

BOSTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

At the meeting of Boston Borough Council held in the Council Chamber, Municipal Buildings, West Street, Boston, PE21 8QR, on Monday, 2nd March, 2020 at 6.30 pm

Present:

The Mayor (Councillor Anton Dani), in the Chair

Councillors Deborah Evans, Tracey Abbott, Tom Ashton, Alison Austin, Alan Bell, Peter Bedford, David Brown, Michael Cooper, George Cornah, Anne Dorrian, Viven Edge, Paul Goodale, Martin Griggs, Neill Hastie, Martin Howard MSc. PCGM, Cert Ed, Jonathan Noble, Frank Pickett, Brian Rush, Judith Skinner, Paul Skinner, Peter Watson, Judith Welbourn, Nigel Welton, Colin Woodcock and Stephen Woodliffe

Officers –

Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive (Monitoring Officer), Credit Control Manager, Council Tax and Benefits Manager, Chief Finance Officer and S151 Officer, Accountancy Manager (Revenues and Systems) and Democratic Services Manager

1 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 20 January 2020 were taken as read and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

2 MINUTES OF EXTRAORDINARY MEETING

The minutes of the Extraordinary meeting of the Council held on 3 February 2020, were taken as read and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

3 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Richard Austin BEM, Chelcei Sharman, Aaron Spencer and Yvonne Stevens.

4 COMMUNICATIONS

The Deputy Chief Executive reminded Members that, in accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, all votes on the council tax and budget setting report would be taken as recorded votes.

It was announced that in accordance with the present arrangements for the selection of Mayor, Councillor Frank Pickett had agreed to serve as Mayor for the municipal year 2020/21.

It was reported that a request for an Extraordinary Meeting of the Council had been received, signed by the Leaders of the four political Groups of the Council, to debate the recently published report on the Emergency Department at Boston's Pilgrim Hospital highlighting the inadequate standard in all aspects considered.

5 DEPUTATIONS AND PETITIONS

The Chief Executive reported there were no deputations or petitions.

6 QUESTIONS FROM ELECTED MEMBERS

The Chief Executive reported there were two questions from Councillor Brian Rush and two questions from Councillor Anne Dorrian.

Question asked by Councillor Brian Rush pursuant to paragraph 11 of the Rules of Procedure as set out in the Constitution.

“Councillor Skinner, I wonder if you are as frustrated as I have been, regarding the ongoing denigration of this Borough, over past recent years.

Are you able to tell me, but more importantly those people we were ALL elected to represent, what you, your Deputy Leader, and your Cabinet Members, plan to do, to demand a greater share of the Counties spoils, for the benefit of our people, our town, and our Borough?”

Response by Councillor Paul Skinner

“Thank you for question Councillor Rush, as previously carefully explained to you on several occasions the Council taxes raised all have a designation and all authorities are required to produce a balanced budget.

In addition to the County investing extra resources in Social Services, Flooding and Roads recently. The town has also been in receipt of the opportunity to bid for £25 Million and the Government have also through the EA invested in excess of £125 Million in the Barrier and Bank projects.”

Supplemental question asked by Councillor Rush pursuant to paragraph 11.6 of the Rules of Procedure as set out in the Constitution:-

“As a dual hatter, when will Boston get a fair crack and a real share of funding from Lincolnshire County Council?”

Response by Councillor Paul Skinner

“You should understand your question, and don't bring problems without viable solutions.”

Question asked by Councillor Anne Dorrian pursuant to paragraph 11 of the Rules of Procedure as set out in the Constitution.

“At the meeting of Council on 15th July 2019, it was brought to your attention that children in the town of Boston have the worst teeth in the Country. What specific actions did you take as a result of receiving that information?”

Response by Councillor Paul Skinner

“I thank Councillor Dorrian for notice of her question.

As I mentioned in my response to Councillor Dorrian on 15 July, public health falls under the responsibility of Lincolnshire County Council, the Borough Council has no direct powers in this respect.

However, I can report that at a meeting of the Boston Strategic Health Group held on 6th February, of which the Borough is a partner organisation, the issue of oral health was discussed. It was recognised that there are significant inequalities in Lincolnshire with 41% of children in Boston having experience of dental decay. There is evidence that socio-economic deprivation is a clear determinant of such inequalities and one of the main attributing factors is the water not being fluoridated in our area.

