

BOSTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

At the meeting of Boston Borough Council held at the Council Chamber - BBC, on Monday, 23rd January, 2023 at 6.30 pm

Present:

The Mayor (Councillor Anne Dorrian), in the Chair
Councillors Brian Rush, Frank Pickett, Tom Ashton, Tracey Abbott, Alison Austin, Richard Austin BEM, Peter Bedford, David Brown, Katie Chalmers, Anton Dani, Deborah Evans, Martin Griggs, Neill Hastie, Jonathan Noble, Judith Skinner, Paul Skinner, Aaron Spencer, Yvonne Stevens, Peter Watson, Judy Welbourn and Stephen Woodliffe

Officers –

Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive (Growth), Assistant Director - Finance (Deputy S151 Officer) and Democratic Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer ELDC

57 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 21st November 2022 were taken as read and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

58 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tracey Abbott, Alan Bell, Paul Goodale, George Cornah and Nigel Welton.

59 COMMUNICATIONS

The Chief Executive reported there were no communications.

The Mayor advised two communications. One was the receipt of the signed Proclamation and the second the gift of two works of art from Hakusan. All items would be hung in due course within the Municipal Buildings.

60 DEPUTATIONS AND PETITIONS

The Chief Executive reported there were no deputations or petitions

61 QUESTIONS FROM ELECTED MEMBERS

The Chief Executive reported there were two questions from Councillor Tom Ashton and one question from Councillor Judith Skinner.

The question from Councillor Paul Skinner directed to Councillor Paul Goodale was not asked as Councillor Goodale was not present at the meeting.

Question asked by Councillor Tom Ashton pursuant to paragraph 11 of the Rules of procedure as set out in the Constitution:

Could you confirm whether you understand, support and uphold the Council's Code of Conduct, specifically the Protocol on Member and Employee Relations?

Response by The Mayor, Councillor Anne Dorrian:

I thank Councillor Ashton for notice of his question and my response is yes.

No supplemental question.

Question asked by Councillor Tom Ashton pursuant to paragraph 11 of the Rules of procedure as set out in the Constitution:

Could you advise me whether, during your Mayoral Year, you believe there is any point where you are not the Mayor?

Response by The Mayor, Councillor Anne Dorrian:

I thank Councillor Ashton for notice of his question and my response is yes and no as I also have a role as a mother and friend amongst others, when I am acting within those roles with those people involved I am not acting as the Mayor.

No supplemental question.

Question asked by Councillor Judith Skinner pursuant to paragraph 11 of the Rules of procedure as set out in the Constitution:

Would the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services agree with me that a 20% decrease in fly-tipping is good news for the Borough? Could she tell me how this has been accomplished?

Response by Councillor Deborah Evans:

I thank Councillor Judith Skinner for notice of her question my response is:

We attribute the reduction in fly tipping to number of focused activities, which include;

- I) Introduction of an innovative enforcement service utilising overt surveillance technology to target hot spot areas.
- II) Extensive media messages educating people on the damage fly tipping causes to the environment and the personal risks being caught fly tipping, using social media channels, website, posters, signage, TV and radio.
- III) Introduction of a multi-disciplinary team from housing, development control, environmental health, community safety and waste services, to share intelligence, and conduct joint operations to target behaviour.
- IV) Providing a dedicated team to clean up fly tipping quickly.

Providing a robust enforcement presence on the street tackling littering and fly tipping, issuing fixed penalty notices Would the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services agree with me that a 20% decrease in fly-tipping is good news for the Borough. Could she tell me how this has been accomplished?

- V) Prosecuting those individuals who fail to pay their fixed penalty notices

- VI) Working with Lincolnshire Environmental Crime Partnership to share best practice, knowledge and intelligence and to coordinate wider resources with other partners, such as conducting Operation Clean Sweep.
- VII) Engaging with Councillors for example the Members Working Group on fly-tipping.

Councillor Judith Skinner did not raise a supplementary question but did congratulate the portfolio holder and the fly-tipping team on the success of decrease in incidents.

62 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The Chief Executive reported there were two questions tabled.

One from Councillor Paula Ashleigh-Morris directed to Councillor Paul Skinner, Leader of the Council and one from Mr D Broughton directed to Councillor Tracey Abbott.

The question tabled by Mr S Roberts directed to Councillor Paul Skinner could not be asked as Mr Roberts was not in attendance.

Question asked by Councillor Paula Ashleigh-Morris pursuant to paragraph 10 of the Rules of Procedure as set out in the Constitution:-

As the County Councillor for Boston West Division, I am particularly concerned that CCTV coverage ends before the end West Street heading out of town. Could you please update me on what plans the Council has for improving and extending CCTV coverage along West Street and further outwards, to enhance the safety and wellbeing of the residents I represent?

Response by Councillor Paul Skinner, Lead of the Council:

I thank Councillor Ashleigh-Morris for her question.

