

BOSTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

At the meeting of the Boston Borough Council held at the Municipal Buildings, Boston, on Monday 20 January 2020 at 6.30 p.m.

Present:

The Mayor (Anton Dani) in the Chair

Councillors Tracey Abbott, Tom Ashton, Alison Austin, Richard Austin BEM, Peter Bedford, Alan Bell, David Brown, Michael Cooper, Anne Dorrian, Deborah Evans, Paul Goodale, Martin Griggs, Neill Hastie, Jonathan Noble, Frank Pickett, Brian Rush, Chelcei Sharman, Judith Skinner, Paul Skinner, Yvonne Stevens, Peter Watson, Judith Welbourn, Nigel Welton, Colin Woodcock and Stephen Woodliffe.

Officers -

Chief Executive, and Democratic Services Manager.

49 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 16 December 2019, were taken as read and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

50 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors George Cornah, Viven Edge and Aaron Spencer.

51 COMMUNICATIONS

The Chief Executive reported that Councillor Aaron Spencer had resigned as Leader of the Council. Therefore the questions on notice to be asked of Councillor Spencer as Leader would be directed to Councillor Nigel Welton as Deputy Leader.

52 DEPUTATIONS AND PETITIONS

The Chief Executive reported there were no deputations or petitions.

53 QUESTIONS FROM ELECTED MEMBERS

The Chief Executive reported there were questions from Councillors Anne Dorrian, Richard Austin and Brian Rush.

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

“Do you think that the recommendation from the Peer Review - that BBC councillors should take responsibility, wherever possible, to present the council in a good light - has been heard by this body?”

Response by Councillor Nigel Welton

“Thanks for your question Councillor Dorrian. I am as ever an optimist and I completely support the LGAs recommendation and would encourage all councillors to leave negativity at the door and build up the town and council together.

I hope everyone has heard this however it will be down to the morals and intention of the individual councillors whether they choose to help the majority of us who want to secure a better vision for the town or whether they would rather continue to do a disservice to this council, themselves, the officers and Boston in general.”

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

Councillor Dorrian made a statement relating to the circumstances of the resignation of the Leader of the Council which did not contain a direct supplementary question.

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

“What proposals are there for Councillors to view and discuss the details of any submissions by this Council in the ‘Towns Fund’ process?”

Response by the Councillor Nigel Welton

“Thank you for your question. This is a crucial concept and scheme for the town and your continued support and interest is appreciated.

I can confirm the initial meetings have been interesting and I believe the towns fund board is going to deliver great things for the town.

For more details please refer to the Council report of the 16th December which contains this information”.

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

“The PE 21 project was introduced in the early summer and so councillors will be now well familiar with the detail and are generally supportive of the plan.

Presuming this is the main intervention by this Council, I am hoping you can clarify whether you are you now expecting councillors and the public to come forward with additional suggestions to present to the Towns Fund Board and whether this is the right moment to do so.

Is this an opportunity to use some of the Councils own government loan money on a good and safe investment to help create a welcoming and thriving town centre that will help the Borough towards increasing prosperity?”

Response by Councillor Welton

“The Town Board is comprised of representatives of many different organisations, everyone involved would be encouraged to bring forward ideas and projects.

The Council was represented by the Leader of the Council and the Chairman of BTAC, and update information would be provided to Members during the next 6 months.

Everyone needs to bring forward ideas and put any differences aside for the betterment of Boston. All input would be welcome.”

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

“I am sure you will agree that our Planning Committee, in the past, has been the subject of some scrutiny, previous to your Chairmanship.

What reassurances are you prepared to give, to me, and the people of Boston, in order to reassure them that they can “rely” upon you, as their dedicated Elected, Public Representative, whose focus will be to protect the interests of ALL of the people of this Borough, as well as its diverse communities?”

Response by Councillor Tom Ashton

“Thank you Councillor Rush for notice of your question. You are correct to observe that Planning is one of the most scrutinised functions of Local Government, both in Boston and everywhere else. Few areas of what we do as Councillors and as a Council have quite such a direct impact on the area in which we live.

As Chairman of the Planning Committee it is my job to ensure good decision making by the Planning Committee: to ensure that members of that Committee fairly and thoroughly debate applications before them and arrive at sound and defensible decisions which are rooted in our Local or National planning policies.

