

BOSTON TOWN AREA COMMITTEE (BTAC)

3 FEBRUARY 2021

Proposed BTAC budget 2021/22 and forecast to 2025/26

Report of BTAC Chairman, Paul Goodale

(Author: Accountancy Manager – Revenue and Systems)

BOSTON TOWN AREA COMMITTEE (BTAC) – 2021/22 BUDGET, AND FORECAST TO 2025/26

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

Members of the Committee will be well aware of the context in which this and recent budgets have been set, being a time of continuous change and significant financial challenge for councils. These include ongoing reductions in grant support from the government, the impact of welfare reform, changes to the mechanism upon which central government support is allocated, and the proposed future moves for further localisation of the business rates regime.

Boston Town Area Committee (BTAC) plays an important role in helping make the lives of its residents a little easier.

BTAC's support includes Footway Lighting, Central Park and open spaces maintenance, Public Conveniences and the Community Toilet Scheme; all key areas where the reduction in funding as a result of national policy would otherwise have seen the loss or severe reduction of some or all of these important services.

Over recent years, BTAC has played a key role in helping keep our town clean and welcoming for residents, businesses and visitors, and introduced initiatives to maintain and provide services that people value highly. Without the Committee's support the Borough Council would have had to make decisions that would have proved very difficult. Therefore, I believe that each Committee member should be proud of the way that the whole Committee has worked together to deliver its achievements.

Going forward, BTAC will play its part in deciding how and what future services are delivered in the town given the likely resources available to it and the Borough, and this budget will enable the new BTAC Committee to consider its priorities for the coming years.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

- Proposed BTAC precept requirement 2021/22 £731,479 (2020/21 £702,696)
- The Council Tax base for 2021/22 is 9,505.9 Band D equivalent properties (2020/21 9,306.0)
- Proposed Council Tax in 2021/22 is £76.95 at Band D (2020/21 £75.51), an increase of 1.91%
- Cost per week in 2021/22 will be £1.48 at Band D (2020/21 £1.45) – the majority of households will pay less than this
- Projected level of reserves at 31 March 2021 estimated at £120,000

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Boston Town Area Committee (BTAC) is asked to make a recommendation to Cabinet and Council on the precept and Band D Council Tax levy for properties in the BTAC area for the 2021/22 financial year. This report details the current position and the proposed levy for the Council to approve for 2021/22. The following timetable is in place:
- 3 February 2021 – proposed BTAC budget to BTAC (this meeting);
 - 24 February 2021 – final budgets to Cabinet and recommendation to Council;
 - 1 March 2021 – full Council to approve budgets, and agree Band D Council Tax
- 1.2 Members are reminded of the context in which this budget has been set. It is at a time of continuing change and significant financial challenge for local government. These include the ongoing reductions in grant support from the government, the impact of Welfare reform, changes to the mechanism upon which central government support is allocated, and the proposed future moves to full localisation of the business rates regime.
- 1.3 BTAC members have in recent years increased the Council Tax and precept to help make the town a better place, and initiatives have been progressed to fund public conveniences, central park spend, footway lights and open spaces, events and town centre operatives. The proposed budget includes an inflationary increase this year, which includes an unallocated sum to enable members to support further measures to improve the town.

- 1.4 The level of Council Tax is a key factor for the Committee when considering its future aspirations.
- 1.5 Following the budget workshop delivered earlier in February, to illustrate the effects of changes to the assumptions on Council Tax, Table 1 below shows Council Tax projections and implications for the Committee's resources if :-
- (a) **The proposed increase of 1.91% in 2020/21, then 2% p.a.**
 - (b) No increase in 2020/21, then 2% p.a.
 - (c) An increase of 0.5% in 2020/21, then 2% p.a.
 - (d) An increase of 1.0% in 2020/21, then 2% p.a.

