

Present: Councillor Paul Goodale (Chairman), Councillor Stephen Woodliffe (Vice-Chairman), Councillors Alison Austin, Katie Chalmers, Anne Dorrian, Martin Griggs, Brian Rush and Yvonne Stevens

Officers –

Assistant Director - Support Services & Partnership, Assistant Director - Finance (Deputy S151 Officer) and Democratic Services Officer

**24 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were tabled by Councillors Alan Bell, Anton Dani, Viven Edge, and Neil Hastie.

**25 MINUTES**

Committee agreed the minutes of the previous meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2021.

**26 UPDATE ON ACTIONS FROM THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

No updates were tabled

**27 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

None tabled

**28 PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

None tabled

**29 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME**

No public speakers

**30 LINCOLNSHIRE HOUSING PARTNERSHIP**

The Chairman welcomed the representatives from Lincolnshire Housing Partnership, Mr Anthony Read Chairman, Mr Murray MacDonald Chief Executive and Mr Mark Coupland Corporate Head for Customer Service to the meeting and thanked them agreeing to attend.

Mr Anthony Read addressed the meeting and confirmed he had been in the post since September 2019 and that Lincolnshire Housing Partnership were grateful to have the opportunity to address the meeting. Referencing a question which sought to identify any issues Lincolnshire Housing Partnership were experiencing with the Council, he advised on that there were none and the relationship between the two remained very strong. Thanking Members for the pre submission of questions, Mr Read stated it was much easier to deal with specifics in advance to allow responses at the meeting. Furthermore, Mr Read advised of forthcoming recruitment schemes by Lincolnshire Housing Partnership. Confirming the board membership was rotated every six years, with three board members retiring, three new board members were currently sought.

Furthermore Lincolnshire Housing Partnership were looking to appoint 2 of their tenants to sit on their operations committee, and they were also working with three other housing associations across Lincolnshire to provide a facility for training future board members. Committee were asked to encourage any suitable candidates they may know to apply.

Mr Murray Macdonald noted that he was delighted at the success of the quadrant development and the support the housing association had been able to provide within Phase 1 to enable the development to begin. He advised that since the merger they had stayed committed to the comital at the merger with the agreed priorities of customers first and not forgetting Boston. Concerns noted at the time of the merger in respect of all monies going to Grimsby had not happened. The partnership working with the Council continued with officers working together on the town deal and on homelessness issues with each committed to Boston and its community. A physical office remained in Boston staffed by local residents of the town. 77 new homes had been built since the merger with a further 95 homes in either the ground or the pipeline to be built. More than £50million had also been spent since the merger to update and improve homes.

Throughout Covid, Lincolnshire Housing Partnership had never had to stop any of its services and had maintained its repair service during that time along with its care service. Boston Mayfield which provided extra care services to residents had shielded and the site had remained safe.

Moving onto the questions tabled in advance of the meeting and during the meeting have been collated and the representatives responses as follows:

*Referencing concern at neglected rural properties:*

The partnership had invested in repairs with a comprehensive programme of works for all properties based on the life cycle of the property and equipment therein, which did not distinguish between rural and urban dwellings. It was always a tenant's choice to accept repairs to the property and sometimes they did refuse resulting in the home not being repaired or updated. Walkabouts at all sites were vital in identifying potential 'missed' dwellings and the input of residents and members during the walkabouts could not be underestimated and was invaluable intelligence gathering. Members were encouraged to take part in their areas and a full schedule of walkabouts would be provided after the meeting.

*Delays and concerns in respect of answering enquiries and dealing with repairs:*

On average 1000 repairs per month were undertaken in Boston, and occasionally when an engineer arrived on site, the initial repair reported was not as it seemed, resulting in engineers needing source materials and return to complete the task with 96% of repairs being undertaken at the first time visit. It was always intended to address enquiries for repairs within 10 working days but on the odd occasion it could be longer. In 1920/21 the Partnership had received 11 complaints from Councillors with only one exceeding the timescale. The switchboard received 150000 calls per year with 50000 being repair related. A direct email address for Councillors to submit complaints would be provided after the meeting and reassurance was provided that all complaints by Councillors were addressed.

*Tenants with a history of ASB against their neighbours and who regularly swapped homes:*

Members were assured that all applications were vetted and checked with agencies but they were clearly dependant on evidence having been provided of such activity. The partnership worked closely with other agencies and action was taken when evidence was available.

*Provision of play areas:*

With no remit to provide play areas within their sites, the Partnership had inherited certain play spaces during the merger but the upkeep of those areas was at a cost to the tenants. As tenants move to right to buy the number of rent paying tenants reduced and they picked up the outstanding costs. If there was evidence that tenants required additional play areas then consultations would take place, but it was the tenants who would decide.

*Responsibility of tenant to maintain property:*

All tenants were responsible to maintain their homes to an acceptable standard with all new customers on starter tenancies. Liaison with other agencies helped to identify evidence and enforcement action using a Bailiff through the Courts was taken.