Clearly there will always be decisions with which Elected Members or members of the public disagree one way or another, and on occasions when the decision is very finely balanced in policy terms it is possible that there is ‘more than one right answer’. In those cases it is for the Committee to debate the issues and decide that balance; my role is to facilitate that debate.

It is necessary to observe that decisions will never please all of the people all of the time, and it is important to point out that party, personal, or popular politics have no place on the Planning Committee or in its decision making, and nor will they under my Chairmanship.

I am pleased to give both yourself and the people of Boston every reassurance that I will always defend the independence of the Planning Committee to the hilt and use my experience and knowledge of Planning gained during my time in Local Government to aid with sound decision making without fear or favour, as I hope you will agree that I have during my tenure as Chairman of the Planning Committee.”

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

Councillor Rush made a statement relating to the circumstances of the resignation of the Leader of the Council which did not contain a direct supplementary question.

54 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The Chief Executive reported there was a question from Mr. Darron Abbott.

Question asked by Mr. Darron Abbott pursuant to paragraph 10 of the Rules of Procedure as set out in the Constitution.

“Recently Boston Wood Trust have announced that they are to be charged by Boston Borough Council a figure I believe to be £2,300 per year. The original figure suggested for the service being £12,000.

The Boston Wood Trust have put out an appeal to 100 people to donate £20 per year to cover the costs, if those 100 people do not rise to the request surely this will impact on the number of trees that they can plant each year.

The only item on the Agenda this evening relates to climate change, one of the suggestions is to plant more trees, how does the proposal to levy this charge encourage the planting of more trees.”

Response by Councillor Yvonne Stevens

“The Council is under no statutory obligation to collect waste from Boston Woods Trust. Given the financial pressures facing the Council we can no longer afford to service the voluntary arrangement, free of charge.”

Supplemental question asked by Mr. Darron Abbot pursuant to paragraph 10.8 of the Rules of Procedure as set out in the Constitution.

“I thank Councillor Stevens for her reply. Could I politely ask Councillor Stevens to go back over her paperwork and check the wording on her proposal for charging this organisation as it is only recently that it was proposed by herself to charge for replacing domestic wheelie bins because the Council could not afford to fund the replacements. After a great deal of time and resources was spent on that discussion and it turned out to be a waste of time because the proposal had not been read properly.

If the Council does impose the charge and, in the fear of repeating Councillor Richard Austin, please would Councillors consider becoming members of the Boston Woods Trust and give just £20 of their allowance to ensure they can continue to plant the trees that this evening’s report suggests should be done. One Councillor has already agreed to do this even though she has only just found out. I have membership forms should anyone want one.”

Response by Councillor Stevens

“I will provide a written response.”

55 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

56 CLIMATE CHANGE

Councillor Judith Skinner introduced a report on behalf of the Environment and Performance Committee presenting the conclusions of the Climate Change Working Group built upon the update report considered by Council on 16 December 2019.

The report stated that at the meeting of Full Council on 15 July 2019, two Motions on Notice had been submitted relating to climate change. As a result Members voted on a procedural motion to seek the Environment and Performance Committee's consideration and detailed reporting for referral back to Full Council.

The Environment and Performance Committee (E&P) met on 30 July 2019 and agreed to establish a Working Group to progress activity. The Working Group met informally to consider all aspects and issues referred to in the Motions on Notice and reported findings and recommendations to the Environment and Performance Committee.

The Group had provided a verbal update to E&P Committee on 24 September and a further formal update to its meeting on 5th November. An interim report was presented to Council on 16 December and provided a summary update of the work to date. Final draft recommendations were reported to the E&P Committee on 7 January 2020 which were referred to full Council for adoption.

The Working Group was comprised of five elected members including the Portfolio Holder, eight members of staff and one co-opted member of the public, and was Chaired by Councillor Anne Dorrian.

The work of the Group included:-

- Reviewed previous and ongoing BBC carbon reduction activity and the Carbon Management Plan.
- Collated all BBC environmental and climate change activity (Air Quality, Homes Energy Conservation Act, Private Sector Enforcement, etc.)
- Taken on the Local Government Association good practice advice for Councillors.
- Reviewed other council approaches and best practice publications.
- Collated a list of external invitees with expertise and insight.
- Agreed an intent to be clear about the differences required for BBC to become carbon net neutral and "leading/championing" others within the Borough geography.
- Begun to explore carbon offsetting potential/opportunities.
- Begun collating a list of "quick-wins" to include in the final action plan recommendations to E&P.
- Attended the "Ashden" Local Authority Climate Change Toolkit launch in October.
- Attended the Western Power event - Transition to a Zero Carbon Economy.
- Considered relevant proposals contained in the Environment Bill published 15 October.

