

Boston Borough Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Cabinet** held in the Committee Room - Municipal Buildings, West Street, Boston, PE21 8QR on Wednesday, 25th September, 2024 at 6.30 pm.

Present:

Councillor Anne Dorrian (Leader), in the Chair.

Councillors Councillor Dale Broughton (Deputy Leader), John Baxter, Callum Butler, Emma Cresswell, Sandeep Ghosh and Sarah Sharpe.

In attendance:

Councillor James Cantwell.

Officers:

Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive - Communities, Deputy Chief Executive (Corporate Development) and S151 Officer, Assistant Director - Regulatory, Assistant Director - Wellbeing and Community Leadership, Enviro-Crime Monitoring Officer, Head of Revenues and Benefits PPSL, Democratic Services Team Leader and Democratic Services Officer.

27 Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence were received.

28 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

29 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 24th July 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

30 Questions from Members of the Public

No questions were received.

31 Recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny (Standing Item)*

There were no recommendations.

32 Recommendations from the Boston Town Area Committee (BTAC) (Standing Item)

There were no recommendations.

33 Quarter 1 24/25 Performance and Risk Report

The Leader presented the quarterly report covering performance and risk monitoring information for Quarter 1 of 2024/25, as at June 2024. The quarter 1 performance targets were detailed within Appendix 1. The quarter 1 performance trends were detailed within Appendix 2. The quarter 1 risks were detailed within Appendix 3.

Members noted that changes had been made in respect of the performance measures. For example, the planning extension measures had been dropped and some new measures had been introduced in respect of the Office for Local Government (Oflog). Improvements had also been made to the formatting of the report:

- The target and trend measures had been split and sorted by priority to make the differences clearer.
- Shading had been added to show how the measures performed in previous quarters to make the trends clearer.
- Additional commentary had been included for the HR measures to provide more context for absence and turnover of staff.
- The measures had also been made quarterly, instead of year to date, to ensure that trend was easier to track over time.

The Leader advised that the majority of measures were on target. She highlighted three red measures, for which commentary had been provided for context:

- Occupancy Rate of Industrial Units
- Percentage of subject requests responded to within statutory timescales
- Housing Benefit New Claims speed of processing (Year to Date) (PSPS)

Members discussed the report and commented as follows:

- The occupancy level of the market stalls had increased over the quarter.
- The percentage of car parking income was high as a result of the addition of income from 2023/24.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Anne Dorrian and seconded by Councillor Dale Broughton.

RESOLVED:

That the quarterly performance and risk monitoring information for Q1 of 2024/25 be noted.

34 2024/25 Quarter One Finance update

Councillor Sandeep Ghosh presented a report which set out a summary of the current financial position for the Council at the end of the first quarter of 2024/25 forecasting, as at June 2024. Appendix A contained full details in respect of the General Fund Revenue Budget, the General Fund Reserves Position, the Capital Programme for 2024/25, and the Treasury Management Performance for the year.

Attention was drawn to various key points, including the oncoming challenges to be faced due to a downturn in the economy impacting the Council's income levels in areas such as building control, planning and cremation income. Some of this was being offset by higher than anticipated investment income due to the interest rate levels and increased cash balances. It was also highlighted that the 2024/25 Pay award had not yet been announced and that it would impact the forecast outturn position if it was greater than the budgeted 3.5%.

Councillor Ghosh pointed out Table 4 was a new addition and he advised that future quarterly budget reports would contain illustrating additions to the revenue budget as the year progressed through decision notices and delegated decisions.

