

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber - The Guildhall on 18 November 2025 commencing at 6.30 pm.

Present:

Councillor Jeanette McGhee (Chairman)
Councillor Roger Patterson (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Stephen Bunney
Councillor David Dobbie
Councillor Peter Morris
Councillor Lynda Mullally
Councillor Maureen Palmer
Councillor Roger Pilgrim
Councillor Mrs Mandy Snee

In Attendance:

Nova Roberts	Director of Change Management, ICT & Regulatory Services
Sally Grindrod-Smith	Director Planning, Regeneration & Communities
Russell Clarkson	Development Management Team Manager
Grant White	Communities Manager
Darren Mellors	Performance & Programme Manager
Claire Bailey	Senior Change, Projects and Performance Officer
Katie Storr	Democratic Services & Elections Team Manager
Molly Spencer	Democratic & Civic Officer

Visiting Members: Councillor Trevor Bridgwood

22 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

On being put to the vote it was

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 14 October 2025 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

23 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

24 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE

The Democratic and Civic Officer confirmed that, in relation to emergency plans, information had been circulated on behalf of Grant White to the committee members on Tuesday, 11 November. The Enterprising Communities Manager had confirmed that he was happy to

attend the February meeting when the Local Resilience Forum would be presenting, in order to address any further questions. It was stated that this item would be reported as closed at the next committee meeting.

Regarding GP provision, the matter had been marked as completed as the Director for Planning, Regeneration and Communities was present at the meeting to provide an update following the health provision motion to full council.

Through the Chairman's Briefing for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Lead Members had enquired whether the Committee should review the Corporate Plan. At that time, the corporate plan had not been included on the forward plan but was now scheduled for Full Council in March 2026. This item would remain as "pending" on the work plan and marked as closed on the Matters Arising Schedule.

With no further comments or questions, the Matters Arising Schedule was **DULY NOTED**.

25 2026/27 PROGRESS & DELIVERY MEASURE SETTING APPROACH – MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

The Performance and Programme Manager provided an update regarding the 2026/27 Progress and Delivery Measure Setting Approach and Member Engagement. It was reported that the performance measures were currently being reviewed to create closer linkages to the corporate plan and to ensure that they remained meaningful. Member engagement was highlighted as vital to the success of both the performance framework and the review of measures, and the paper presented recommended member engagement in the process.

Four key engagement activities were proposed. The first was the circulation of draft measure sets to all members for comment. If approved at the meeting, these would be sent the following day, with feedback requested by 30 November 2025. The second activity was an all-members briefing during the week commencing 24 November 2025 to discuss performance management and the move to reporting by corporate plan theme. It was explained that the approach would differ from a traditional session to ensure a consistent message was delivered to all members.

The third activity proposed was the establishment of a Task and Finish Group to review the measure set, as had been done in previous years. Overview and Scrutiny members would be invited to volunteer to sit on this group, and the invitation would also be extended to other members. The fourth activity was the final approval of the measure set by the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee in February. Oversight of the strategic line measures would also be provided as part of the corporate plan sign-off process.

The Performance and Programme Manager concluded the report and confirmed that questions on the paper would be welcomed, along with any volunteers to join the Task and Finish Group.

Members discussed the proposed approach to member engagement in the review of

performance measures. A Member expressed support for the approach and asked whether, when circulating the measures to Members, a feedback form would also be provided. It was noted that when measures were sent without a form, Members often read them but did not respond, even if they had comments. The Member suggested that a simple form could be included to allow Members to indicate which measures they wished to review, without requiring detailed responses.

A Member raised concerns about the timing of the proposed briefing during the week commencing 24 November, suggesting multiple sessions or a recorded option might be necessary.

The Performance and Programme Manager confirmed that a feedback mechanism would be included and that a short, recorded video was being considered to explain performance management and the move to strategic reporting. Councillor Stephen Bunney volunteered to join the Task and Finish Group.

The Chairman confirmed her own willingness to join the group, emphasising the importance of Member involvement.

