

The Committee discussed the implications of underperformance in customer contact, which was the only indicator reported as red. Members considered the challenges faced by the customer contact team, including increased call volumes and complexity of enquiries. The Committee agreed that further scrutiny of call handling performance would be appropriate and resolved to add this issue to the work programme.

Further discussion took place regarding the redevelopment of the Geoff Moulder Leisure Centre and Rosegarth Square. Concerns were raised about the lack of communication with members and residents regarding the closure of the leisure pool and the availability of alternative facilities. It was confirmed that while the leisure pool was closed for redevelopment, the training pool remained open, and members could access facilities at the Princess Royal Arena. However, it was acknowledged that communication had been insufficient, with some members only learning of the closure upon arrival at the centre.

Officers confirmed that Parkwood Leisure, the Council's contractor, had issued press releases and used member contact channels, but accepted that communication could be improved. The Assistant Director – Regulatory agreed to raise the issue of communication at the next redevelopment meeting. A further point was raised regarding whether residents had been informed of their ability to use alternative facilities during the closure. Officers committed to investigating this and ensuring that information was shared more effectively going forward.

It was agreed that a further Members' Update Meeting should be scheduled to provide an opportunity for members to receive updates and discuss progress on both the Rosegarth Square development and the redevelopment of the Geoff Moulder Leisure Centre.

The Chairman thanked officers for the comprehensive report and confirmed that the Committee had noted the concerns regarding customer contact performance. The Committee looked forward to receiving the next quarterly update in due course.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

[The Group Manager – Insights and Transformation Manager left the meeting following consideration of the above item at 7.51pm.]

23 Work Programme and Forward Plan

The Committee considered its current Work Programme and the Council's Forward Plan, with a view to identifying future areas for scrutiny based on the performance report and recent discussions.

The Chairman opened the item by noting that the Committee had already received a detailed report from the Democratic Services Officer, summarising the outcomes of the recent scrutiny workshop. However, due to low attendance at the current meeting, it was suggested that a more in-depth discussion of the workshop findings be deferred until the September meeting, when a greater number of members were expected to be present. It was agreed that time would be set aside at that meeting to review the workshop outcomes and shape the Committee's future priorities..

The Committee agreed to add customer contact performance—specifically call handling—to the work programme, following concerns raised earlier in the meeting in relation to the Quarter 4 performance report.

The Chairman advised that the September meeting was already shaping up to be a full agenda. The Portfolio Holder for Highways had confirmed attendance, and the Lincolnshire Road Safety Partnership was scheduled to attend the October meeting. Members were reminded of the importance of submitting technical or detailed questions in advance of meetings with external guests.. Members were encouraged to think ahead about the issues they wished to raise to ensure scrutiny remained effective.

The Committee was also updated on efforts to secure a visit from the Chief Constable of Lincolnshire Police, Paul Gibson. While a date had not yet been confirmed, it was reported that open lines of communication had now been established. It was acknowledged that September could be a critical period for the force, particularly in relation to its financial position and future resource allocation.

The Chairman thanked members and officers for their contributions and closed the meeting.

The Meeting ended at 8.00 pm.