

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 Tuesday 10th February 2026 at 6.30 pm.

Present:

Councillor Paul Gleeson, in the Chair.

Councillors Councillor Suzanne Welberry, Anne Dorrian, Andy Izard, Patricia Marson, Barrie Pierpoint, Ralph Pryke, Lina Savickiene, David Scoot and Stephen Woodliffe (substitute for Richard Austin BEM).

In attendance:

Councillor Mike Gilbert, Deputy Leader of the Council.

Officers:

Assistant Director - Regulatory, Assistant Director - Governance and Monitoring Officer, Information Manager and Data Protection Officer, Head of HR & OD, HR Projects and Transformation Manager and Democratic Services Officer.

81 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Richard Austin (Substituted by Councillor Stephen Woodliffe), David Brown, Anton Dani, Neil Drayton and Stuart Evans.

82 Declarations of Interest

Several Members reported interests relating to matters on the agenda. Councillor Stephen Woodliffe declared that he was a Member of the Lincolnshire Police and Crime Panel, an interest relevant to the Policing item scheduled for consideration. Councillor Ralph Pryke stated that he served as a Board Member of Public Sector Partnership Services (PSPS), and Councillor Suzanne Welberry similarly declared her role as a PSPS Board Member, both interests being pertinent to discussions involving partnership-wide staffing and organisational policies. Councillor Anne Dorrian advised that she was a member of a Trade Union, noting this in relation to the agenda item concerning the alignment of workforce terms and conditions. No further declarations were made.

83 Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 15th January 2026 were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

84 Public Questions

No questions were received from the public.

85 Policing

The Committee received a comprehensive verbal briefing from the Chief Constable of Lincolnshire Police and the Chief Inspector for Boston and South Holland, who attended virtually. The Chairman welcomed both officers and outlined the purpose of the session, explaining that the Committee had invited senior representatives of the Force following a period of heightened local concern regarding resources, community safety and national discussions on police reorganisation.

The Chief Constable began by setting out the strategic position of Lincolnshire Police, noting that the Force had experienced long-standing structural underfunding over many years, resulting in constrained planning horizons and reduced capacity across operational and specialist policing teams. He described how the year-to-year financial uncertainty had historically limited the ability of the organisation to invest, modernise and stabilise its workforce. The Committee was informed, however, that the recent national financial settlement represented a marked improvement and provided the most sustainable outlook the Force had seen in many years. Members were advised that the 2026/27 funding package included an uplift of almost 5% in the central police grant. A Police & Crime Panel-approved increase in the council tax precept and a three-year £12 million annual stabilisation grant, allocated specifically to address the historic funding gaps.

The Chief Constable explained that the stabilisation grant was particularly significant, as it allowed the Force to begin rebuilding officer numbers back to establishment levels, reverse previous reductions in police staff roles, and increase PCSO numbers to strengthen neighbourhood policing and community visibility. The Force was also able to re-examine specialist functions, including areas such as child protection and investigations, where capacity had been stretched.

Turning to national policy, the Chief Constable updated Members on the Government's ongoing work on police reform. Although proposals were at a high level, he highlighted the importance of ensuring that any future changes preserved strong local accountability, community engagement and the operational autonomy necessary to respond to Lincolnshire's unique geography and demand patterns.

The Chief Constable emphasised that the Force was working constructively with national partners while maintaining a focus on neighbourhood presence and responsiveness at the local level. The Chairman thanked both senior officers for setting out the strategic picture and invited the Committee to move into discussion.

Members engaged in detailed discussion on policing matters affecting Boston and the wider locality.

Members questioned the levels of violent crime and the perceived prevalence of weapons in the town centre. The Chief Inspector provided an evidence-based breakdown of recorded offences, which demonstrated that the number of incidents involving knives or other weapons in Boston had remained comparatively low over the past four years. Members noted that the data contrasted with some public perceptions, and the Force acknowledged the need to continue improving communication so that residents understood the true picture of local crime trends.