Members discussed the report and commented as follows:

- It was positive to see that the Government had taken note of the financial impact being felt by the Council and that it was responding to the representations by the Special Interest Group with the scheduling of a meeting in October. The Council appreciated the receipt of additional funding in respect of the IDBs and it was important to keep that pressure on the Government.
- Pensions planning was forecasting a reduction in planning for income; and direct cremation was having an impact on the crematorium income. Commercialisation opportunities were being investigated by various service areas.
- It was clarified that funding from the transformation reserve would be put towards projects or consultants to bring in efficiency savings.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Sandeep Ghosh and seconded by Councillor John Baxter.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the forecast revenue position of a £148k underspend for 2024/25, as detailed in Table 1 within the report, and the need for continued focus on the savings and efficiency programme be noted;**
- 2. That the reserve transfer of £296,307 into the budget, in respect of Project Funding that has been set aside on the balance sheet for that use, be approved;**
- 3. That the reserve transfer of £260,000, to the Capital Reserve in respect of a VAT refund received in year, be approved; and**
- 4. That the amendments to the Capital Programme, to take into account the changes set out in Appendix A – Table 5 within the report, be approved.**

35 Local Council Tax Support Scheme (Consultation) 2025/26

Councillor Sandeep Ghosh presented a report which provided an update on the Boston Borough Council's Local Council Tax Support current scheme and presented scheme modification options for the working age Council Tax Support scheme to take forward to public consultation with a view to helping the Council decide its local scheme for 2025/26.

Members noted that the results of the consultation would be brought back to Cabinet to make its final recommendation to Full Council.

Members discussed the report and commented as follows:

- It was important that members had been given the opportunity to express their views.
- The work had focussed on the residents that needed help at a time when the cost of living was hitting everyone.
- Thanks were given to the Councillors and Officers involved in the work.
- It was noted that the scheme did not cover pension age residents, where national rules applied.

The recommendations, as written in the report, were moved by Councillor Sandeep Ghosh and seconded by Councillor Emma Cresswell.

Councillor Anne Dorrian proposed an amendment to the recommendations in that the following options, in 6.3 within the report, be consulted on:

- A. Modify the maximum CTS amount.
 - i) Increase the maximum CTS for households with children to 100%, and to 85% for other households.
- B. Remove the earnings disregard for Universal Credit claims.
- C. Introduce a standard £10 rate for non-dependant deductions.
- D. Introduce a minimum weekly award of £1.00 per week.
- E. Reduce Upper Capital Limit
- F. Remove the current three-month review period on Universal Credit earnings cases and replace with a threshold for earnings changes of £30 per week (£130 per month) or £50 per week (£217 per month) with discretion.
- G. Introduce a Discretionary Exceptional Hardship Payment Fund
- H. Update the 2025/26 scheme in line with DWP uprating.

The proposed amendment was seconded by Councillor Dale Broughton.

The amended recommendations were moved by Councillor Anne Dorrian and seconded by Councillor Dale Broughton.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the modification options, presented in section 6 within the report, be noted;**
- 2. That options A (i) and B – H, as outlined in section 6.3 within the report, be consulted upon; and**
- 3. That the consultation, and delegated oversight of the consultation approach to the Section 151 Officer in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Finance, be approved.**

[The Head of Revenues and Benefits PPSL left the meeting, following consideration of the above item, at 7.10pm.]

36 Working in Partnership with the Voluntary and Community Sector

Councillor Emma Cresswell presented a report which provided an overview of the Voluntary and Community Sector work/activity that was being supported and further developed by the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership; and sought approval to deliver more sustainable and enhanced local services through the Voluntary and Community Sector that were operating within South and East Lincolnshire.

The Volunteer Charter, attached as Appendix A within the report, set out the nine key principles which helped to underpin good relations within a volunteering environment.