We are currently looking at an extra camera location in this area, funded as part of the Safer Streets project. The hope is that this location will be somewhere in the area of the West Street / Sleaford Road roundabout. This will fill a gap between our furthest West Street camera (on the Wickes building), and the next camera along the chain (which is on Lister Way).

We have employed a company to conduct a structural survey of an LCC lighting column in that area, to see if it will safely take a CCTV installation (as required by LCC Highways). Depending on the results of the survey we will then apply to LCC for permission to install camera equipment on the column.

Should the result of the survey prove negative, we will then need to look at other options such as the installation of a dedicated CCTV column, or seek permission from LCC to install CCTV on their traffic camera column at the junction of Lister Way/Sleaford Road.

Councillor Ashleigh-Morris did not raise a supplementary question but did congratulate the portfolio holder and team stating the work being undertaken was very good news and perhaps the Council could look at furthering the CCTV provision in the future.

Question asked by Mr D Broughton pursuant to paragraph 10 of the Rules of Procedure as set out in the Constitution:-

As portfolio holder for the town centre could you tell me what impact the Christmas lights, or should I say lack of them, had on shop retailers leading up to Christmas compared to previous years?

Response by Councillor Tracey Abbott:

I thank Mr Broughton for his notice of question:

I am able to share the positive news that footfall in Boston during the month of December is the highest since 2019.

Data shows that:

2022 compared to 2019 increase by 12%

2022 compared to 2020 increase by 65%

2022 compared to 2021 increase by 30%

The response is late, and I apologise for the lateness, but this was in order that the most up to date data could be obtained from records.

Supplementary Question

The figures provided did not show pre-covid footfall, was it possible to see figures for that time and had the Portfolio Holder met with retailers to see if they had seen an increase in footfall and if so, which retailers had she met with?

Response by Councillor Tracey Abbott:

It was not for the portfolio holder to go and visit retailers, I believe there will be communication with them once the outcomes were assessed.

63 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest were tabled.

64 PEER REVIEW REPORT

Councillor Paul Skinner, Leader of the Council, introduced the report confirming that the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership (SELCP) had been established in October 2021 and the Peer Review had deemed it a good thing for the three Councils concerned. Internally it had raised all three councils' aspirations and brought access to shared expertise, opportunities to learn from each other, and greater capacity in certain areas. Externally it had secured greater visibility and profile on particular issues, such as its growth activities. Tangible and quantifiable evidence had however demonstrated the benefits of the Partnership beyond its growth activities and was still nascent. A strong focus on delivery and performance monitoring was needed to ensure that the Partnership's exciting ambitions translate into reality and deliver the required impact.

Concerns were noted by a number of members at the issues in respect of lower grade staff feeling undervalued and not included within the partnership, particularly the staff at Boston Borough Council. It was noted that whilst the senior and higher grade staff felt very positive and included and were moving ahead at speed, the lower grades felt excluded with a wide gulf between them and what was happening. Other members voiced their gratitude to the senior staff who had driven the partnership forward and worked tirelessly to do so, stating it was still work in progress but it had achieved savings and sourced significant funding for projects in Boston.

It was moved by Councillor Paul Skinner and seconded by Councillor Martin Griggs and:

RESOLVED:

That the Council note the LGA Peer Review Report and Action Plan

65 JOINT SCRUTINY OF THE SOUTH AND EAST LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCILS PARTNERSHIP

Councillor Judith Skinner introduced the report on behalf of the Chairman of the Review Group Councillor Edward Mossop and confirmed that The Overview and Scrutiny Committees of Boston Borough Council, South Holland District Council, and East Lindsey District Council had commissioned a joint Scrutiny Task & Finish Panel to undertake a review of the progress on the opportunities identified in the approved business case for the South & East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership.

The report had been presented to each of the Partnership Councils' relevant sovereign scrutiny committees before being presented to Council. The scrutiny work undertaken was required under the Partnership's Memorandum of Agreement and is an annual commitment. The Leaders of each Partnership Council had collectively considered the recommendations. The Leaders had thanked the Panel for their work and were pleased to be able to accept 9 of the 10 recommendations made. The only recommendation Leaders jointly felt unable to accept is recommendation 6 – this conclusion was reached as Member allowances are a sovereign Council matter and not something the Partnership should seek to influence.

Members commented on the efforts of the review group and congratulated the work undertaken and the outcomes achieved. Repeating concerns noted from the LGA report at the worrying issue of lower grade staff feeling excluded and left behind, a member referenced the comment made that the pace of change needed to be realistic and achievable.

It was moved by Councillor Judith Skinner and seconded by Councillor Judith Welbourn and:

RESOLVED:

To note the contents of the report and the recommendation within Appendix A.

66 AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MINUTES

It was moved by Councillor Peter Watson, seconded by Councillor George Cornah that the confirmed minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee held on 5 December 2022.

67 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2023/24

Councillor Jonathan Noble presented the report confirming it sought Council approval of the Cabinet decision on the final proposals for the 2023/24 Local Council Tax Support scheme and confirmed the Local Government Finance Act 2012 had introduced the framework for localism of Council Tax Support.