With no further questions or comments and having been proposed, seconded and voted upon, it was

RESOLVED that

- a) member engagement be undertaken through the following forums as detailed within the supporting report.
 - a cross-party member Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group be established comprising of Councillor Stephen Bunney, Councillor Jeanette McGhee and any additional volunteers
 - the KPI review proposal be circulated to all members for comment, introducing Strategic and Operational measures aligned to Corporate Plan themes.
 - an all-member briefing be provided (week of 24th Nov) or an alternative format, as detailed during the debate, in order to present review outcomes and the shift to strategic theme-based reporting
 - Corporate Policy and Resources Committee approval of the 2026/27 measure set be secured

26 MANAGING BATTERY ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEMS - PLANNING MATTERS

The Development Management Team Manager presented an update on battery energy storage systems (BESS), particularly in relation to the planning system. It was reported that, in November 2024, Full Council had considered a motion to lobby the government to make local fire and rescue services statutory consultees on planning applications. This was recommended but not mandatory. Since that time, letters had been issued to the then Secretary of State, the Chair of the Local Government Association, and all nine Greater

Lincolnshire local planning authorities. A private Member's Bill proposing such a measure was now before Parliament and was expected to have its next reading in spring.

Planning policy at both national and local level supported BESS developments in principle, as they were reported as seen as a way of balancing the energy network and contributing towards net zero targets for 2050. The government's Clean Power Action Plan stated that 23 to 27 gigawatts of battery storage would be needed by 2030, compared to 4.5 gigawatts at the end of the previous year, representing a five-fold increase.

A significant rise in BESS applications had been reported nationally, including within West Lindsey, where two applications had been received. Both applications had been refused planning permission by the Planning Committee due to concerns about location, battery safety, fire risk, and potential water contamination when extinguishing fires. One refusal had been overturned on appeal in August 2025, with the Planning Inspector finding that the proposal met national and local policy. The Inspector had also concluded that the Council had acted unreasonably in refusing permission and awarded full costs to the appellant, which were expected to be a five-figure sum.

The Development Management Team Manager explained that the Council's local validation list, which set out requirements for planning applications, was due for review by May next year. It was being proposed that the list include a requirement for a battery safety management plan addressing fire risk and water contamination concerns. National Fire Chiefs' guidance recommended that sites hold two hours' worth of water on site, and the Planning Committee's concerns had related to how this water would be managed to prevent contamination. The paper proposed that future requirements aligned with the National Fire Chiefs Council's guidance and any future updates. Additionally, it was being proposed that an online renewable energy search facility be developed to allow the public easier access to information on proposed developments.

The Chairman thanked the Development Management Team Manager for his presentation and invited Members to comment.

Members discussed the update on battery energy storage systems. A Member expressed appreciation for the report and noted that, while contact had been made with national Government and a private Member's Bill was progressing, it would be worthwhile to continue lobbying to ensure the Bill was supported. The Member also highlighted the importance of raising the matter at relevant meetings of the Central Lincolnshire Plan Committee, given that the plan was now under review and the process could take two to three years. It was stressed that the Council should keep the issue at the forefront of debate, focusing on safety concerns rather than opposing BESS developments in principle. Further concerns about schemes being used for commercial purposes, such as storing electricity for resale, which was not in the spirit of renewable energy storage were raised.

The Development Management Team Manager confirmed that support for the private Member's Bill would be noted and that the Council could continue to promote this position. He explained that the local validation list, which set out requirements for planning

applications, was due for review and would include measures such as battery safety management plans to avoid delays. It was also confirmed that the local plan review had commenced and that policy updates would be considered as part of that process, subject to public consultation.

The Member reiterated the need for clarity between the Council's political ambitions and the regulatory framework and asked for confirmation that the Council's position was understood. The Chairman confirmed that the comments had been noted. The Development Management Team Manager acknowledged the committee's concerns and confirmed that efforts would be made to address them within the legislative framework.

Another Member raised concerns about the costs awarded against the Council following a recent appeal, noting that this could intimidate the Planning Committee in future. The Member also asked whether the appeal process operated under the same terms of reference as standard planning applications. The Development Management Team Manager confirmed that the appeal process followed the same policies and procedures as local determinations. Costs were only awarded where unreasonable behaviour was found, and the Inspector's report provided useful guidance for future decision-making. He emphasised that the outcome should not intimidate the committee but should serve as a learning point.