As a result of these issues being highlighted, Health Visitors have been universally distributing tooth brushing packs containing a toothbrush, high fluoride toothpaste and free flow cup. Work is on-going with primary schools in relation to the Lincolnshire Smiles initiative, a county wide supervised tooth brushing initiative for Early Years Settings and Schools designed to reduce dental decay in children. The EMTET Team (Ethnic Minority and Traveller Education Team) are also looking at appropriate educational tools to help alleviate the problems. The matter is due for further consideration at the next meeting of the Strategic Health Group on 21 May 2020.”

Supplemental question asked by Councillor Dorrian pursuant to paragraph 11.6 of the Rules of Procedure as set out in the Constitution:-

“I allowed you to sit on this for six months before discussing again. You are the Council’s representative on the Group and a dual hatter, as such have a duty to provide leadership and should have replicated action taken by other councils in tackling the problems. Cabinet members and Leader should be taking action not just saying words, I am more interested in action.”

Response by Councillor Paul Skinner

“I am no longer hold the health portfolio, which is now health and wellbeing. As described, successful action has been taken across the districts to tackle the problem, but I do not run the NHS, I will stick with Cabinet.”

Question asked by Councillor Anne Dorrian pursuant to paragraph 11 of the Rules of Procedure as set out in the Constitution.

“Please outline how you intend to lead the whole Council rather than just the Conservative Group.”

Response by Councillor Paul Skinner

“I have already stated that I would work with anyone for the mutual benefit of the Town of Boston.”

Supplemental question asked by Councillor Dorrian pursuant to paragraph 11.6 of the Rules of Procedure as set out in the Constitution:-

“How are you going to lead the Borough out of this mess and move forward? It’s bad enough that your wife is chairman of a committee scrutinising your decisions which goes against the recently adopted scrutiny guidelines.”

Point of personal explanation from Councillor Judith Skinner –

“I take exception to those comments. I do the best I can in a fair and transparent way. This is a personal attack.”

Response by Councillor Paul Skinner

“I have recently held a meeting of Group Leaders and emphasized the importance of working together and individual member development. I will endeavor to make the Council the best it can be. Tony Robbins, an inspirational speaker, asks why do we do what we do, what motivates us to deliver tasks. We create our own path to success and our own path to failure.”

Question asked by Councillor Brian Rush pursuant to paragraph 11 of the Rules of Procedure as set out in the Constitution.

“Councillor Skinner, I have known you for a good number of years, and despite your obvious loyalty to the Conservative cause, Elected Members of all persuasions are bound together by this authorities support, for the Principles of Nolan.

For those of you here, that do not know what the Principles of Nolan are, let me please enlighten you:

Selflessness, Act solely in terms of the Public Interest!

Integrity, Holders of public office must not place themselves under any obligation to anyone that might try to influence them in their work. Nor take decisions to secure benefits for themselves, their family or friends.

Objectivity, They must act and take impartial decisions, fairly, using the best evidence, and without discrimination.

Accountability, Holders must be accountable for their decisions, and remain ready to submit themselves to scrutiny to support this.

Openness, Information should never be withheld from the Public, without clear and lawful reasons for doing so.

Honesty Holders must be truthful.

Leadership Holders must be seen to support these principles in their own lives, and be always willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever and whenever, it occurs.

These SEVEN principles of Councillorship, are our promises to you, the Electorate!

Councillor Skinner in this the first few weeks of your Leadership, will you promise the good people of Boston Borough, that you will be upholding these principles, throughout your term, and without fear or favour?

Response by Councillor Paul Skinner

“I am pleased you took notice of Councillor Alison Austin’s comments at the last Council meeting.

Yes I do intend to abide within my party’s rules.”

Supplemental question asked by Councillor Rush pursuant to paragraph 11.6 of the Rules of Procedure as set out in the Constitution:-

“Do you agree the most important of the Nolan Principles is to act selflessly in the public interest, would you like to make an apology?”

Response by Councillor Paul Skinner

“It is not just the seven principles, I would like to see respect and courtesy included. Members should treat others as they would want to be treated themselves. To quote from Rocky VI, the value of hard work and commitment is not how hard you hit, but how hard you hit and keep moving forward, never give up.”

