

Present: Councillors Mike Gilbert (Chairman), Dr Gurdip Samra (Vice-Chairman), Alison Austin, Mark Baker, Paul Gleeson, Paul Goodale, Yvonne Gunter, Paul Kenny, Tiggs Keywood-Wainwright, Bob McAuley, Derek Richmond, Stephen Woodliffe and Mary Wright

Portfolio holders: Councillors Peter Bedford and Raymond Singleton-McGuire

Officers in attendance for the flood recovery update only: Strategic Director & Deputy Chief Executive, Head of Housing, Health & Community Services, Principal Community Safety Officer, Principal Officer (Street Scene) and Communications and Marketing Manager

Other officers: Head of Financial Services, Senior Accountant and Senior Democratic Services Officer

Observer: County Councillor Sue Ransome

## **19 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 October 2013 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## **20 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gloria Smith, Carol Taylor and David Owens and also from Richard Harbord, the Chief Executive.

## **21 URGENT ITEM**

The Chairman suggested that an urgent item, submitted by Councillor Alison Austin, should be deferred until the next meeting. The item, circulated to Members prior to the meeting, was:

*“In light of the damage suffered to St Botolph's Church as a result the flooding last week I would like to move a proposition that BTAC award an appropriate sum of money from BTAC reserves towards the clean up and restoration of the church.*

*The contribution that this magnificent Church brings to Boston cannot be measured in monetary terms but it's upkeep is dependant mainly upon the generosity of those worshipping there.*

*The finances of the church were already severely stretched at the end of the extensive period of internal restoration.*

*I hope that all other members of BTAC will feel able to support this request and that this will be treated as a matter of urgency.”*

A Member advised the Committee that St. Botolph's had reported being well insured and did not need this money; it would be better given to people in need.

Councillor Austin asked that the item be deferred until the next meeting in case St. Botolph's found this was not the situation. There was no objection to this.

## **22 FLOOD RECOVERY UPDATE**

The Chairman said the floods, which had hit Boston on 5<sup>th</sup> December, had revealed the resilience and community spirit of the public and he thanked everyone involved in the response work.

The Committee then received an update from the Strategic Director & Deputy Chief Executive, the Head of Housing, Health & Community Services, the Principal Community Safety Officer and the Principal Officer (Street Scene), who described the events as they unfolded and explained the current position with respect to post-flood recovery work.

Members had several questions and views, including:

- What was the cost to the authority?
- What could Councillors do to help?
- People should sign up to Floodline; could the Council do a mass drop of Floodline cards? The Floodline cards had no information in other languages.
- Why did the EA not let the water go up through Sluice Bridge and Black Sluice?
- Prevention and warning measures had not been good enough.
- The EA should publicise the fact that sandbags were being brought in for the breaches as the public were criticising them for bringing them in too late.
- Many people in the town area could not afford insurance against flooding.
- People were confused about how to deal with flooding and Members needed to have a thorough debate about the matter with the agencies involved.
- The officers were commended for their tremendous efforts.

The Chairman advised the Committee that the area's response to the flood would be taken through the appropriate scrutiny committee in due course.

The Strategic Director informed the Committee that discussions would be held with the Department for Communities and Local Government regarding a claim for funding to cover all costs incurred by the floods. Boston was currently in the recovery stage and would remain so for a considerable time, but all items of expenditure were being monitored. The County Council took the lead for the response to the floods and would hold a formal inquiry into the response as a matter of course. The Council would participate in the inquiry, including all Members. There would be an initial meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2013, at which Members' views would be fed back, and a de-briefing meeting would be held in January.

## **23 FORMATION OF A NEW TOWN COUNCIL**

The Leader presented a report by the Chief Executive, concerning proposed changes to the procedure for the formation of a town council, which would be implemented by September 2014.

The Chief Executive's report of 13 February 2013 had set out the current procedure, which the Government wished to simplify to encourage more parish councils to be formed in line

with the localism agenda. Consultation had run from October 2012 to January 2013. The Government's response was published in September 2013.

Currently, the number of signatures required from a community in a petition to the local authority to begin the process was between 10-50% depending on the number of electors. On receipt of the petition the local authority would agree terms of reference for a Community Governance Review and there was no time limit set for this. Once terms of reference were agreed the authority would have to complete the review in a 12-month period.

Proposed changes included timescales being limited to 12 months from receipt of a petition and the number of signatures required on the petition reduced to 7.5% of electors for all but very small communities. Legislation would clarify the proposals.

If necessary, the Chief Executive would report to the Cabinet about the matter. The review would require 2 full time employees to complete it in 12 months and, with consultation, would cost around £70,000, which the Council would meet.

