

Present: Councillor Paul Goodale (Chairman), Councillor Stephen Woodliffe (Vice-Chairman), Councillors Alison Austin, Alan Bell, Katie Chalmers, Anton Dani, Anne Dorrian and Martin Griggs

Officers –

Assistant Director - Culture and Leisure, Assistant Director - Finance (Deputy S151 Officer), Strategic Finance Manager and Democratic Services Officer

105 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were tabled by Councillors Neill Hastie, Brian Rush and Yvonne Stevens.

106 MINUTES

With the agreement of the committee the Chairman signed the minutes of the previous meeting held on 15 December 2022.

107 UPDATE ON ACTIONS FROM THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

None tabled.

108 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None tabled.

109 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

None tabled.

110 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME

No representation received.

Prior to moving into part 2 of the agenda the Chairman welcomed Councillor Bell back to the committee

111 BTAC ANALYSIS

The Assistant Director – Leisure and Culture, and Lead Officer for the committee advised members that the report had been requested to provide a more in-depth analysis of the component parts of BTAC enabling members to see a clear account of the financial responsibilities of BTAC.

Member deliberation followed which included:

Addressing the costs identified for the former public toilets on London Road, latterly known as the Community Shed, a member asked if the facility was still used, and if so, who by.

The Chairman confirmed that the facility was used and did receive an income from the Boston Central Neighbourhood Action Group (BCNAG) and the Witham East Neighbourhood Action Group (WENAG) who primarily used it for storage of their equipment used for maintenance.

On questioning the event budget a member asked what part of the budget was spent on the performing rights licence. The strategic finance Manager advised that *the cost for the licence would be forwarded following the meeting.*

Referencing the grounds contract a member questioned the high cost asking if it was an internal or external contractor, stating they felt the charges to be very high solely for cutting grass. The member asked if there would be an opportunity to reduce the costs once the existing contract expired. In response, the member was advised that BTAC had no control over the charges nor any negotiation of the contract which was in-house and charged by the Borough Council.

Reference was also made at the contract costs for the public conveniences which also questioned the re charge for St. Johns Depot and also the cost which appeared to be high indicating that all the operatives did was to clean the toilets. In response, members were advised that the St. Johns re charge was due to the facilities on the site for the drivers and also the staff on the site. The charges were solely for toilet cleaning which also included the toilets within the Stump.

RESOLVED:

That the report be included onto the annual work programme to be tabled

112 PROPOSED BTAC BUDGET 2023 - 24 AND FORECAST TO 2027 - 28

The Assistant-Director Finance presented the report as part of the Council's budget setting.

Committee were advised that the proposed budget for 2023/24 identified within appendix 1 provided the detailed budget lines for the functions that were contained with the BTAC remit

The proposed increase for band D charge of £3.02 3.95% (band A- £2.01) was the maximum permissible (within referendum principles (£5 or 3% whichever is greater) – composite calculation with BBC)

That would result in a rise to a band D charge of £79.38 (previously £76.36) a weekly charge of £1.52, and a band A would be £52.92 (£50.90) meaning £1.02 per week.

Overall that increase would provide a small amount (£13k) for new initiatives

Table 1 detailed the impact on budget if the increase was between 0% – 1%, however, such proposals would not generate enough income to cover costs and the balance would need to be met from the BTAC reserves.

To Balance the budget a 2.2% (increase of £1.67) – revised band D of £78.03 (£1.50). Band A - £52.02 - £1.00 per week.

The Budget was due to be considered by Cabinet on 22nd February and Council 6th March which would be the formal budget setting agreement.

The reserve balances were forecasted to be £254,875 at 31st March 2023 with no current planned future use. The recommended minimum level of reserves was £70k, (table 3.1)

Committee deliberation followed which included:

The Chairman noted that whilst he appreciated that members would be reluctant to agree any significant increase, he was very mindful that anything less than the 2.2% would result in an impact on BTAC reserves and that moving forward such losses would not be recouped. Based on the existing and future commitments of BTAC moving forward, the Chairman moved that a 3.95% increase in the BTAC precept.

A number of members agreed the Chairman's proposal, noting that BTAC already had significant commitments which they felt would only increase over the forthcoming years. Taking into consideration the various reductions available for residents who were means tested, with certain residents only ending up paying an extra 13p, members acknowledged that residents on lower incomes who would be subjected to the various reductions, resided predominantly within Band A properties and were on the lowest precept.

A member questioned the reasoning behind tabling the assumptions for the forthcoming years asking if the committee would be committed to such increases. The Assistant Director – Finance confirmed that the figures were only an indication of what increases would be achieved by such an increase and BTAC were not committed to them. They were purely an indication and for information purposes only.

Noting the cost of the locking of the Central Park gates a member questioned the significant rise in charge but was advised it was for a year, with the smaller charge referred to being for only a six month period at that point in time.

Voicing concern at the proposed level of increase, a member stressed that a number of their residents were living in extreme conditions and the impact of such an increase would be significant on them. As such the member proposed that in order to give those residents some peace of mind during the current financial climate that BTAC agreed a 1% increase in its precept for the forthcoming year. The Portfolio Holder responded to the concern stating that the Council did have emergency funding available for any resident who was subjected to extreme hardship.

A member stated their ongoing concern that following the last review by the Boundary Commission 450 residents were moved from a BTAC ward to a Parish ward but were still subject to paying the BTAC precept. They were unrepresented at the meetings of BTAC and the member felt it unfair on the residents. The Chairman advised that all ward members were welcome to come to BTAC and speak on behalf of their residents although they could not vote on any business of the committee. The re alignment had nothing to do with BTAC and BTAC had no power to address the position.

The Chairman moved that the committee agree the 3.95% in the BTAC precept, had the motion seconded and the motion was clearly carried.

RESOLVED

That BTAC agree the increase of 3.95% increase for the forthcoming year 2023 – 2024.

113 WORK PROGRAMME - STANDING ITEM

Referencing the final meeting of the year on the 23rd March 2023 members were reminded that the meeting would be held in Purdah.

Items confirmed were the Small Grants Scheme for ratification and then an update on the working of the BTAC operatives.

Boston Town Area Committee (BTAC)
9 February 2023

A request was tabled for an updated financial statement at the time of the last meeting.

The Meeting ended at 8.00 pm