The Chairman welcomed a visiting Member and expressed thanks for his involvement in initiating the discussion on battery energy storage systems, noting the importance of safety in West Lindsey. The visiting Member raised concerns about the use of lithium-ion technology in battery storage systems, explaining that such batteries generate their own oxygen during thermal runaway, making fires extremely difficult to extinguish. It was noted that suppression systems claimed by applicants were unlikely to be effective, as none had been tested on grid-scale units. The visiting Member highlighted that current fire service guidance was to fight defensively by cooling surrounding areas rather than attempting to extinguish the fire. He stressed that, although incidents were rare, the risks were significant and cited historical disasters as examples of rare but catastrophic events. The Member expressed concern about introducing technology with limited regulation and suggested incorporating the draft National Fire Chiefs' guidance into local documents.

The Development Management Team Manager acknowledged these concerns and confirmed that, in the event of a fire, the accepted approach was to allow the batteries to burn, which could take over 24 hours. He explained that planning guidance required applicants to consult local fire and rescue services. The Development Management Team Manager confirmed that Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue provided valuable input and that the Council maintained a strong working relationship with them. He noted the recommendation to align local requirements with the National Fire Chiefs' guidance and suggested writing to seek clarity on the delay in adopting the guidance. The Development Management Team Manager proposed drafting local documents to ensure compliance with the most up-to-date guidance.

With no further comments and having been proposed, seconded and voted upon, it was

RESOLVED that: -

- a) the update and work to date be noted;
- b) WLDC work with the Central Lincolnshire Local Plans team to review and update the Local Validation List to include specific documents required for planning applications for Battery Energy Storage development;
- c) a 'renewables register' be published to provide easier access to information regarding applications for the development of renewable energy in the district.

27 PRIDE IN PLACE

The Chairman introduced the next agenda item, Pride in Place, and advised that the report was presented for noting only, as it had previously been considered and approved by the Prosperous Communities Committee on Tuesday, 4 November 2025. The Director of Planning, Regeneration and Communities was invited to present the update.

An overview of the Pride in Place programme was provided. Gainsborough West had been selected to receive £20 million of funding over the next decade through the government's initiative. The allocation had been based on deprivation and community needs data and was not subject to a bidding process. Approximately £2 million per year would be provided, with around 37% allocated to programme management and delivery.

The Government had published a list of pre-approved interventions, enabling delivery without a full business case. A neighbourhood board would be established to develop a regeneration plan, including a 10-year vision for the area. The board was to include residents, businesses, community representatives, faith leaders, workplace representatives, the local MP, and other stakeholders, and would be chaired by an independent person appointed by the local authority in consultation with the MP. Support would be provided by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and the first meeting with the community delivery unit was scheduled for Thursday, 22 November 2025. Further documentation and details of the interventions would be circulated to Members following the meeting.

Funding priorities would be determined through community engagement across three objectives: building stronger communities, creating thriving places, and empowering people to take back control. West Lindsey was considered to have a strong baseline due to previous regeneration work. The pre-approved interventions covered themes such as regeneration, high street and heritage investment, housing quality and provision, work and skills, community cohesion, health and wellbeing, transport, safety and security, and education and opportunity. Gainsborough West was confirmed as an area comprising several middle-layer super output areas with a population of approximately 10,500.

The Government was expected to provide a data pack to identify local challenges, and full guidance on governance was anticipated before Christmas 2025. By July 2026, the Council were to confirm the neighbourhood board membership, chair, and any boundary proposals.

The regeneration plan was to be submitted by winter 2026–27 for approval, covering a 10-year vision and an initial four-year investment plan.

The Council would act as the accountable body for the funding, ensuring compliance with government requirements. The neighbourhood board would co-produce the plan, with the local community playing a central role. The board would have an independent chair and include the MP, a Councillor from each tier of local government, a senior police representative, and other stakeholders such as businesses and community organisations.

An initial communications plan was being developed to begin engagement, with early steps including forward-looking questions in surveys and discussions at recent business events.

In terms of next steps, a meeting with the MHCLG advisor was scheduled, and guidance was expected by Christmas 2025. Key actions from the communications plan had commenced, and Officers were learning from early adopters, with support from colleagues in Gedling, Bassetlaw, and East Lindsey. Consideration of the neighbourhood board and its membership was identified as a priority, and Members were encouraged to share ideas on its operation and potential candidates for chair.