Members discussed the report and commented as follows:

- Notable achievements included: working with Lincolnshire Community Foundation through the Household Support Fund; the valuable support and assistance of Citizens Advice Mid Lincolnshire that provided for residents; the set up a South and East Lincolnshire Trusted Volunteer Scheme, which had been funded through the UKSPF.
- A Commission Service would enable the Council to monitor the outputs of grant funding more and outcomes more measurably in a more of a fair, open and transparent way for the community.
- A Volunteer-Coordinator role had been established to drive the recruitment of volunteers and help point potential volunteers towards areas of need.
- It was noted that in Quarter 1, 17 volunteers had become part of the scheme.
- A Volunteer Scheme provided good opportunities for younger people in the area.
- The Lincolnshire Community and Voluntary Service was not being replaced, and would continue to provide support to local communities.
- A trusted volunteer scheme ensured the Councils was taking the safety of the volunteers seriously.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Emma Cresswell and seconded by Councillor Sarah Sharpe.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the important role that the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) plays in supporting local communities/residents in enjoying healthy fulfilling lives within South and East Lincolnshire be noted;**
- 2. That the current progress made between the SELCP and VCS, including the SELCP Trusted Volunteers Scheme, be noted;**
- 3. That the proposed South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership 'Volunteer Charter' be approved; and**

- 4. That the transition from grant giving to VCS organisations, and the move to a commissioned services model (where appropriate) that meets the aims and objectives of the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership, be approved.**

37 Public Spaces Protection Order - wild bird feeding controls in designated areas of Boston Town Centre

The Leader presented a report which proposed Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) to control the indiscriminate feeding of wild birds by the public, in designated areas of Boston Town Centre, following a period of mandatory public consultation. A copy of the consultation response was attached to the report as Appendix A.

A copy of the Draft Public Spaces Protection Order 2024 (No. 01/2024) was attached to the report as Appendix B. A copy of the PSPO Designated Area (Map of Boston Town Centre) was attached to the report as Appendix C. A copy of the draft Minutes extract from the Environment and Performance Committee meeting held on 5th September 2024 was attached at Appendix D.

Members discussed the report and commented as follows:

- The feeding of wild birds in the town centre was leading to damage and fouling of the public realm, its buildings and the Town's heritage sites.
- It was having a detrimental impact on the cleanliness of the area, on the pavements and street furniture, which actually exposed the public to potential health risks.
- The proposals related to feral pigeons as opposed to domestic birds such as racing pigeons.
- The Antisocial Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 gave the local authority discretion to make a public spaces protection order.
- The public consultation was conducted between 1st May and 31st July 2024.
- Scrutiny members were generally in favour of introducing a PSPO.
- Members noted that a PSPO breach was enforceable via fixed penalty notice, limited by statute to £100.
- If approved an extensive public information campaign would follow over the next three months, where no fines would be issued initially. Visual signage would also be included, in order to assist the public.
- Members thanked officers for their hard work.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Anne Dorrian and seconded by Councillor Callum Butler.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the feedback from the Environment and Performance Committee be noted; and**
- 2. That the making of a Public Spaces Protection Order to implement wild bird feeding controls in designated areas of Boston Town Centre be approved.**

38 Alignment of Case Management System across the South & East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership

Councillor Sandeep Ghosh presented a report which sought to secure funding to align the multiple Case Management Systems in place in the Planning and Regulatory Directorates in Boston and South Holland to the Uniform system currently being deployed at East Lindsey District Council.

As well as the revenue savings identified within the report, an alignment would unlock further significant efficiency savings by enabling teams to come together across the Partnership aligning processes and procedures. An alignment would also benefit the Wellbeing and Community Leadership Directorate, in particular the Housing Standards Team.

Members discussed the report and commented as follows:

- Aligning the systems would help officers that were working across the three authorities. It would also help with forthcoming service reviews.
- Members agreed it was important to streamline the services for efficiency and that staff would adapt to the changes.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Sandeep Ghosh and seconded by Councillor Emma Cresswell.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the addition of £339,869 to the Council's Capital Programme to enable the project's delivery to be financed, as described in paragraph 2.8 within the report, be approved; and**
- 2. That the addition of the projected savings to the Councils multi-year savings and transformation plan, as overseen by the Finance Portfolio Holder, be approved.**

The Meeting ended at 7.39 pm.