7 MOTION ON NOTICE

A Motion without Notice was moved by Councillor Anne Dorrian to suspend Procedure Rule 24.2 which allowed members of the public to film the meeting as she was being subjected to intimidation and harassment by an individual in the public gallery who constantly recorded her during meetings.

Councillor Brian Rush seconded the Motion.

The Monitoring Officer advised that, under the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014, the Council did not have the powers to prevent the recording and filming of meetings unless guidance had been issued in circumstances where it may be permissible to do so, as such members of the public had the absolute right to film whilst Council was in open session.

On being put to the vote the Motion was lost.

8 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The Deputy Chief Executive reported there were no questions from the public.

9 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

10 AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Councillor Jonathan Noble introduced the confirmed minutes of the Audit and Governance Committee held on 11 November 2019 highlighting the key matters considered by the Committee.

It was moved by Councillor Jonathan Noble, seconded by Councillor Tom Ashton and

RESOLVED that the confirmed minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee held on 11 November 2019 be received.

11 COUNCIL TAX AND BUDGET SETTING, MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Councillor Martin Howard introduced a report by the Chief Finance Officer which outlined the 2020/2021 revenue and capital position for the General Fund and proposals for the setting of discretionary fees and charges.

The Local Government Act 2003 introduced a requirement for the Chief Financial Officer to report on the robustness of the budget. The estimates had been prepared in a prudent manner, although it was highlighted that there were a number of elements outside of the Council's control. These had been identified within the report and would be mitigated through the budget monitoring and risk management processes of the Council.

The financial regime from 2021/22, following the election of a new Government, the conclusion of the 2020 Spending Review, the proposed Fairer Funding review and introduction of further localisation of business rates, would determine the Council's future financial landscape and constraints/opportunities in future years.

Difficulties facing the economy and the impact on the viability of town centres nationally presented potentially significant risks to future funding levels, which would require careful management and planning. The challenge of delivering balanced budgets remained a key issue and the recent refresh of the Transformation Programme provided a clear framework within which resources would be aligned to continue to deliver valued services to the community. The Council's risk management processes were robust and alongside the annual budget the quarterly performance monitoring processes provided updates in the impacts being experienced as the situation became clearer.

In developing the Council's budget proposals for 2020/21, it had managed inflationary pressures on operational costs and pressures on some areas of income collection. Areas where net budget reductions had been delivered to produce a balanced budget included service modernisation initiatives in street cleansing, community safety and finance; increasing garden waste fees; amending council tax levels for long-term empty properties and a review of bad debt provisions.

The Council continued to develop its response to the 'commercial agenda' and the role of innovation and development of services to deliver new/increased income an example

being the Commercial Waste Service which had delivered income growth and provided learning across all service areas to drive further commercialisation opportunities.

In order to deliver its statutory budgetary duty from 2020/21 and develop proposals for a financially secure medium term, the Council would update its Corporate Plan during 2020/21 and continue to seek innovative opportunities to achieve the anticipated budget reductions necessary to deliver balanced budgets each year without adversely affecting service delivery and compromising its priorities. Reports would be presented for deliberation and approval as projects were developed, using the Transformation Programme as the basis to progress from.

The following key proposals contained within the budget report were noted by Council as part of the introduction: -

- A rise in Council Tax of 2.05% with Band D council tax being £192.96;
- A balanced budget for 2020/21 after the one year settlement from Government, incorporating on-going savings from the Transformation Programme of £466,000 and increased fees received from planning applications which was being reinvested in the planning service;
- Projected budget gap of £1.4m by 2024/25 representing a significant challenge for the Council in maintaining service provision to the most vulnerable;
- Government's plan to further localise business rates from 2021 would mean the Council's resources being likely to come solely from council tax, business rates and fees and charges. Whilst this may appear a positive step to self-determinism it also had significant risks and numerous uncertainties remained within the detail of the proposals;
- In 2020/21 the Council would continue to be part of a business rates pool across Lincolnshire;
- Savings target of over £925,000 for 2021/22, an increase from the figure published in the draft budget papers following receipt of new information, including a reduction in replacement bin income and actual Internal Drainage Board levies being formally confirmed. The target would require considerable focus during the year in terms of bringing forward projects in the Transformation Programme and assessing the impact of future funding proposals as they became available;
- Rural Services Delivery Grant had been extended for one year so for 2020/21 the Council would continue to receive support;
- New Homes Bonus tapering down from 2020 to nil in 2023/24;
- 1.94% increase in the Boston Town Area Committee Special Expense Account for 2020/21;
- A sustainable and affordable capital programme had been formulated and the revenue consequences built into the revenue budget;
- The capital programme showed a diminishing programme in future years as resources became scarcer. The programme included spending to renew the refuse fleet in 202/21.