The Chairman thanked the Director of Planning, Regeneration and Communities for the update and invited questions.

A Member raised two points. Firstly, it was asked whether Gainsborough Town Council had been approached to provide a representative, as their engagement was considered vital given their close involvement with the local community. Secondly, the Member expressed concern that central Gainsborough had already benefited from the Levelling Up Fund and would now receive further investment, while the Uphill area appeared to have been overlooked. It was suggested that improvements in transport and health provision would help ensure benefits were spread more widely across the town and district.

The Director confirmed that Gainsborough Town Council would be expected to play a role in the programme, although no approaches had yet been made pending publication of the guidance. It was emphasised that inclusivity would be a priority. Regarding the boundary and the Uphill area, the Director acknowledged the concern and explained that the guidance required a tight boundary. However, it was noted that interventions could be designed to support the wider town and district, with Gainsborough acting as the primary district centre. The Director stated that the forthcoming data pack would clarify the targeting required and that the programme would aim to deliver multi-layered interventions to spread benefits more broadly.

A Member expressed support for earlier comments and raised concerns regarding the likely introduction of a unitary authority and the potential for delays during the shadow year. It was suggested that any arrangements should ensure continuity and avoid disruption caused by changes in governance. The Member also noted that the Council would appoint the chair of the neighbourhood board and requested clarity on the process for selecting board members, including whether they should be drawn from within or outside the area. It was emphasised

that representation should reflect both the designated area and the wider community, and that criteria for selection should be brought back to Committee for consideration. The Member stressed the importance of appointing individuals who could take a balanced view rather than those who were simply the most vocal.

The Officer confirmed that further guidance was expected to include criteria for selecting representatives and that there was an expectation for a clear and transparent process. It was anticipated that this would be presented to Members in an early paper for input.

Another Member welcomed the programme and acknowledged concerns about the focus on Gainsborough, noting that the Government's criteria had determined the allocation. It was emphasised that benefits could extend beyond the immediate area, for example through improved transport links. The Member stressed the importance of engaging young people, as they would be the future beneficiaries of the programme, and suggested working with schools both within and outside Gainsborough.

The Member expressed hope that the programme would foster pride in the town and encourage positive engagement, despite some negative perceptions. It was noted that the programme should be robust enough to withstand future changes in local government and continue regardless of political priorities. The importance of appointing an inspiring chairperson to lead the neighbourhood board was also highlighted. The Member concluded by stating that the programme represented a significant opportunity for Gainsborough and the wider district.

The Officer thanked Members for their comments and confirmed that key points had been noted. It was highlighted that the fund provided an opportunity to bring partners to the table and leverage additional influence and funding, particularly in areas such as transport. Engagement with children and young people had been discussed, including those educated outside Gainsborough, and the importance of appointing a chairperson with strong leadership qualities was acknowledged.

The Chairman echoed earlier concerns regarding the boundary and expressed a desire to explore ways to extend benefits beyond the designated area. The importance of involving Town Councillors was emphasised. The Chairman raised concerns that funding might become concentrated in the town centre and stressed the need to address community priorities, such as play areas and green spaces, particularly in Southwest Ward. It was noted that the area included locations identified by the police as hotspots for crime and antisocial behaviour, and improvements in safety would be welcomed. The Chairman reiterated the need for an inspiring chairperson and suggested that candidates from education or health backgrounds could bring valuable strategic insight.

A Member asked for clarification on the funding profile, querying whether the £20 million allocation would be paid as four instalments of £5 million or £2 million annually over ten years. The Director advised that the profile had not yet been confirmed but was likely to be tapered, with a smaller initial payment to support programme setup. It was noted that the endowment-style approach would allow flexibility for borrowing or forward funding, and that

37% of the allocation was earmarked for revenue, directing most expenditure towards capital projects. Further details were awaited.

Another Member raised concerns about the certainty of the full £20 million allocation and the potential for political influence. The Director acknowledged the uncertainty and confirmed that clarity would be provided once contracting arrangements and the four-year investment plan were agreed.

