

BOSTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

NOTICE OF DECISIONS TAKEN BY CABINET ON 24 FEBRUARY 2021

DATE OF PUBLICATION: FRIDAY, 26 FEBRUARY 2021

DEADLINE FOR CALL-IN: FRIDAY, 5 MARCH 2021

NOTES:

MINUTE NUMBER 142, BEING A STARRED MINUTE, WILL BE REFERRED TO FULL COUNCIL ON 1 MARCH 2021.

A COPY OF THE CABINET AGENDA HAS BEEN PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL. IF YOU REQUIRE ANY FURTHER INFORMATION ON ANY ISSUE PLEASE CONTACT, IN THE FIRST INSTANCE, THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER OR OFFICER NAMED IN THE RIGHT HAND COLUMN.

MEETING OF THE CABINET

24 February 2021

Present:

Councillor Paul Skinner, in the Chair
Councillors Tracey Abbott, Richard Austin BEM, Martin Griggs, Jonathan Noble, Yvonne Stevens and Nigel Welton

Officers –

Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive (Place) & Monitoring Officer, Section 151 Officer, Assistant Director - Regulation, Climate Change & Environment Manager, Accountancy Manager - Revenue and Systems, Senior Democratic Services Officer and Democratic Services Apprentice

135 MINUTES

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 27th January 2021 were received and would be signed by the Chairman.

136 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

137 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

No declarations were made.

138 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Question from Darron Abbott:

“At the cabinet meeting in May 2020 it was agreed to by new cremators for the crematorium, these were to be delivered by the 1 August 2020. Would Councillor Noble please confirm the new cremators were delivered and are in fact working and providing the town capacity to cope with the unprecedented circumstances we find ourselves in at the moment.”

Response from Councillor Noble:

“On 20 May 2020, the Council’s Cabinet resolved to approve the purchase of a temporary replacement cremator (not **cremators**) and I am pleased to say that a new cremator is in situ at the crematorium and is operating at its planned capacity of up to six cremations each working day. I am further pleased to be able to advise that rather than installing a temporary cremator, we were able to install a cremator that can remain in situ permanently for its lifetime.

“Installation did not however go without its challenges and we are still working with our engineers to secure a permanent flueing solution so we can bring a further report that explains our longer term solution, including the potential addition of abatement. As agreed on 20 May 2020, Scrutiny will be able to consider the report in advance of any recommendations to the Cabinet.

“As well as serving the town and wider Borough, some 35% of the funerals that take place at the Crematorium come to us from outside our Borough; the new equipment we have does allow us to increase the number of cremations above planned capacity if required, however, I and I’m sure everyone hopes that that will not be necessary. Meeting the needs and expectations of bereaved families is so important to us and we are committed to offering a dignified and efficient service to all who have lost loved ones.”

Supplementary question from Mr Abbott:

“At the same meeting that it was agreed to purchase the new cremators it was revealed that there we still 2 years worth of loan repayments due on the old ones also the Council were still making payments payments for a maintenance contract even though no maintenance was being carried out. Payments were being made for repairs that were not being done to a satisfactory level. The portfolio holder at the time promised a full investigation into the debacle. Could you please update us all on the progress of this investigation and when we should expect the findings of that investigation. Will you also confirm that the report will detail the amount outstanding on loan repayments along with the money wasted on the maintenance contract and poor repairs along with the details of the officers responsible?”

Response from Councillor Noble:

“Thank you for your supplementary question; there is no loan outstanding on the previous cremators. The Council ceased paying the Contractor’s invoices from December 2019 and all invoices up until the Contractor went into liquidation in March 2020 were unpaid. In total a sum of £8,269.65 was withheld. In addition to this a claim was filed to the Liquidator for £13,987, the outcome of which is presently unknown. The recommendations from the Cabinet report of 20th May 2020 do not request an investigation into the matter but do recommend that a follow up report about longer term solution, including the potential addition of abatement be presented to Scrutiny in due course. The Cabinet report itself contained financial detail regarding losses and expenditure on the former maintenance contract. The Contractor was responsible for its own poor performance, and as a result eventually entered into liquidation which left not only Boston, but many other crematoria without maintenance support.”