The draft budget had been published on the Council's website for consultation with all stakeholders, including the local business community and responses were set out in Appendix D of the report. In addition Members had been consulted through various

forums including the Corporate and Community Committee, and Audit and Governance Committee on the governance aspects of the budget preparation.

During debate at the Corporate and Community Committee two main views were put forward; that the Council should consider increasing council tax as much as possible to safeguard council services and reassure members that the challenge of future savings targets could be met; and that the increase should be as low as possible due to the impact on low income families who were already struggling to pay increasing bills. The final recommendation from the Committee was that the council tax level should be increased as much as possible.

Cabinet had considered the report at its meeting on 19 February and thanked the scrutiny committee for its detailed consideration of the issues. However it was felt that as the County Council and Police were proposing to increase their council tax levels to the maximum permitted by Government, it was appropriate to temper the Borough Council's increase for the coming year. The budget as proposed presented a balanced position for 2020/2021. Cabinet had recommended the budget and medium term financial strategy 2020/21 to 2024/25 to Council for approval.

Comments received through the Member forums included the need to ensure that Internal Drainage Boards funding and its impact on district council budgets was included in representation regarding the future funding regime.

Council supported the view in respect of the current drainage board funding regimes commenting that having the levies incorporated into the Council's budget requirement impacted on the Council's spending ability and was not a transparent process in terms of the public understanding as the Council's role was purely as a collection agency. It was suggested that the Council should continue to lobby Government and the MP for change under the fairer funding proposals.

The recommendations in respect of increased council tax premiums for empty properties were welcomed as they would act as a driver to encourage property owners to put their properties back into use.

Concern was expressed regarding the impact of the increased garden waste charges on projected income levels as a Member had been advised that direct debits totalling £17,300 had been cancelled to date. Austerity measures were affecting mortality rates amongst the most deprived in society and the design of the council tax system resulted in the lowest paid being charged a higher percentage of their income for council tax and those with significantly higher salaries, as it was based on 1991 property valuations. Government should be lobbied to overhaul the system to make it fairer for all.

Council was generally supportive of the proposed budget which was balanced and recognised the challenges to be faced in future years. Thanks were expressed to the Finance team for their efforts in the budget preparation process.

It was moved by Councillor Martin Howard, seconded by Councillor Paul Skinner and

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RESOLVED

1. That the Boston Borough Council Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2020/21 to 2024/25, and associated financial strategies which are appended at Appendix C be approved.
2. That the formal 2020/21 Council Tax resolutions at Appendix A (Parishes, BTAC special expense, the County Council and Lincolnshire Police and Crime Commissioner are also dealt with as part of this resolution), that there is a 2.05% increase in the Borough element of Council Tax, its Band D Council Tax increasing to £192.96, be agreed.
3. That an increase in Council Tax premium on Long Term Empty Properties to apply the full extent of the provisions of the Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018 be approved:
 - An additional 50% Council Tax premium on Long Term Empty properties from 1 April 2020;
 - An additional 100% Council Tax premium on Long Term empty properties longer than 5 years, from 1 April 2020;
 - An additional 100% Council Tax premium on Long Term Empty properties longer than 10 years, from 1 April 2021.

The only exceptions to apply to the premium will be in respect of those empty properties that are already exempt under Council Tax legislation.

4. That the current 10% second home discount be removed from April 2020, increasing the Council Tax to 100% charge on furnished, unoccupied dwellings.

For

Against

Abstain

Abbott
Ashton
A. Austin
Bedford
Brown
Cooper
Cornah
Dani
Edge
Evans
Griggs
Hastie
Howard
Noble
Pickett
J. Skinner
P. Skinner
Welbourn

Bell
Dorrian
Goodale
Rush
Watson

**Welton
Woodcock
Woodliffe**

(The meeting ended at 7.50 p.m.)

(The meeting ended at 7.50 pm)