(these illustrations of various increases have been based on feedback from members on the preferred scale of future BTAC operations and council tax levels going forward)

Table 1 – Resource projections

Changes in Council Tax assumptions	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
	£	£	£	£	£
<u>1.91% increase (then 2% p.a.)</u>					
BTAC Band D charge	76.95	78.48	80.01	81.63	83.25
Amount unallocated for new initiatives	71,879	88,126	99,807	110,966	122,791
<u>0% increase (then 2% p.a.)</u>					
BTAC Band D charge	75.51	77.04	78.57	80.10	81.72
Amount unallocated for new initiatives	58,191	74,301	85,843	95,981	107,656
<u>0.5% increase (then 2% p.a.)</u>					
BTAC Band D charge	75.87	77.40	78.93	80.46	82.08
Amount unallocated for new initiatives	61,613	77,757	89,334	99,507	111,217
<u>1.0% increase (then 2% p.a.)</u>					
BTAC Band D charge	76.23	77.76	79.29	80.91	82.53
Amount unallocated for new initiatives	65,035	81,214	92,825	103,914	115,669

- 1.6 The impact on Council Tax payers of the proposed 1.91% increase would be that BTAC's Band D annual charge would go up by £1.53, or 3 pence per week. Almost 70% of BTAC households are in bands A and B, meaning that their weekly increase, before taking Council Tax Support into account, would be approximately 2 pence in each case.

2. ASSUMPTIONS

- 2.1 The estimates cover the period 2021/22 to 2025/26. Over this timescale it is important we make realistic assumptions as to how costs may rise or fall.
- 2.2 There is an assumption that revenue budgets will be used to deliver services during the year for which they are approved, and that any additional resources will be allocated and spent in the year they become available.
- 2.3 We have prepared the estimates on the understanding that appropriate service budgets were produced for 2020/21, revised for specific adjustments due to operational changes and decisions made since the budget was set, where necessary. Other than these adjustments, no major variances are expected, and the draft budget has been prepared to reflect the prevailing financial circumstances. General inflation and rental income are assumed to have a 0% increase per year, the expectation being that savings will consume any net cost increases in these areas. There is one exception to this approach, being utilities/fuel prices, where an average of 5% p.a. has been used to reflect the price risk for these areas; and included within the grounds maintenance charges and support service recharges there is an increase of 2% per annum increase due to staffing cost increases.
- 2.4 The BTAC Medium Term Financial Strategy assumptions within the appendix to this report are based on future year council tax increases of 2% p.a., and **Appendix 1** shows that this would deliver a balanced budget in 2025/26 having allowed for spending on the increased resources available to the Committee to be allocated. Decisions will be needed annually to determine the appropriate level of reserves to be maintained.

3. 2020/21 OUTTURN

- 3.1 An assessment of the projected 2020/21 outturn will inform the reliance we can place on the baseline we use for setting the 2021/22 estimates. Officers believe the outturn for 2020/21 will be as reported to the Committee in the regular Finance update reports, and will leave unallocated reserves at 31 March 2021 of £120,000 (being the S151 Officer's minimum requirement assessment of £70,000 plus £50,000).

4. TAX BASE

4.1 The tax base assumptions are shown in Table 2 below (equivalent number of Band D properties).

Table 2 – Tax Base

2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
9,306.00	9,505.9	9,601.0	9,697.0	9,793.9	9,891.9

4.2 The tax base has risen by 2.15% from 2020/21 to 2021/22. For future years, an increase of 1% p.a. has been forecast. The tax base includes a non-collection adjustment (of 1%; in other words an assumption of 99% collection over time) to take account of non-payment of Council Tax. Officers believe that these assumptions remain prudent, and they will be influenced by factors such as planning policy and the strength of the local economy. The impact of the Council Tax Support Scheme has influenced collection rates slightly since its introduction, although it is still a little early to assess the longer term impact on collection given the ongoing wider welfare reform changes.

5. 2021/22 ESTIMATES

- 5.1 The following table shows the estimates by type of expenditure/income split over the CIPFA standard classification. Details of the overall position are shown at **Appendix 1**.

Table 3 – Estimates by expenditure/income

		2020/21 £	2021/22 £	Variance £	Variance %
1	Employees	260,090	239,290	20,800	8.0%
2	Premises	169,980	155,350	14,630	8.6%
3	Supplies and Services	203,280	207,520	(4,240)	(2.1%)
4	Transport	9,230	9,430	(200)	(2.2%)
5	Support Services	73,330	83,040	(9,710)	(13.2%)
6	Other projects and initiatives	23,256	71,879	(48,623)	(309.1%)
	Total Expenditure	739,166	766,509	(27,343)	(3.7%)
5	Fees and Charges	(36,470)	(35,030)	(1,440)	(3.9%)
	Total Income	(36,470)	(35,030)	(1,440)	(3.9%)
	Budget Requirement	702,696	731,479	(28,783)	(4.1%)

- 5.2 The changes to employees are mainly due to the reduction in Events. Premises costs are due to reduced planned repair costs relating to the Public Conveniences. The Support Services increase includes a reallocation of Assistant Director recharges, which partially off-sets savings in Employee costs.
- 5.3 The other projects and initiatives line recognises BTAC members' request to have additional funds to enable them to support more projects and initiatives to help make the town a better place.

