

Present: Councillor Stephen Woodliffe (Chairman), Councillor George Cornah (Vice-Chairman), Councillors Tom Ashton, Alison Austin, Alan Bell, Anton Dani and Frank Pickett

In attendance: Councillor Nigel Welton, Deputy Leader & Portfolio Holder

Officers –

Assistant Director – Organisation and Corporate Services, Assistant Director - Assets and Democratic Services Officer

40 MINUTES

The Chairman requested a recorded vote on both sets of minutes to be agreed. The respective Members of the Committee, in attendance at the respective meetings, agreed accuracy of the Minutes as follows:

Councillors Ashton, Bell, Cornah, Dani, Pickett and Woodliffe agreed the accuracy of the Minutes for the meeting held on the 6 February 2020.

Councillors Cornah, Dani and Woodliffe agreed the accuracy of the Minutes for the meeting held on the 14 June 2020.

41 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were tabled for Councillor Anne Dorrian and Councillor Deborah Evans. Councillor Alison Austin in attendance as a substitute member for the vacant Independent seat.

42 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were tabled.

43 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions.

44 DRAFT CORPORATE STRATEGY/PRIORITIES FOR CONSULTATION

Councillor Nigel Welton Deputy Leader of the Council introduced the report and provided committee with a review of the process to date, confirming that Cabinet had originally tasked him to undertake the review in 2019.

The timeline at the onset of the review was to have included various rounds of Member Briefings ahead of the draft document, which once formulated, would have been taken through Scrutiny and on to Cabinet, prior to public consultation. The timeline however had stalled due to the pandemic.

Since resuming the task, various group consultation sessions had taken place. The current timeline now looked to seek Cabinet's agreement to consultation on the 9th

September 2020, with consultation beginning the following day on the 10th September 2020, should Cabinet agree. On completion of the consultation exercise, a further report tabling the outcomes to Cabinet, ahead of the final document being tabled for adoption though Full Council late in 2020

Referencing the process adopted for production of the draft document, Councillor Welton advised that he had initially researched a number of similar documents both locally and nationally and identified that the majority were weighty, wordy and in-depth. Further detailed consideration of the comparative documents clearly found that the bigger the document, the less relevance it had for local people. The draft document tabled for Members' initial consideration, was subject to ongoing change dependant on the outcomes of the various consultation streams. Final adoption of the document would be a matter for determination by all Members at Full Council.

With clear identification of the overarching priority as being what would be best for the residents who lived and worked within the Borough, four priorities were agreed. The document allowed ease of read for all members of the public: it was not about the past, but it did build on what had taken place historically to move the Borough forward. The document gave the Council a clear mandate moving forward and would evolve as required to accommodate changes in the future, allowing the Council to shape the document as necessary in light of potential changes arising from devolution of a move to a unitary authority.

The final document would provide a very clear statement of intention for the Council moving forward. Furthermore, to ensure full monitoring of the priorities, the final report to Full Council would seek agreement for annual scrutiny of the document by both Scrutiny committees.

Thanking Councillor Welton for introducing the report, the Assistant Director of Organisation and Corporate Priorities presented the report, confirming that the need for the review had arisen from a Peer Review carried out in 2019. The remit of the recommendation had been to provide a focus going forward recognising the Authority had limited resources.

Reiteration of the timeline confirmed that should Cabinet agree the consultation process, it would commence on September 10th 2020. The consultation streams would include employees of the Council, all residents, press (including local media), and the Boston Bulletin, business communities across the Borough, all Parish Councils' and community groups. Furthermore, should any member have any additional channels for consultation, their notification of such would be appreciated.

The Assistant Director of Organisation and Corporate Priorities reminded Committee Members of the key points for consideration. The primary point was the need to appreciate the uncertain future of local Government. The second point was the importance of the need for the Council to adapt and flex as the environment changed, and the third point was Members' awareness that whilst some actions were identified as long term, they would be activated within the timescale of the document. Committee Members were further advised of the importance of improved partnership working across all sectors, which would be fundamental to the success of the strategy. Addressing the format of the document in size, the Assistant Director of Organisation and Corporate Priorities stressed that whilst it could not be expected that all residents would read it, in the event that some did then hopefully they would find it easy to

understand in its simplicity. Ultimately, the document would guide the Council and the most important factor would be as to how the Council were able to articulate the vision to the residents.

Committee deliberation followed which included the following comments and suggestions, relevant to the document for consideration within the report, duly collated due to repetition of comment.