Some Members welcomed the changes as the way forward; BTAC needed to change and democracy would be improved in line with the Localism agenda and public engagement, particularly as, in 2015, more people outside the town would set the precept than those inside the area. Others felt BTAC did not need to change at all and the public would not want to spend this amount of money on an extra layer of government. Some then contended that there would not be additional cost; the same precept would be incurred and it would be the same layer of local government as the parish councils.

The issue of Members not having to live within the town area to become Members of BTAC was compared to parishes. It was clarified that people did not need to live within a parish to become a parish councillor; they had to live within 3 miles of the boundary or own land or a business within the parish. It was remarked that Members living outside the town area still represented the people who lived there.

The Chairman stated that the process was intended to benefit larger areas than Boston town; to introduce it here would result in the Council's demise.

<b>RESOLVED: That the report be noted.</b>	<b>RH</b>
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#### **24 REQUEST FOR DONATION FROM FOUR VILLAGES DAY CARE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

The Committee considered a request for a donation from the Four Villages Day Care Management Committee for its Day Care Centre with respect to Boston town clients.

The Committee had made three donations in the past on the basis that there were no facilities in the town that the Boston town clients could attend. The last request was for the year 2011/12 when the Committee had approved a donation based on the cost for each person from the town area to take part in activities to be held at the day centre that year.

The report detailing the request suggested that, should the Committee wish to make a further donation, it could be made on the same basis. The proposed day centre activities, listed in the report, were estimated at £107 per client for the year, being a total of £535 for the 5 clients from the Boston town area.

Peter Barnes from the Day Care Committee answered questions and explained that the clients were collected and taken to the centre on Wednesdays, given lunch and provided with entertainment. The clients did pay a fee themselves, which varied, but was approximately £30 per day. This was a significant amount, but the day at the centre represented respite care and it had increased substantially in recent years. Bicker Parish Council and United Charities both contributed £100 per annum to the centre; they had no clients at the centre at present, but continued with the contributions. Mr Barnes did not know of the new day centre based in the former Riddlington's building. The clients should have personalised budgets from the County Council to cover travel costs etc; however, the request for a donation was towards the estimated cost of entertainment.

A Member commented that the Committee needed to ensure people had day care, to avoid isolation, and should make a donation to the centre. However, the Chairman, as portfolio holder, was asked to consider the provision of day care in the town with relevant stakeholders, such as Age Concern, and with respect to the wellbeing fund and debate this matter in a year's time to work to re-balance provision.

The Head of Financial Services confirmed that BTAC's uncommitted reserves at the end of the financial year were projected to be £35,000.

It was proposed and seconded that a donation be made based on the estimated cost of entertainment, as suggested in the report.

Mr Barnes thanked the Committee.

<b>RESOLVED: That a donation of £535 be made to the Four Villages Day Care Management Committee for the participation of 5 Boston town clients in day centre activities for one year.</b>	<b>JC</b>
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## **25 BTAC ANNUAL REPORT 2012/13**

The Committee considered a report, which attached an annual report of the Committee's activities in 2012/13.

The annual report had been drafted following a request for feedback from people and organisations who had received BTAC Community Grants, which appeared in Part 7 of the report. It was suggested that the report be submitted to full Council in the same way as the scrutiny annual reports and also the first annual report produced for the Planning Committee and then published on the website.

Members commented that it was important for committees to produce annual reports, to give an insight into their work, and the practice should continue. Although BTAC did not require full Council approval, it was felt appropriate to submit the annual report in the same way as the annual reports of other committees. It was further suggested that a précis be

considered to send out with council tax bills so that residents could see where some of the precept had been spent, though only if the cost was not prohibitive.

<b>RESOLVED: That the draft BTAC Annual Report for 2012/13 be submitted to full Council for approval.</b>	<b>JC / Chairman</b>
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## **26 BTAC FINANCIAL UPDATE REPORT 2013/14 AND BUDGET SETTING 2014/15-2018/19**

The Head of Financial Services and Senior Accountant presented the Committee's financial update report for 2013/14 and budget setting information for 2014/15 – 2018/19.

The forecast revenue outturn for 2013/14 projected an under spend of £2,000. The reserves were healthy with a projected closing balance of approximately £35,000. A 0% increase in council tax was recommended within the five-year budget setting plan.

Appendix 1 showed the income and expenditure breakdown for 2013/14. The main change was the three allotment sites transferring over to allotment associations, resulting in an estimated saving of just over £2,000 for the year.