The Chief Constable highlighted reductions in wider violent-crime categories including violence with injury and violence without injury reflecting a broader downward trend. The Committee then discussed retail crime, with Members reporting significant concern from both major retailers and smaller independent businesses. The Chief Inspector outlined the work undertaken under targeted operations, including proactive enforcement days, enhanced evidence-gathering and multi-agency collaboration. The Committee noted that many retail offences had been committed by a small number of prolific offenders, and that coordinated action had resulted in multiple arrests and the clearance of large numbers of cases linked to those individuals.

Members were assured that neighbourhood officers, local partners and business groups would continue to be supported to respond to these issues swiftly and consistently. Concerns were raised relating to the night-time economy, including anti-social vehicle use, noise and behaviour in and around the town centre during evening hours.

The Chief Inspector outlined recent enforcement activity, including operations focused specifically on dangerous driving, vehicle modifications and antisocial use of vehicles. Members were informed that it had resulted in several vehicle seizures, the issuing of Section 59 warnings, and further targeted monitoring of known hotspots.

Members acknowledged the impact that visible enforcement had on community reassurance. They also discussed the issue of cycling within pedestrianised areas. Frequent examples of unsafe cycling in busy zones, such as Strait Bargate, were mentioned. The Chief Inspector explained the role of PCSOs in advising and challenging cyclists, commenting on the limitations of current signage and the need to consider broader public-realm measures such as clearer infrastructure or defined cycle routes to support better compliance.

Members representing rural wards emphasised that policing visibility needed to extend beyond the town centre. They highlighted the importance of PCSOs in maintaining engagement with village communities. In response, the Chief Constable reiterated that neighbourhood policing remained a core part of the Force's operating model and that the planned uplift in PCSO numbers would support wider coverage across rural Lincolnshire.

It was noted that reassurance and local presence were essential in maintaining trust in policing. Discussions also touched upon public confidence, with Members encouraging the Force to invest further in clear, reliable communication to counter negative perceptions and highlight improvements.

The Chief Constable referred to existing initiatives, such as the Lincolnshire Alert system and the development of more targeted communication channels for specific communities. Members expressed support for enhanced collaboration with businesses, community groups and local authorities to reinforce positive messaging.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Constable and Chief Inspector for their detailed responses and for their continued willingness to engage openly with the Committee.

[The Chief Constable and Chief Inspector left the meeting at 7.45pm, following discussions.]

86 Terms and Conditions Alignment - Next Phase

The Committee received a detailed report from the Head of HR and Organisational Development on the second phase of proposals to align workforce terms and conditions across the South & East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership. Members considered the report and the associated appendices (Appendices A–C), comprising the SELCP Vehicle Purchase Assistance Policy, the SELCP Redundancy and Redeployment Policy extract, and the updated Annual Leave Appendix within the Time Off Policy. Members were informed that the long-term programme of work had been initiated to ensure fairness, consistency and operational coherence across all three partner councils, recognising that many services now operate on a shared basis with officers working across multiple authorities.

Phase 1 of the alignment process had already addressed several major contractual differences, particularly in areas affecting large staff groups. Phase 2 brought forward the remaining nine areas requiring harmonisation which included overtime arrangements, car loan schemes, notice periods, redundancy terms, pay protection, mobility clauses and annual leave provisions, several of which differed significantly between the partner councils due to historic local policies.

Members were advised that the proposals had been assessed against multiple criteria, including financial implications, fairness, operational resilience, HR best practice and alignment with legal requirements. Each proposed revision had been reviewed through the Senior Leadership Team, relevant Portfolio Holders and the Partnership Stakeholder Board before being presented to Overview and Scrutiny for comment.

The Head of HR confirmed that, should Full Council approve the recommendations, the changes would be subject to consultation with staff and recognised Trade Unions.

Members were reminded that the proposals set out in the report aimed to move all staff to the “best of” position wherever feasible. Where Boston Borough Council already offered the most favourable terms, no change was proposed. Where East Lindsey or South Holland had the more favourable provision, the proposal was to align Boston staff to that standard. The Head of HR highlighted that the approach sought to ensure equality whilst maintaining affordability and organisational stability.

A discussion on the proposals took place, reflecting the significance of contractual terms both for staff wellbeing and operational delivery.