*Energy efficient homes moving forward:*

Boston's existing housing stock was some of the most energy efficient the Partnership held and above the national target with 480 properties below the statutory level of 69. Of the remaining stock 60% would reach the requirement by 2030 of Energy Level C with the remainder being unable to achieve the level due to their design and construction. One option would be to sell those properties but that would not help the required housing stock provision. A survey of all properties had been collated over the years providing a clear picture of each property. The traditional brick builds did not present a problem, but the modern properties built with concrete and flat roofs were an issue. Whilst there were solutions, they could potentially be so expensive that re building would be the best option. However, consideration would also be given to history of the tenants at such properties with recognition of the memories many generations of families may be invested within them.

A Member voiced their thanks to the representatives, stating that the service the Partnership provided should be celebrated, especially for its speed of response to urgent issues.

Concluding the Chairman thanked the representatives for their time and informative presentation and extended an open invitation to attend a future meeting to further inform and update the committee.

## **31 BTAC BUDGET**

The Assistant Director – Finance presented the report to the committee stating that Members of the Committee would be well aware of the context in which the tabled budget along with recent budgets had been set, being in times of continuous change and significant financial challenge for councils. They had included 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.

BTAC's support included 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. In addition, the Committee had introduced BTAC Operatives, with a broad remit to maintain the BTAC area and improve the appearance of the town, and their efforts are producing tangible changes to the town's look and feel. This is alongside the replacement of 90 litter bins in the town area. The Committee had also agreed extra Events funding, to support and enhance the range of events and activities for local people. Over recent years, BTAC had played a key role in helping keep the 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. Going forward, BTAC would 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.

Following the budget workshop delivered earlier in January, four options to illustrate the effects of changes to the assumptions on Council Tax identified the Council Tax projections and implications for the Committee's resources based on feedback from members on the preferred scale of future BTAC operations and council tax levels going forward.

- (a) **The proposed increase of 1.35% in 2022/23, then 1% p.a.**
- (b) No increase in 2022/23, then 1% p.a.
- (c) An increase of 0.5% in 2022/23, then 1% p.a.
- (d) An increase of 1.0% in 2022/23, then 1% p.a.

The proposed budget requirement for 2022/23, and demand on Council Tax being:

Budget Requirement.	2021/22	£716.192.	2022.23	£732.864
Adjusted Tax Base.	2021/22	9.505.9	2022/23	9.597.4
Band D Equivalent (a-b)/c	2021/22	£75.34.	2022/23	£76.35

Committee deliberation followed which included:

Whilst some Members were reluctant to agree any increase in light of the current economic situation particularly in respect of predicted increases in gas and electricity prices, they did recognise the need to ensure continuity of funding and felt it fiscally irresponsible not to agree an increase. BTAC was committed to provide certain services including the recent successful implementation of closing the gates at Central Park, which residents had requested, and any change in providing those services would not be well received. BTAC was a committee of the Borough Council and the cap for the increase was 1.35% and a Member noted that the majority of properties within the BTAC area were within Bands A and B, and as such their increase would be lower than that of Band D as per the recommendation.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That BTAC recommends to Cabinet and Council the level of its Special Expense precept for 2022/23 at £732,864, and the Council Tax charge of £76.36 at Band D.

## **32 WORK PROGRAMME - STANDING ITEM**

Members were advised that an additional meeting had been scheduled for the 14<sup>th</sup> April 2022 to accommodate outstanding reporting.

Committee agreed to undertake two reviews to report back to the 14<sup>th</sup> April meeting. The first review would be the current grants scheme which would be facilitated by the grants working group and supported by its officer. The second would be a review of the current Terms of Reference for BTAC and the membership was agreed of the Chairman, Vice Chairman, Councillors Katie Chalmers and Martin Griggs and facilitated by the committee lead officer.

The Assistant Director – Leisure and Culture (Lead Officer for the committee) referenced a submission received from Transported to seek committee's initial agreement for them to position a bouy within Central Park to allow an extension to the trails. Should committee agree the initial siting in the park, Transported would progress the project with submission of an application for £1000 through the small grants scheme.

Members questioned the proposed site of bouy within the park indicated within the brief information provided, and also voiced concern at the application for funding for £1000 which they felt could be spent more productively for children and, questioned how it aligned with any educational values. Concern also noted spending of such a large amount on an item of art in the current economic climate and queried what the public would think.

The Chairman reiterated the initial request for committee to agree or not, of the actual siting in Central Park. He stressed that the application for funding would be through the formal small grants scheme process and they would make a decision which would come to committee for ratification. The Assistant Director – Leisure and Culture confirmed that when the application for funding was submitted it would include all alignments to educational values.

Resolved:

The majority of Members agreed the initial request of siting the bouy within Central Park. Transported be formerly invited to attend committee and present an overview of their activity within the borough, to date and moving forward.

The Meeting ended at 8.55 pm