

Boston Borough Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Cabinet** held in the Committee Room - Municipal Buildings, West Street, Boston, PE21 8QR on Wednesday, 24th July, 2024 at 6.30 pm.

Present:

Councillor Anne Dorrian (Leader), in the Chair.

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

Officers:

Deputy Chief Executive - Communities, Director of Economic Development, Assistant Director - Regulatory, Assistant Director – Corporate, Operations Manager, Chief Finance Officer PSPS (attended virtually) and Democratic Services Team Leader.

14 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Emma Cresswell and Sandeep Ghosh.

15 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

16 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 26th June 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

17 Questions from Members of the Public

No questions were received.

18 Recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny (Standing Item)*

There were no recommendations.

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

There were no recommendations.

20 Quarter 4 report - Performance and Risk

The Leader presented the quarterly report covering performance and risk monitoring information for Quarter 4 of 2023/24, as at March 2024. The majority of performance was on target, or better than target, and all of the details were set out within Appendix A.

The Leader advised that Appendix B included comparative data from Quarter 4 in 2022/23, but otherwise was the same as Appendix A. Members agreed to merge the data going forward. Full details of the strategic risks, scores and changes since the last report detailed in Appendix C.

The Leader referred to the risk scoring matrix on pages 53 and 55 in respect of the risks which were likely or almost certain to happen and would have a medium or high impact. She requested that the Portfolio Holders monitor those risks which fell into their remit. With funding being a high risk the Leader advised that they would continually be lobbying the Government, for which she had sought the support of the new MP. She added that there was also a risk in respect of staff sickness, showing just over 11 days per staff member.

Councillor John Baxter highlighted the many positive areas within the report. He noted the improvements to the narratives and the reasoning, and the trend measures, for which he thanked officers.

Councillor Dale Broughton was reassured by the downward trend in fly tipping incidents. He thanked the Portfolio Holder and his team for their work.

Councillor Callum Butler was reassured by the increase in the car parking percentages. He looked forward to seeing the figures for the first quarter in which the new machines had been installed. The Leader agreed and confirmed her eagerness to see the performance figures.

Councillor Sarah Sharpe referred to the repairs and maintenance in respect of the Guildhall for which she wished to reassure members of the public that the Council was also exploring external funding options.

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet note the quarterly performance and risk monitoring information for Q4 of 2023/24.

21 23/24 Outturn Report & 22/23 Abbreviated Outturn including Audit Update

The Chief Finance Officer, PSPS presented a report which set out the financial position of the Council for the year 2023/24, the outturn position for 2022/23 and an overall financial update.

Members noted that the Draft Statement of Accounts for 2023/24 had been finalised and then published on 30th May 2024, in line with the regulatory requirements, with the External Audit by KPMG due to commence shortly as recently reported to Audit and Governance Committee.

The audited 2022/23 Statement of Accounts had also received the necessary external audit sign-off by Mazars and the final revenue position for 2022/23 had a surplus of £155,868. The report encapsulated the outturn for that year, reserve balances, and year-end adjustments.

The Council had navigated challenging financial periods influenced by many factors. The lingering effects of international events had impacted the resourcing levels and financial position. Significant inflationary pressures, across various domains, included contract obligations, the Internal Drainage Board (IDB) levy, service demands, payroll, and energy costs.

Councillor Baxter queried the references of unbudgeted section 113. The Chief Finance Officer, PSPS advised that after the budget had been set and arrangements were then made to share officers under Section 113 agreements, this would result in unbudgeted S113 recharges. A process had been set for the Quarter 1 monitoring process for 2024/25, where finance was inputting the necessary budget adjustment, to cancel out the variance. Councillor Baxter also queried the overspend of repairs and maintenance. The Chief Finance Officer, PSPS advised that for some of those overspends there had been some offsets from external income and the bulk of the overspend had not been funded.

Councillor Baxter referred to the positive outcomes and underspends where savings had been made. He thanked the officers for their work.

The Leader referred to the IDB funding and queried where the funding would go. The Chief Finance Officer, PSPS advised that the 23/24 funding had been announced, but they were still waiting for confirmation from the Government on the 24/25 allocation. The Assistant Director – Corporate stated that the 23/24 funding had been received and allocated to that year. He added that they were putting pressure on the Government to announce the previously committed £3,000,000 for 24/25 which, once received, would go against the efficiency target.