General comment:

Overall members agreed the size of the document and its ease of read although concern was noted that it should be presented as a serious document and a Member questioned the target readership. Members agreed that the document needed to be aspirational, relevant, and most importantly, that it relate to the whole of the Borough. Addressing the four priorities members noted that they were in line with those over previous years, in particular people and prosperity. Members did however welcome the introduction of environmental awareness with the carbon reduction plan secured in the document, along with the increased attention to technology. One key omission noted by a member, was the lack of any electronic connectivity that continued to be a serious problem in the local rural areas of the borough.

The majority of Members recognised the need for sustainable economic growth, agreeing that the Borough was not only a place to visit, but also a good place to live with its magnificent historic market place and grammar school education and that all improvements should be for both residents and visitors alike. However, concern was noted at the loss of many high street shops, thus diminishing the visitor-shopping offer, but most Members recognised it this was not a local issue, it being aligned with national changes in retail provision.

Agreeing that the depth of the consultation process would enable input by any person wishing to contribute, Members also stated they felt reassured at the measures being put in place to monitor the document by annual scrutiny. A member asked what the average percentage feedback of consultations was and officers advised that a written answer would be provided following the meeting.

Identifying key concerns in the draft document members agreed the following points of change.

Firstly, that the final draft document needed to be reviewed in respect of wording and punctuation, prior to going out to consultation. The word 'Google' should be replaced by a more generic label to compliment the seriousness of the document. An amendment to the fifth paragraph under Place to re-word the statement to read the wider borough has 18 parishes: not as stated, the broader borough geography. A further amendment to the sixth paragraph under the same heading to read "There is consistently low unemployment – not low employment, and the title of the Pilgrim General Hospital to be changed to its correct title of the Pilgrim Hospital.

Suggestions for additional reference in the document identified three areas: inclusion of electronic activity; emphasising Boston as being a sub-centre and mention of Boston's International Links.

One member addressed the meeting and stated he would be critical in respect of a lack of consultation in respect of tourism in the town. The member stated that he felt in his opinion, all the minority ethnic groups in the Town had been marginalised. He further stated that many Councillors had extensive personal experience of the industry. The

member said many ethnic minority groups and businesses in the Town, felt they were not listened to, with many having their own suggestions for taking the Town forward. Referencing recent funding streams made available, the Member stated that small projects were easy to implement in the town centre and as effective as large-scale projects. The Member noted ongoing issues within Boston town centre in respect of anti-social behaviour and traffic problems, and stated in his opinion that the residents in Boston had lost faith in the Council. Furthermore, the Member then questioned if Cabinet would take on board all the comments made when they determined the report.

At this point in the proceedings the Chairman intervened and referencing the item under discussion, stressed that the draft document covered all of the Borough of Boston and not just the town centre. He reminded the Member that there were 18 Parish Councils also included in the draft strategy, all of whom were entitled to the committee's full consideration.

In summary, Councillor Welton thanked the Committee Members for their input and confirmed that he would take on board all the suggestions and amendments identified, ahead of the draft document being taken to Cabinet. He confirmed that the document was in its initial stages and would be subject to further change as the consultation process evolved.

The consultation process would include coverage throughout not only the town but also within the 18 parishes, allowing input for all residents and businesses across the whole of the Borough.

To address the concerns raised by a member in respect of Cabinet considering the Committee's comments in respect of the document, Councillor Welton reminded Members that the document did not belong to Cabinet for final determination. The strategy was a Council document with Full Council making the final decision. Cabinet would only agree the consultation process in the first instance, and then when the final document was tabled post-consultation, Cabinet would recommend it to Council for final determination.

RESOLVED:

That the committee agree that the committee had provided comments to support the Strategy' development with notation of the following suggested amendments to the draft document:

- The document to be reviewed in respect of wording and punctuation.
- Change the reference to 'google' to something more generic as it needs to be a serious document.
- Wider Borough geography has 18 parishes – the 'geography' does not have 18 parishes.
- The hospital is called Pilgrim Hospital....not the Pilgrim General Hospital.
- Page 25. Third paragraph from the bottom: change low employment to low unemployment.
- Electronic connectivity is not within the document and is a key area needing address across the Borough.

- Boston is a regional sub-centre of the County – could that be emphasised within the document somewhere?
- There is no mention of Boston's International Links. Could they be incorporated within the document?
- The Council must consult widely, through various channels, exposing the agreed draft to staff, businesses and residents.

The Meeting Closed at 8.20 pm