6. RESERVES

- 6.1 The following table shows the projected movement on the BTAC reserve, and the assumptions made with regards to the expected outturn position at paragraph 3.1.

Table 4 - Summary of the proposed movement on the BTAC reserve

£	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
B/fwd	125,000	120,000	70,000	70,000	70,000	70,000
In	-	-	-	-	-	-
Out	(5,000)	(50,000)	-	-	-	-
C/fwd	120,000	70,000	70,000	70,000	70,000	70,000

- 6.2 The 2021/22 reserve position assumes all projects to be funded from reserves will be spent by 31 March 2022, and that the unallocated 2021/22 sum is spent in the year, and leaves a projected closing balance of £70,000. Current spend projections for the next five years show the reserves remaining the same, using the assumption that BTAC will spend any additional funds on projects and initiatives within the year that they are raised.
- 6.3 Last year the recommended minimum level of reserves to be held (assessed by the Chief Finance Officer as Section 151 Officer) was £70,000. It is recommended that £70,000 remains the minimum amount to be held for the 2021/22 year. This will be reviewed annually as part of the budget setting process.

7. BUDGET REQUIREMENT

7.1 The proposed budget requirement for 2021/22, and demand on Council Tax, is illustrated below.

Table 5 – Budget Requirement

	BTAC 2020/21	BTAC 2021/22
a. Budget Requirement	£702,696	£731,479
b. Adjusted Tax base	9,306.0	9,505.9
c. Band D Equivalent (a-b)/c	£75.51	£76.95

7.2 The proposed BTAC budget requirement for the 2021/22 year is £731,479. **Appendix 1** shows the projected expenditure for that year.

8. FORWARD ESTIMATES

- 8.1 Outline estimates through to 2025/26 are shown at **Appendix 1**. In compiling these figures we have followed the assumptions set out in Section 2 of this report and made specific adjustments to service budgets as and where Service Managers have advised of changes over the medium term. These forward estimates include a 2% increase in BTAC's Council Tax charge per annum in all future years. These assumptions are for planning purposes only, and will inevitably change.

Table 6 – Forward Estimates

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Budget requirement	753,486	775,857	799,476	823,501
BTAC Precept Demand	753,486	775,857	799,476	823,501
Tax base	9,601.0	9,697.0	9,793.9	9,891.9
Band D Council Tax	£78.48	£80.01	£81.63	£83.25
Percentage Increase	1.99%	1.95%	2.02%	1.98%

9. BUDGET SENSITIVITIES

9.1 The forward estimates (Table 6) include various assumptions regarding the risk of price increases that BTAC faces. Some of the main ones are as follows:

- (a) Grounds maintenance increases by 5%;
- (b) Employee costs increase by 5%;
- (c) Utilities increase by 5%.

Table 7 – Effect of sensitivities on the BTAC budget

	2021/22 £	2022/23 £	2023/24 £	2024/25 £	2025/26 £
Grounds maintenance @ 5%	9,380	9,570	9,760	9,960	10,160
Employee Costs @ 5%	11,970	11,850	11,970	12,190	12,420
Utilities increase @ 5%	1,360	1,400	1,450	1,490	1,530

10. CONSULTATION

10.1 Public consultation will take place as part of the overall Council budget consultation process.

11. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

11.1 To comply with the budgetary and policy framework.

11.2 To recommend to Cabinet, and then to Council, the amount of the BTAC precept and Council Tax levy to be adopted for 2021/22.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

12.1 That BTAC recommends to Cabinet and Council the level of its Special Expense precept for 2021/22 at £731,479, and the Council Tax charge of £76.95 at Band D.

Appendices:

1 Budget, and projected, position for the years 2021/22 – 2025/26