Members asked for clarification on the consultation process with Trade Unions and staff, particularly whether any areas might return to Council if significant objections were raised. The Head of HR confirmed that consultation feedback would be carefully reviewed and that, if proposals required amendment, especially where financial impact or statutory provisions were affected, the matter would return through the appropriate governance route before final adoption.

Concerns were raised regarding the mobility clause, especially as some officers had caring responsibilities, disabilities, or restricted access to transport. Members asked what protections would be available should staff be required to work at alternative locations.

The Head of HR explained that the mobility clause had been standardised across the Partnership for new employees for some time, reflecting the modern working arrangements of a shared service structure. For existing staff with older contracts, the proposal aimed to align the wording for consistency. However, it was emphasised that the clause would always be applied reasonably and in accordance with HR policies, considering individual circumstances. Hybrid and agile working practices further reduced the likelihood of significant disruption caused by location changes.

Members then discussed notice periods, particularly the proposal to increase employer and employee notice for senior roles. The impact on business continuity and organisational resilience was explored. Officers advised that aligning notice periods with sector norms would support better succession planning and service continuity, ensuring that services were not left vulnerable during periods of recruitment.

Members examined the proposed revisions to overtime rates, annual leave, and the car loan scheme, noting that most changes aligned Boston staff to the most favourable provision currently offered elsewhere in the Partnership. Clarification was provided that no Boston officer would be placed on less favourable terms as a result of the proposals.

The importance of maintaining a fair and attractive employment offer to support recruitment and retention in key service areas was acknowledged.

Questions were asked regarding staff speculation on the creation of a new authority. The Head of HR explained that any future Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) would be subject to statutory TUPE protections, meaning that new contractual terms introduced through this alignment would transfer with staff into any successor organisation. Although a future authority could seek to review policies after transition, it could not diminish individual contractual entitlements without lawful process.

In response to a query about whether staff would receive new written contracts, the Head of HR confirmed that issuing revised contracts was the most transparent and legally robust approach. Given the scale of historical variations and legacy amendments held by long-serving staff, a consolidated contract would provide clarity, reduce confusion and ensure that all officers were working under a consistent and up-to-date document.

Members noted that the proposals represented a positive step towards organisational coherence and would support the continued development of integrated services across the Partnership. The Chairman thanked officers for the clarity of the report and for addressing Members' questions.

Resolved:

That the Committee noted the report on Phase 2 of the alignment of workforce terms and conditions across the South & East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership, including the associated appendices, and agreed that the comments made during discussion be submitted to Full Council to inform its consideration of the proposals.

[The Head of HR and Organisational Development PSPS and the HR Projects and Transformation Manager left the meeting at 7.49pm, following consideration of the above item.]

87 Data Protection Policy and Records Management Policy

The Committee received a comprehensive presentation from the Group Manager for Information Governance and Data Protection Officer on the updated Data Protection Policy (attached as Appendix 1 within the report) and Records Management Policy (attached as Appendix 2 within the report), both of which had undergone a full review to reflect recent legislative, technological and organisational developments. Members were reminded that the Council's ability to deliver effective services was fundamentally dependent on the quality, availability and security of the information it held. The review had therefore been undertaken to ensure continued compliance with statutory requirements and to strengthen the Council's governance framework for handling data across all departments and partnership arrangements.

Members were advised that both policies had been rewritten to integrate the latest requirements of the UK General Data Protection Regulation, the Data Protection Act 2018, and critically, the recently introduced Data Use and Access Act (DUAA) 2025, which brought significant changes to data-sharing, access rights, complaint-handling and public-sector interoperability. They were informed that the DUAA placed new obligations on public bodies particularly around 'reasonable and proportionate' search expectations for Subject Access Requests, transparency in data sharing, the handling of automated decision-making, and the management of datasets across partnerships and multi-authority environments. The updates had been embedded within both revised policy documents.

The Records Management Policy had similarly been modernised to reflect the full lifecycle of information, encompassing creation, storage, use, archival retention, secure disposal, and the handling of AI-generated records. Members were advised that the policy aligned with national frameworks, including the Section 46 Code of Practice under the Freedom of Information Act, and sought to ensure that the management of records both paper and digital met the standards expected of a modern local authority. The Group Manager for Information Governance and Data Protection emphasised that the updates were intended not only to maintain compliance but also to promote organisational resilience, operational efficiency and public trust, particularly as more teams across the South & East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership adopted shared processes and systems.