Another Member raised two points. Firstly, it was suggested that the Council should use this opportunity to promote the positive impact of previous regeneration schemes across the district, not only in Gainsborough, and to celebrate achievements such as the banking hub and high street improvements in Market Rasen. Secondly, the Member emphasised the need for a long-term investment strategy to ensure continuity beyond the initial funding period. It was noted that £2 million per year was not a large sum when inflation was considered, and the Council should prepare projects and explore additional funding sources to build on the programme and avoid reliance on uncertain promises.

The Enterprising Communities Manager responded that the endowment-style funding approach was increasingly common and confirmed that the Council had experience with similar models, such as the Local Access programme in Gainsborough, which supported social enterprise investment over a ten-year period. This experience would be used to inform the delivery of the Pride in Place programme.

With no further comments or questions, the Pride in Place report was **DULY NOTED**.

28 FORWARD PLAN

A Member expressed concern that local government reorganisation was not sufficiently reflected in the forward plan, noting that it was likely to have a significant impact. It was suggested that the matter should appear on every agenda to ensure regular updates and proactive consideration. The Member highlighted the importance of planning for the standardisation of responsibilities across parishes and towns following reorganisation and urged that this be included in the work plan.

The Democratic Services and Elections Team Manager explained that the next major milestone would be the statutory consultation and confirmed that committee work plans were living documents. It was noted that no changes were expected before the consultation was published, but scrutiny would have an important role in informing policy committees and shaping the Council's response. Assurance was given that reports would be scheduled ahead of the consultation and that the matter would come before the committee and full council.

Another Member suggested that, given the scale of the work, a joint session of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Governance and Audit Committee could be arranged to consider the implications before submission to full council. The Chairman agreed that this would be a constructive approach and would be given further consideration, thanking Members for their contributions.

With no further comments the Forward Plan was **DULY NOTED**.

29 COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

The Democratic and Civic Officer confirmed that Everyone Active were scheduled for the meeting on 14 April 2026 and noted that the corporate plan remained a pending item on the work plan.

The Chairman highlighted that the Markets Member Working Group was still listed as pending and asked whether this should be removed, as the group was no longer meeting. The Democratic and Civic Officer confirmed that this was correct and as such the item would be removed from the work plan.

A Member raised concerns regarding local government reorganisation and asked whether the matter could be included regularly on the committee's agenda. It was suggested that a timetable or target dates would assist in ensuring structured discussion. Another Member noted that all councils would have an opportunity to contribute during the statutory consultation process and emphasised the importance of feeding parish and town council views into the debate.

The Chairman acknowledged that Gainsborough Town Council had expressed a desire for greater involvement and suggested that a briefing could be arranged following the next milestone. It was agreed that engagement should be inclusive and that technology could be used to facilitate communication with all parishes and towns. Members discussed the need to ensure that all councils were aware of how to participate in the process.

The Director of Planning, Regeneration and Communities confirmed that the next deadline in the reorganisation process was 28 November 2025, when the Council would submit its position statement to government. A draft letter outlining West Lindsey's position would be shared with Members and circulated to parish and town councils to assist them in preparing their own responses. It was explained that the statutory consultation process would follow, although the timeframe was not yet known. The Officer noted that communications would form a key workstream within the transition programme and that stakeholder mapping would be undertaken to ensure structured engagement. Assurance was given that officers and leadership were committed to making the process as inclusive as possible.

With no further comments or questions the Committee Workplan was **DULY NOTED**.

30 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED that under Section 100 (A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

Note: The meeting entered closed session at 7.44pm

31 UPDATE FOLLOWING HEALTH PROVISION MOTION

The Committee considered matters relating to healthcare provision within the district. An update was received outlining ongoing work to improve access to services and the progress made on feasibility studies and stakeholder engagement. Members acknowledged the complexity of the issues and the need for continued collaboration with external bodies.

It was suggested by the Officer that the presentation be circulated, and this was agreed by the Committee.

It was confirmed that further reports would be presented following the completion of the initial feasibility study and receipt of external assessments. Members emphasised the importance of maintaining dialogue with health authorities to ensure local needs were addressed. It was agreed that close liaison would continue with the Integrated Care Board and that the matter would be revisited at a future meeting once preparatory work had concluded.

The update was **DULY NOTED**.

The meeting concluded at 8.22 pm.

Chairman