139 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY (STANDING ITEM)*

Recommendations were contained within the reports on the agenda.

140 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE BOSTON TOWN AREA COMMITTEE (BTAC) (STANDING ITEM)

There were none for this meeting.

141 CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT UPDATE

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| DECISION | Portfolio Holders and Officer |
| 1. That the progress already achieved in delivering the nine recommendations approved by Full Council in January 2020 is recognised and the next steps as outlined in this paper are supported. | PS/SB |
| 2. That the Environment Policy be adopted. | |

REASON FOR DECISION

The Leader introduced a report by the Climate Change & Environment Manager, which detailed the progress made by the Council against the nine recommendations agreed by Full Council in January 2020 (Appendix A), attached a draft Environmental Policy for Members’ consideration (Appendix B) and set out the next steps to be taken.

The Climate Change Working Group, established by the Committee, had submitted the nine recommendations to Full Council, but the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted progress and the necessary resources to take the work forward had only been identified recently. The Climate Change & Environment Manager had been working with the Assistant Director - Regulation since August 2020.

The Strategic Alliance with East Lindsey District Council (ELDC) gave a renewed opportunity to pick up this work and to share knowledge and experience to help both authorities take action on the climate change agenda.

The Council's new Corporate Strategy for 2020-24 included a priority around environmental awareness and accountability. This contained several commitments including developing a Carbon Reduction Plan and ensuring that every service and policy delivered on the Council's climate change commitments.

The Council was in the process of commissioning the Carbon Trust to produce a new Carbon Reduction Plan, which would also provide an updated baseline of the current carbon footprint. Work would begin on this in early 2021. The Carbon Trust had recently completed a similar exercise for ELDC and it was hoped there would be opportunities to align both plans and identify savings through joint projects.

The nine recommendations demonstrated a clear intention to embed a culture of environmental consideration and carbon reduction across all areas of the Council. To ensure this happened, the Environment Policy would set the framework under which relevant plans and strategies, such as the Carbon Reduction Plan, would sit. It was a simple mandate for climate change and environment action with four main themes that would ensure every service area was working to an agreed set of objectives consistent with the new corporate priority.

It was also important that all Council staff had an awareness of the far-reaching implications of climate change, the multiple benefits that taking action could achieve and an understanding of where changes could be made. A Carbon Literacy training programme was in development to be rolled out to all staff and Members in 2021.

The next step would be to produce a Climate Change Strategy for the Strategic Alliance as a whole, which would set the context for Boston and East Lindsey. The Strategy would identify key sectors and stakeholders with which to engage and set out an action plan for ensuring the Council and ELDC worked collaboratively to reduce emissions and enhance the natural environment for residents, businesses and visitors.

The draft Environmental Policy had been considered and supported by the Environment & Performance and Corporate & Community Committees. A minor amendment had been agreed that the promotion of sustainable travel behaviours amongst local authority employees be extended to include Members.

During debate, the Environmental Policy was commended as a concise and punchy document that represented the start of a new direction with significant next steps to follow. Members recognised that individuals needed to play their part, as well as businesses and organisations, including parishes, across the borough, and this would ensure more rapid progress. Although the environmental impact of the Council's own operations was relatively small, it could lead the way for others by setting an example.

In response to questions, the Chief Executive explained that the three roles in the climate change and environment team, to be established across the Strategic Alliance, would be filled by the redeployment of staff time through the efficiencies being created through the alliance; it would not be an additional cost.

The Climate Change & Environment Manager agreed that the Council's community leadership role was key and the aim was to get everyone involved and contributing by ensuring they had the tools and knowledge to do so.

With respect to Theme 2 within the policy, *Mitigating and adapting to climate change*, the Leader noted a Member's concern that provision of a loch was needed beside the flood barrier to mitigate against flooding.