Members held a detailed discussion on the implications of the revised governance framework, recognising the significance of information handling to Council operations and the growing importance of data protection in public life.

It was explored how the updated policies would support the Council to manage increasing volumes of complex data, including digital records, cross-partnership datasets and information generated by emerging technologies. Members sought clarification on how the new DUAA requirements would influence day-to-day processes, particularly regarding Subject Access Requests and other statutory rights.

The Group Manager explained that the shift from an exhaustive search obligation to a reasonable and proportionate one would reduce the administrative burden on officers while maintaining legal compliance and ensuring individuals' rights were upheld. Members noted that it represented a significant practical improvement, especially in service areas managing large volumes of case files or legacy systems. They also discussed the new, DUAA-mandated complaints process, which sat outside the Council's corporate complaints procedure and mirrored the structure used by the Information Commissioner's Office. The added formality would help ensure consistency, clarity, and adherence to statutory timelines, particularly in complex data-handling scenarios. The Group Manager confirmed that updated training materials and guidance would support staff in implementing the revised process.

Questions were raised about the responsibilities of councillors when handling personal data. Members were reminded that councillors may act in different legal capacities depending on the context, such as acting independently as a data controller when managing ward casework, and that the updated policies were aligned to provide greater clarity on those distinctions.

The Group Manager confirmed that when Members acted on behalf of the Council, they were covered by the Council's data protection framework and insurance arrangements, but separate obligations applied when operating outside Council business.

Members further explored the impact of digital transformation and automation, particularly the handling of AI generated records. They were informed that both policies explicitly addressed modern digital workflows, including the creation, classification and retention of records generated or processed by automated systems, which ensured that such records were subject to the same standards of security, accessibility and lifecycle management as other Council records.

The Records Management Policy also set expectations for metadata, retention schedules and disposal, ensuring transparency and auditability across all formats. Throughout the discussion, Members acknowledged the crucial role of effective training in ensuring compliance. The Group Manager outlined the mandatory training programme for staff, including induction, refresher training, specialist modules for high-risk roles, and ongoing awareness campaigns to ensure that officers and Members remain up to date with statutory requirements and organisational policies.

Members thanked the Group Manager for the comprehensive update, recognising the scale and importance of the work undertaken and noting the value of clear and robust information governance in supporting public confidence and operational effectiveness.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Paul Gleeson and seconded by Councillor Barrie Pierpoint.

Resolved:

That the draft Data Protection Policy and Records Management Policy, attached at Appendices 1 and 2 within the report, be recommended to Cabinet for approval.

[The Group Manager for Information Governance and Data Protection Officer left the meeting at 7.55pm, following consideration of the item.]

88 Council Procedure Rule 11 - Questions by Members

The Committee received a detailed report from the Assistant Director – Governance and Monitoring Officer regarding a motion on notice previously submitted to Full Council on 12th January 2026. The Monitoring Officer's report relating to the proposed changes was attached at Appendix 1. Members were reminded that during the meeting, a point of order had been raised concerning procedural requirements under the Constitution. Specifically, any proposal seeking to amend the Council's Procedure Rules must first be accompanied by a Monitoring Officer report and must be considered by a committee before being debated and determined by Full Council. Because the requirements had not been met the motion had been referred to Overview and Scrutiny for consideration, in accordance with the Constitution.

The Monitoring Officer outlined the purpose of his statutory report, which was to provide Members with legal, procedural and comparative context to assist them in forming a recommendation to Full Council. Attention was drawn to the wide variety of approaches taken by councils nationally. Some authorities imposed no restriction on the number of questions Members could ask at Full Council, while others adopted limits based on time, number of questions, or the length and scope of those questions. The variation demonstrated that councils had broad discretion in how they regulated questioning, provided statutory obligations and constitutional safeguards were observed.

Members were reminded that the motion under consideration sought to amend Council Procedure Rule 11.2 to introduce a limit of one question only per Member per meeting, whilst retaining the right to ask one supplementary question arising directly from the original question or its reply.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that introducing such a limit was lawful and commonplace, noting that many authorities imposed similar constraints to manage meeting length, ensure orderly debate and provide opportunities for wider Member participation.