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

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet:

- 1. Approve the report outlining the current year end underspend of £458,000 for 2023/24, and the detail set out in Appendix A within the report, and the transfer of the surplus to reserves;**
- 2. Note that the Draft Statement of Accounts for 2023/24 had been finalised and published on 30 May 2024 in line with the regulatory requirements, with the External Audit due to commence shortly as recently reported to Audit and Governance Committee.;**
- 3. Note the final revenue position of 2022/23, which was an underspend of £155,868 transferred to reserves, as set out in Appendix B within the report;**
- 4. Note that the 2022/23 Statement of Accounts had been audited and signed off by the External Auditor, as reported to the Audit and Governance Committee**
- 5. Recommend that Full Council approve the reserves transactions and balances for 2023/24, as set out in Table 4 of Appendix A within the report;**
- 6. Recommend that Full Council amend the Capital Programme for 2024/25, as shown in Table 5a to take into account the changes set out in Appendix A within the report; and**
- 7. Recommend that Full Council approve the reserve transactions and balances for 2022/23, as set out in Table 3 of Appendix B within the report.**

22 Environment Policy

Councillor Callum Butler presented a report which sought approval for a new South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership Environment Policy, to underpin the Sub-Regional Strategy. The policy represented a refresh of the existing Boston Borough Council Environment Policy, which had been approved in 2021. It had been designed to provide the mandate for climate change and environment delivery to underpin the collective ambition of the three partnership Councils within the sub-regional strategy.

Members noted that the existing environment policy underpinned the previous Boston Borough Council corporate policy aim around environmental awareness and accountability, whereas the revision underpinned the new sub-regional strategy's environment priority. The policy was split into four key themes: protecting and recovering our natural environment, mitigating and adapting to climate change, enhancing our built environment and ensuring a sustainable approach to waste and waste management.

Members noted their support of the policy. The Leader stated that the policy would enable the authority to create a community across the borough that was green and healthy, and that it would assist them to achieve their ambitions. She thanked the Portfolio Holder and officers for their work.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Callum Butler and seconded by Councillor John Baxter.

RESOLVED:

That the new Environment Policy, in Appendix A, be adopted.

23 Pilot Community Skip Service

Councillor Callum Butler presented a report which sought approval to introduce a pilot scheme for the use of community skips to help reduce fly tipping. The proposal was to place a community skip in the St George Street car park, within Boston, on Mondays in August and November, in the hope that it would have a positive impact against fly tipping.

Members noted that the St George Street car park had been chosen due to its easy accessibility, its closeness to one of the main areas that was affected by fly tipping, it had good CCTV coverage and it was Council owned land. The Council's approach would ensure compliance with environmental legislation. The site will be managed by Council operatives in order to prevent commercial waste from being dumped. Many items such as gas canisters, asbestos, batteries, etc would not be accepted and residents would be directed to the household waste recycling centre. The use of a van was also available to dispose of any electrical white goods.

Members discussed the arrangements for the pilot scheme in detail. The scheme would only be available to residents of Boston. It was confirmed that residents would be able to contact the Council to arrange a booking slot for them to bring their unwanted household items to the collection point for disposal. Members requested that assistance also be given to any residents attending without an appointment. If successful, officers would investigate the potential for purchasing skips, rather than hiring, and they would also look to place them throughout the more rural areas of the Borough. Members noted that the skips would be staffed from existing resources.

It was agreed that the pilot would commence on Monday 19th August 2024 and each Monday for a four week period, and on Monday 4th November 2024 and each Monday for a four week period.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Callum Butler and seconded by Councillor John Baxter.

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet approve a trial for the use of community skips within the Borough within the next six months, to be provided on Monday 19th August 2024 and each Monday for a four week period, and on Monday 4th November 2024 and each Monday for a four week period.

24 To allocate funding to relocate Boston Borough Council's ICT server room to South Holland District Council

The Assistant Director – Corporate presented a report which sought allocation of funding to allow the relocation of Boston Borough Council's ICT server room to South Holland District Council.

Members noted the proposal to relocate Boston Borough Council's ICT server room to the offices of South Holland District Council. It was necessary to refresh the aging network infrastructure to ensure continued availability and integrity of the computer network. The proposal also sought to remove a number of environmental risks that were associated with the current ICT server room; lack of fire suppression, inadequate battery backup and utilisation of a room that was below an identified flood line.

The Assistant Director – Corporate stated that the opportunity was afforded due to the collaborative working between the Councils resulting from the formation of the Partnership. It was underpinned and supported by a multi-site, multi-skilled ICT team, through PSPS. The proposal supported the longer term aspiration of a combined ICT environment and/or a Partnership wide move to cloud hosting. He advised that the Cabinet was requested to allocate £120,000 in the capital programme and support the addition of £20,000 to revenue to fund the proposal.

Councillor Sarah Sharpe queried whether the internet speed at the Council had been tested. She requested assurance that no one would be negatively affected by the changes. The Assistant Director – Corporate advised that assurance had been given by ICT that the infrastructure and the links would be sufficient to cope with demand.

Councillor Sarah Sharpe mentioned that she had also been provided with a breakdown of the hardware, brands and model numbers, and that she was content that they would making a best value purchase. The Assistant Director – Corporate added that they would continue to investigate best value options.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Anne Dorrian and seconded by Councillor Sarah Sharpe.