Members thanked the Climate Change & Environment Manager for achieving a considerable amount of work within a short timeframe and they looked forward to the development of the next steps.

OTHER OPTIONS OR ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The Council could decide to take no further action; however, this would go against the intentions of the climate change and environment emergency declared in January 2020 and make it almost impossible for the Council to meet the target it has set to reduce its carbon emissions in advance of timetable set out by the UK Parliament.

RECORD OF ANY CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

RECORD OF ANY DISPENSATION GRANTED

None.

***142 2021/22 BUDGET SETTING REPORT AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY, AND COUNCIL TAX**

DECISION

That the following be recommended to Full Council:

- 1. The Draft Budget and Medium-Term projections; and**
- 2. A Council Tax increase of £4.95 (2.57%)**

Portfolio Holders and Officer

**JN
AS/TS**

REASON FOR DECISION

The Portfolio Holder introduced a report, which presented a proposed budget, Medium-Term projections and a council tax increase of £4.95 (2.57%) for Cabinet to consider following the public consultation exercise in order to make a recommendation to Full Council, which would consider the report on 1st March.

The draft summary set out the Council's revenue position for the 2021/22 Budget and the 5-year Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to 2025/26. It showed a predicted surplus for 2021/22 of £98,000, followed by the need to make savings in future years in order to maintain a balanced budget position without drawing down on reserves.

The level of savings needed from 2022/23 had been reported as approximately £700,000. However, following the decision by Full Council on 15th February to accept the proposal to become a shareholder in Public Sector Partnership Services (PSPS) Limited, the savings required had reduced to £500,000. This was a healthy financial position in view of the challenges currently being experienced throughout local government, but it was essential for the Council to continue to be prudent going forward.

The budget assumed an increase in council tax of £4.95 (2.57%) for 2021/22 and 2% per annum thereafter, which was in line with current known referendum limits of £5 or 2%, whichever was the greater. Set in context, the proposed increase was modest compared to the increase of £15 for Lincolnshire Police and £26 for the County Council.

The increase in the council tax allowed for £36,000 growth for implementation of the Living Wage Foundation and £60,000 for Internal Drainage Board (IDB) levy increases to be absorbed. There was also a £100,000 provision for potential sales and fees income shortfalls, following the additional risk to income collection levels.

For future years, it was expected that the predicted deficit could be partially offset by further Strategic Alliance savings, PSPS transformation savings and other service reviews that would be undertaken during the following year.

It also noted that the Council was expected to have around £13m in reserves at the end of 2021/22.

In conclusion, the Portfolio Holder considered the overall financial position of the authority to be generally healthy in view of the current economic pressures and as compared to several other authorities across the country. Whilst savings were likely to be required moving forward, depending on future government funding announcements, these were achievable with careful financial management. The Portfolio Holder added thanks to the officers for their hard work and professional advice.

During debate, reference was made to the financial burden placed on the Council by the collection of the IDB levy. The Portfolio Holder advised Members that, should Cabinet agree the budget, a press release would be issued to explain this to the public.

The adverse effect on services should council tax not be increased by the amount proposed was recognised and accepted. There was appreciation that the Council's lowest paid staff

would benefit by the implementation of the Living Wage.

OTHER OPTIONS OR ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

No other options have been considered as part of this report although Cabinet could decide utilise reserves to fund one-off schemes or to approve a Council Tax freeze. This would however increase the level of savings required in future years by around £100k per annum.

RECORD OF ANY CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

RECORD OF ANY DISPENSATION GRANTED

None.

The Meeting ended at 7.05 pm



Signed by the Chief Executive

FRIDAY, 26 FEBRUARY 2021

These decisions will come into force (and may then be implemented) on the expiry of five clear working days after the date of this notice UNLESS the decisions are subjected to the Call-In procedure, or are exempt from the Call-In procedure, or are starred minutes requiring Full Council approval.