Members also noted that the motion originally proposed that the change take effect at the conclusion of the 12th January 2026 meeting; however, as the amendment had not been lawfully approved at that meeting, the implementation date was no longer valid. The Monitoring Officer advised that, should the Committee support the proposal, the effective date must instead be updated to reflect the next Full Council meeting on 2nd March 2026.

Members undertook a thorough discussion on the merits and implications of amending the procedure for Member questions at Full Council. Differing perspectives were expressed, reflecting varying priorities around democratic engagement, meeting management and the role of scrutiny within the Council's governance framework.

Some Members observed that recent Council meetings had seen extensive questioning from individual Members, which had the effect of prolonging meetings and limiting time available for wider debate on substantive items of business. They noted that the purpose of introducing a question limit was not to restrict scrutiny, but to ensure that Council

meetings could progress efficiently, maintain focus on decision-making, and provide other Members with equitable opportunity to participate. It was suggested that committees, Portfolio Holders and alternative channels already provided suitable routes for raising matters requiring more detailed examination.

Other Members expressed strong reservations about the proposal, arguing that questions at Full Council formed an important part of transparency and democratic accountability. They contended that imposing a numerical restriction could discourage legitimate scrutiny and reduce the public visibility of important issues. It was highlighted that, despite perceptions of lengthy questioning, the actual duration of recent Council meetings had frequently been well within the allotted three-hour limit, and therefore the premise that questioning had impeded the conduct of business was not accepted.

The debate also reflected wider concerns about Member behaviour, political culture, and the need to ensure that Full Council remained a forum for respectful and balanced debate. Members acknowledged that while questioning should be conducted responsibly and in good faith, mechanisms already existed within the Constitution, such as the Mayor's powers to manage disorderly conduct or irrelevant questioning.

The clarity provided in the Monitoring Officer's report was welcomed, particularly the comparative benchmarking of other councils' rules. It was noted that many authorities had introduced limits on written questions to ensure proportionate use of time, and that such measures were not inherently restrictive provided Members retained the ability to ask supplementary questions on the day.

As debate concluded, the Monitoring Officer provided a clear procedural clarification. He reminded members that the role of the Committee was not to determine the matter but to make a recommendation to Full Council.

The Committee then proceeded to vote on the recommendation.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Barrie Pierpoint and seconded by Councillor Stephen Woodliffe.

Resolved:

That the following recommendation be made to Full Council:

- 1. That Council Procedure Rule 11.2 be amended so that a member may submit one question only per Full Council meeting;**
- 2. That the amendment take effect at the conclusion of the 2nd March 2026 Full Council meeting; and**
- 3. That the Monitoring Officer be authorised to update the Constitution accordingly.**

Councillor Anne Dorrian requested that her vote against the recommendations be recorded.

[Councillor Anne Dorrian left the meeting at 8.15pm and returned at 8.17pm, following consideration of the above item.]

89 Work Programme and Forward Plan

The Committee received the latest Work Programme and Forward Plan for review. Members were reminded that the Work Programme was updated throughout the year to ensure scrutiny remained responsive and Member-led.

An update from the Town Centre Task and Finish Group was noted, with Members informed that the draft report was expected to be circulated within the coming week and would likely be scheduled for consideration at the Committee's March meeting.

Members discussed the importance of ongoing Member training, particularly in areas such as roles, responsibilities, governance and statutory duties. A request was made for refresher training to be added to the Work Programme, and officers undertook to arrange appropriate sessions.

Members acknowledged the recent change in the Lincolnshire County Council Highways Portfolio Holder, with officers confirming that work was underway to secure attendance from the new postholder at a future meeting.

In terms of longer-term planning, the Chairman proposed holding a scrutiny workshop at the start of the new Council year to help Members shape priorities, identify future review topics and ensure the Committee's forward planning remained effective.

Resolved:

That the content of the current Work Programme and Council's Forward Plan be noted.

[Councillor Anne Dorrian left the meeting at 8.22pm, during consideration of the above item.]

The Meeting ended at 8.23 pm.