RESOLVED:

That, in order to invest in aging ICT infrastructure and to allow the relocation of the ICT server room to South Holland District Council, the Cabinet approve the addition of £120,000 to the Capital Programme and, if required, £20,000 to the revenue budget, to be financed from the Capital Reserve, and to note the implications for future year's budgets.

25 Pool Car Renewal

The Assistant Director – Corporate presented a report which proposed a refresh of the Council's Pool Car fleet, which was now 13 years old and was becoming costly to maintain. This involved replacing the existing five cars with three electric cars and one petrol van.

Members noted that it was possible to reduce the fleet due to changes in working practices over recent years and a reduction in journeys. The move to electric would also support the Council's environmental agenda. The petrol van had been selected for longer journeys, as might be required from time to time, whilst also providing increased capacity for those services that were required to transport larger pieces of operational equipment.

The Assistant Director – Corporate explained that the pool car fleet was used by officers when undertaking Council business and remained a cost effective way for officers to travel and that it was cheaper than using their own vehicles and claiming expenses. He advised that procurement would be carried out alongside the purchases being made with East Lindsey to try and maximise the potential of joint procurement between the Councils. The Cabinet had been requested to add £68,000 to its capital programme to fund the vehicles, which would be funded from the Minimum Revenue Provision.

Councillor Callum Butler raised concerns in respect of moving to fully electric vehicles, and also that the proposed vehicles had been discontinued. The Assistant Director – Corporate advised that the vehicles would be under warranty and also added that the Council was receiving a significant discount on their purchase of 42%. Members noted that the approved Environment Policy also gave support to the proposal.

Members requested clarity in respect of the operation of the vehicle and the booking system. The Assistant Director – Corporate advised there was no requirement for any type of mechanical security pass and that manual logs continue to be maintained, in addition to the online booking system. Members noted the importance of ensuring staff safety when using the vehicles, for example, if one should run out of power. The Assistant Director – Corporate clarified that use of the booking system would ensure that officers' whereabouts were known and that there would be someone on hand to assist if required.

Councillor Sarah Sharpe queried whether the utility contracts were being reviewed in light of requiring electrical charging points. The Assistant Director – Corporate advised that the utility contract was currently being reviewed. He added that the Council already had some charging points in the car park for staff with electric vehicles.

Councillor John Baxter queried whether the purchase of a hybrid van had been investigated. The Assistant Director – Corporate confirmed that the hybrid model was considerably more expensive, but would be looked into further if requested. He added that a vehicle running solely on fuel would have more capacity for longer journeys.

Following members requests to purchase the vehicles from local suppliers if possible, the Assistant Director – Corporate agreed to liaise with local suppliers to enquire as to whether the Council could get a better deal than the 42% currently on offer.

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

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet:

- 1. Approve the addition of £68,000 to the Capital Programme to enable the purchase of pool car vehicles; and**
- 2. Note that the capital expenditure would be financed through MRP (Minimum Revenue Provision) over the 7 year anticipated life of the assets; also facilitating future replacement in accordance with asset-life.**

26 LGA Peer Challenge - report and action plan

The Leader presented the report which brought forward the findings from the Corporate Peer Challenge, attached in Appendix A within the report, and the Council's action plan, attached in Appendix B within the report, in response.

Members noted that the peer team had provided their thoughts on what the Council does well and they had given some commentary on areas to focus on within their report. The peer team had recognised the excellent work that had been undertaken to secure £76,000,000 of government investment in recent years, and many of those projects were now coming to fruition. They had also recognised the ongoing effort to support the improvements in the town centre through the new town centre strategy, and the work being done in the wider community.

The Leader emphasised that the peer team had recognised that the Council had a lot to be proud of and to celebrate, particularly its strong performance culture, which was helping to drive improvements in our services, and the management of budgets. She added that the peer team had acknowledged that the Council's officers were committed and proud of what they did, and she gave her appreciation for all their work.

Members noted the positive comments within the report, and confirmed that they were also proud of the result. The Leader thanked the Assistant Director – Corporate and his team for their work.

Councillor John Baxter queried whether officers had been consulted and mentioned the potential for a staff suggestion scheme. The Assistant Director – Corporate advised that there was a very active staff forum across the partnership that were really engaged in these types of projects. He added that he would also be providing them with the results of the action plan. The Deputy Chief Executive – Communities added that they also carried out regular consultation exercises and ensured staff engagement.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Anne Dorrian and seconded by Councillor John Baxter.

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet:

- 1. Note the findings from the LGA's Corporate Peer Challenge, as detailed in Appendix A; and**
- 2. Approve the action plan in Appendix B.**

The Meeting ended at 7.45 pm.