The Working Group focused activity to finalise a series of recommendations for Council to consider:

- A climate change declaration which was aspirational and deliverable in the soonest possible time range.
- All Council policies and practices to consider environmental impacts.
- Lobby for additional resources and support to deliver the carbon neutral agenda.
- A commitment to show geographical and community leadership.
- Recognise and acknowledge the excellent achievements of the Council since 2008.
- Council buildings and asset audits and action plans.
- Recommendations for the Council's procurement practices.
- Potential for climate champion(s), Citizens Assembly and Climate Expo.

It was noted that Councils were well placed to drive and influence action on climate change through the services they delivered, their regulatory and strategic function and roles as community leaders, major employers, large scale procurers and social landlords. Action on climate change could deliver many local benefits, including lower energy bills, economic regeneration and creation of local jobs, reductions in fuel poverty and improved air quality.

Public understanding and awareness of the causes and effects of climate change had increased significantly in recent years aided by the report of the Committee on Climate Change on net-zero emissions, protests relating to perceived government inaction, TV documentaries such as David Attenborough's 'Blue Planet' and 'Planet Earth'.

Reducing the organisation's carbon footprint and becoming net-zero carbon was a substantial undertaking which would have profound implications for the Council and its services. It would involve service re-design, procurement changes and the consideration of the environment practices of partners and affect all aspects of the Council's operation, fuel/energy use, buildings, supply chain and contractors. The Council would need to commit to embracing relevant technologies and consider the impact on existing strategies and plans.

There would be significant financial implications associated with the ambition to deliver net zero carbon that would need to be properly assessed and understood, although there would also be invest to save investments which would provide longer-term savings. At the current time it was not possible to accurately calculate the full financial costs, therefore the Climate Change declaration set an aspiration to embed environmental consideration and carbon reduction into all of the Council's activities going forward. Additional budgetary requirement would be assessed as each and every recommended action was progressed.

The report set out a series of recommendations and rationale supporting those recommendations, for a Boston Borough declaration of 'climate emergency' and ambition to its carbon footprint to become net-zero carbon neutral which had been developed by the Climate Change Working Group through detailed and comprehensive consideration of the issues relating to climate change which could be addressed by the Council.

There was a consensus of support for the proposals put forward by the Working Group and a recognition that everyone had to take responsibility and lead by example to tackle the important issues identified. Green issues should be embedded in the everyday life of the community where possible, education for the public was a key issue to be addressed.

It was acknowledged that although the Council would take appropriate action within its responsibilities and resources to address climate change where possible, pressure should also be brought on other countries which were reliant on coal powered power stations also needed to recognise the problems caused by fossil fuels and take action accordingly.

It was suggested that a Climate Change Officer should be appointed to lead on taking the recommendations forward, as other neighbouring authorities had already done.

The methodology of the Working Group which involved Councillors working with staff and members of the public to achieve sustainable but realistic options for the future, was commended.

Council thanked the Working Group for their hard work to date which reflected a real change in ways of working that would not be detrimental to core service delivery, rather than picking an arbitrary date for the Council to be carbon neutral.

It was moved by Councillor Judith Skinner, seconded by Councillor Anne Dorrian and

RESOLVED that

- 1. Boston Borough Council declares an ongoing climate and environment emergency and commits to a pledge to reduce the Council's carbon footprint and become net-zero carbon in advance of the timetable declared by UK Parliament.**
- 2. All Council reports, policies and practices shall incorporate climate change mitigation and environmental impact as key drivers for consideration.**
- 3. UK Government be requested to provide financial support to Councils to achieve/improve upon their carbon reduction commitments.**
- 4. Include the environment, carbon reduction and halting climate change within the Council's emerging corporate strategy.**
- 5. Collate and promote the positive activity and success of the Council's work across all areas of environmental good practice.**
- 6. The Environment & Performance Committee be requested to adopt Climate Change within its terms of reference.**
- 7. Develop, cost and propose a series of "quick wins" and activity reporting and monitoring progress to the E & P Committee over the next two years.**
- 8. Explore options for cost effective, accredited and audited options for commercial carbon offsetting schemes.**
- 9. Move to a "Green Energy" source utility supplier as soon as possible.**

(The meeting ended at 7.30 p.m.)