Appendix A provided the budget estimates for 2014/15 – 2018/19. An amended copy of the detailed breakdown in Appendix A1 was circulated to the Committee, as the original did not show the figures for the reserves. The reserves were forecast to reduce, despite the projected increases in council tax over the next five years. A recommended reserve balance was £10,000; therefore, whilst BTAC currently had over £25,000 that could be used to fund projects, spending reductions would be needed in the future if any of this was to be considered available to spend.

The budget estimates for the next five years were summarised as follows:

- A proposed BTAC precept requirement for 2014/15 of £114,120 (compared to £116,200 for 2013/14), which included the provision of Council Tax Support Grant of £8,840 (compared to £11,780 for 2013/14).
- The adjusted Tax base for 2014/15 was 8276.70 (compared to 8209.09 for 2013/14).
- No increase in Council Tax band D was proposed in 2014/15; it would remain at £12.72 as for 2013/14.
- The cost per week for 2014/15 would remain £0.24, with most households paying less.
- The levels of reserves at 31 March 2014 still remained relatively high at around £35,000, subject to any further decisions BTAC took with regard to future spending.

With respect to the last point, assuming this spend continued and the Council Tax Support Grant reduced in line with RSG reductions, reserves would fall towards the assumed reasonable level to be held at £10,000 (forecast as £11,775 in 2018/19), if there were no adjustments to spending or council tax levels. At this time, it was anticipated that future years' budgets would be amended to balance income and expenditure annually.

The proposed budget requirement and demand on Council Tax was illustrated in the report. BTAC's budget requirement for the year was £114,120 if there was a nil increase in Council Tax. Appendix A1 showed that this was sufficient to cover expenditure for

2014/15. The forward estimates allowed for a 2% increase in BTAC's Council Tax charge per annum from 2016/17 onwards.

During Members' debate, there was satisfaction that BTAC had managed to pay for everything it had wished to and had still retained a reserve balance of £35,000. However, it was felt that expenditure should be reviewed in line with BTAC's priorities and the best use for the area's residents, which might become clear following de-briefing meetings about the flood.

In response to questions, it was reported that BTAC's expenditure had also increased on utilities etc. The projections were based on the current situation, which would change; BTAC would be urged to consider its deficits long before 2018/19. The income previously received from the allotments had never been sufficient to cover the costs they incurred.

Members discussed BTAC's grounds maintenance recharge. There was concern about the proportion of the total budget spent on this and it was felt a breakdown of spend would be useful. The recharge for the Garfit's Lane small recreation area was said to be £29,000 because BTAC had no option but to buy grounds maintenance services from the Council; it could not contract out the service, unlike parish councils and charitable bodies. It was asserted that if the service was run on BTAC's behalf by a charitable body, it would not have to pay rates or for grass cutting, which was the arrangement in most parishes. The Ward Member for Garfit's Lane pointed out that she had requested its consideration as a future agenda item.

Some Members expressed concern that figures were not provided for them to consider an alternative option for 2014/15. For example, raising the precept by a small amount would avoid a large increase in later years and there were no restrictions on raising parish council precepts. However, it was also felt that, as BTAC was carrying a significant amount of reserves currently, it could avoid an increase for 2014/15 and then look to preventing the reserves being depleted thereafter.

It was reported that there could be restrictions on raising parish council precepts by 2015. As a guide, an increase of 1% on the BTAC precept would provide an additional £1,000.

<b>RESOLVED that:</b>	<b>PJ / DH</b>
<b>1. The 2013/14 projected outturn position at 30 November 2013 be noted;</b>	
<b>2. The level of BTAC's Special Area Expense for 2014/15, and the Band D Council Tax of £12.72 be recommended to Cabinet and Council.</b>	

## **27 AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Committee's next meeting was scheduled to take place 26<sup>th</sup> February 2014. There had been a request to change this date as it clashed with the inauguration of the new vicar at St. Botolph's. It was agreed to put the meeting back to 5<sup>th</sup> March 2014.

The following items were agreed as business for a future agenda:

- Garfit's Lane recreation area
- Bench relocations
- Unspent Neighbourhood Groups Grant
- Transported Project

It was suggested that the amount of BTAC Community Grant ring-fenced for neighbourhood groups be moved back because no further applications had come forward. There was a request for Transported Project to report back to the Committee on the scheme which saw large vehicles being decorated to travel around Europe; it was claimed that the public had not been consulted on this scheme and had, therefore, not been valid.

<b>Action:</b> Make arrangements to postpone the date of the next meeting from 26 <sup>th</sup> February to 5 <sup>th</sup> March 2014.	<b>JC</b>
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(The meeting finished at 8.10 p.m.)