Council Tax Support (CTS) provided financial assistance to people on low incomes, by way of reduction in Council Tax. Each year the Council needed to consider whether to review its CTS scheme. The report advised the conclusion of the annual review and the results of consultation for the 2023/24 scheme.

The Local Government Finance Act 2012 sets out the process by which Councils must approve a local Council Tax Support scheme, including consultation with major preceptors and stakeholders, to inform a final scheme design.

Local CTS schemes replaced the former national Council Tax Benefit (CTB) scheme from April 2013. The scheme for pensioners continues to be prescribed by government and allows up to 100% support against Council Tax liability.

The Welfare Reform Act contained provisions regarding the introduction of Universal Credit (UC) which impacts on the administration of Housing Benefit. UC was introduced for the Boston area in April 2015, and the full service was rolled out in September 2018, for new claims only. The government has confirmed their latest plans for the migration of existing legacy claims to be complete by the end of 2024.

The scheme for Working Age claimants is determined locally. The Government set out its expectations for local authorities to protect the vulnerable and for schemes to support incentives to work.

Boston Borough Council has retained a Council Tax Support Scheme since April 2013 that requires all working age households to pay at least 25% of their Council Tax liability. The Council's local scheme applies a number of principles: -

- Protecting the most vulnerable – pension-age and war pensioners
- Continuation of a means-testing approach, based on the previous CTB rules as far as possible
- The scheme will be reviewed annually
- Protecting war pensioners from reductions in support

Since April 2022, the scheme also provides for discretion to disregard national schemes introduced during a financial year in the calculation of Council Tax Support.

It was moved by Councillor Jonathan Noble and seconded by Councillor Tom Ashton and:

RESOLVED:

That Council approves the Cabinet recommendation for continuation of the current Council Tax Support scheme, including uprating in line with DWP's annual update of allowances and premiums for 2023/24

68 PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE COUNCILS CONTRACT PROCEDURE RULES

Councillor Jonathan Noble presented the report confirming that the purpose of the report was to present to the Council a revised draft set of Contract Procedure Rules with appropriate delegations that provided additional clarity around the procedures to be followed and reflect the Council's management structure. There was also a recommended change to the Financial Procedure Rules which will allow alignment with the new finance system used across all 3 councils when authorising payments.

Key changes being proposed were identified payments over £30k signed by 2 designated signatories with sign off by the section £100k.

The suggested amendments, set out in the report at appendix 3, had been considered by the Audit & Governance Committee on 5th December 2022, and recommended to the next available full Council for approval.

Member comment included support of the report and welcomed the extension of requirement to provide local businesses the chance to tender. A member voiced concern in respect of the lack of consultation with the two Scrutiny Chairmen in respect of any amendments being made and felt for transparency reasons that all changes to update the constitution should be subject to consultation with each Scrutiny Chairman.

The Chief Executive urged caution at any such change to the recommendations tabled, stating that the work undertaken had been to standardise the procedure to make the role of the staff more straightforward and less prone to error. The procedure in place was across the partnership and members were advised to consider the implications of agreeing any change that would render their procedure different to the other two Council's.

An amendment was tabled by Councillor Dani and seconded by Council Stevens:

That Council agrees that the Monitoring Officer be authorised to make the necessary changes to update the Constitution with consultation with the two Chairmen of the Scrutiny committees (Environment and Performance and Corporate and Community) and that a delegation be made for when inconsistencies apply.

The motion fell.

It was moved by Councillor Jonathan Noble and seconded by Councillor Paul Skinner and:

RESOLVED:

That Council:

1. Agrees to adopt the revised Contract Procedure Rules at **Appendix** to this report, without amendment, as the Contract Procedure Rules (CPR).
2. Agrees that the Monitoring Officer be authorised to make the necessary changes to update the Council's Constitution, accordingly, including delegation to amend where inconsistencies arise, noting that the CPR will take primacy.
3. Approves the revised financial procedure rule for Banking arrangement and cheques as detailed in Paragraph 1.12 of the report.

Councillor Jonathan Noble presented the report referring members to appendix A the Mid Term Report on the Council's "Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy."

The report covered the following areas:

An economic update for the first half of the 2022/23 financial year;

A review of the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy

The Council's capital expenditure, as set out in the Capital Strategy, and prudential indicators

A review of the Council's investment portfolio for 2022/23

A review of the Council's borrowing strategy for 2022/23

A review of any debt rescheduling undertaken during 2022/23

A review of compliance with Treasury and Prudential Indicators for 2022/23.

The report referred to a key element of the Council's Governance Framework and therefore represented an important contribution to the evidence trail in support of the Annual Governance Statement 2022/23.

It was moved by Councillor Jonathan Noble and seconded by Councillor Paul Skinner and:

RESOLVED:

That Council received and reviewed the contents of the report attached at Appendix A.

(The meeting ended at 8.46 pm)