

Minutes of Policy & Finance Committee

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 24 November 2009, starting at 7.00pm
Present: Councillor E M H Ranson (Chairman)

Councillors:

R Croasdale	A Knox
D Eccleston	R E Sherras
K Hind	D T Smith
S Hirst	J S Sutcliffe
J Holgate	R J Thompson
S Hore	N C Walsh

In attendance: Chief Executive, Director of Resources, Director of Development Services, Director of Community Services and the Principal Policy and Performance Officer.

586 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor J Rogerson.

587 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

588 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

589 MATTERS ARISING

(a) Third Party Cash Collection

A Councillor sought an update on the progress with this change from the mobile office to third party cash collection and the Director of Resources responded that the new company had been appointed and arrangements were well underway.

(b) Clitheroe Cemetery

The Leader commented that he had received calls from the press asking for details about the Part II item discussed at last Committee but these requests had been refused because of the confidential nature of the item.

590 REVIEW OF CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2009/11

The Principal Policy and Performance Officer sought Committee's approval to the Council's Corporate Strategy 2009/11.

She reminded Committee that the Corporate Strategy set out the strategic direction for the Council for the period 2007/11, providing a focus to ensure that the services the Council delivered met the needs of our communities.

The strategy contained three corporate ambitions to address issues that mattered most to the borough. The Council's priorities were deliberately limited to focus our attention over the lifespan of the strategy. It had been agreed that instead of the existing 70-page document, a slimmed down and more focussed strategy should be produced. This did not include the numerous performance indicators which were available on the Council's website and also issues which were otherwise included within the Council's annual report. It was proposed that in future a new document would also be produced following the end of the financial year, which would provide a summary of the Council's achievements during the previous year. This would include progress against the Corporate Strategy, other key Council achievements, key performance indicators and important service statistics. This would be a document intended for internal use and would be made available to senior officers and Members.

Members then discussed the document and welcomed the slimmed down version.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the Corporate Strategy 2009/2011.

591 THE FUTURE OF THE LANCASHIRE ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP

The Director of Development Services submitted a report on the current situation regarding the Lancashire Economic Partnership (LEP). He sought Committee's views on what the structure and purpose of the Partnership should be. The report gave background information on how the LEP had evolved from a merger between the East Lancashire Partnership and the Lancashire (West) Partnership in the early years of the decade.

The development of the Multi-Area Agreement (MAA) concept had given cause to consider whether the LEP had a continuing role and if so what that role should be. The Pennine Lancashire MAA had objectives that in many areas matched those of the LEP and the strategies it had prepare for the whole county. In the case of the Pennine Lancashire MAA, it had also secured the commitment of the North West Development Agency to long-term funding and support. This Council had been heavily involved in the Pennine Lancashire MAA process and were committed to its implementation. That implementation would fall largely upon the Pennine Lancashire Development Company overseen by the PLACE structure. The Council had been concerned for some time whether the LEP adequately addressed rural issues in Lancashire and the Partnership itself was quite substantially funded through district councils, the current contribution made by this Council was £21,000.

The Chairman reported that he and the Chief Executive had attended a recent meeting where a revised version of the LEP had been discussed. The Pennine Lancashire districts favoured the use of Multi-Agency Agreements to replace the work currently undertaken by the LEP. However, in the remainder of Lancashire,

Multi-Area Agreements had not yet been established and there was therefore some resistance from their Leaders to this proposal.

It was recognised that Lancashire did need a powerful voice when bidding for funding on a regional basis. In the end a compromise deal had been agreed where by a slimmed down board of 14 members drawn from the three Multi-Area Agreements in Lancashire and the private sector should meet to work on transitional arrangements which were aimed at transforming the way that the LEP operated. This new board would report direct to the political leadership from the County Council and Districts.

Councillor Sherras expressed his concern that the rural agenda as championed by Ribble Valley Borough Council was still in need of a potent voice on the board and sought guidance from Committee on how this Council could take that matter forward at the LEP Forum he was attending.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. note this report; and
2. that the LEP Forum be advised that this Council:
 - insist that there be at least one board member with a focus on rural Lancashire and its particular concerns and priorities;
 - agree that the contribution towards the LEP from this Council should be capped at £5,000; and
 - believe the board should be clearly focussed on the economic health of both rural and urban Lancashire.

592 LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN – COMPLAINT REGARDING CONCESSIONARY TRAVEL SCHEME

Committee received a report from the Legal Services Manager referring to a report from the Local Government Ombudsman which contained a finding of maladministration against the Council.

In September 2008, the Local Government Ombudsman had written to the Council with details of a complaint he had received from a local disabled resident. The complaint related to changes which occurred from the 1 April 2008 when the Government introduced a new national concessionary travel scheme entitling disabled people and those over 60 to free bus travel between 9.30am and 11.00pm on weekdays and at any time during weekends and public holidays.

This Council is part of a countywide scheme with a decision being taken by all Lancashire Authorities to operate the scheme on the basis of the statutory minimum. The Council therefore introduced the scheme on that basis.

The Ombudsman's investigations concentrated on the decision-making process as it related to service users rather than the final decision. Correspondence had taken place between Council Officers and the Local Government Ombudsman's

Investigator and it became apparent that the claim was one of several claims which had been made by The Royal National Institute for the Blind on behalf of disabled residents. By the time the complaint was received by the Ombudsman, a decision had already been taken by the Lancashire Authorities to change the initial decision ie to adopt the minimum requirements of the scheme by introducing a flat rate fee of 50p pre 9.30am. The Ombudsman's Investigator was informed of this and at the suggestion of the Ombudsman, a local settlement whereby the Council paid the complainant £100 in recognition of distress, was agreed. However the Ombudsman subsequently decided due to the wider implications of the decision to issue a report and make a formal finding of maladministration.

Members then discussed this matter in some detail, particularly in relation to what action, if any, should be taken to prevent similar matters arising in future.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. note the Ombudsman's findings; and
2. agree that where there are changes in policy, in future the Council would carry out equality impact assessments of those changes.

593 UPDATE ON RIBBLE VALLEY LOCALITY PLAN 2009

Committee were asked to consider the progress being made with the Ribble Valley Locality Plan 2009/10. Locality Plans summarise the activities of the different tiers of Local Government working together in a defined area. The 2009/10 Locality Plan listed six priorities for the Ribble Valley:

- Improving health and well-being;
- Better access to services;
- Improving opportunities for children and young people;
- Better asset management;
- Improving waste management; and
- Delivering the major development at Clitheroe Castle.

The plan outlined a total of 58 commitments and interventions under these heading which both Councils would deliver together or in their own right. Delivery was through existing business planning and performance management systems.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

594 CHANGES TO THE 2010/11 SERVICE PLANNING PROCESS

Committee discussed the report from the Principal Policy and Performance Officer which provided information on the changes to the service planning process for 2010/11.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

595 REVENUE MONITORING 2009/10

Committee considered the report of the Director of Resources on the position for the first six months of this year's revenue budget as far as this Committee was concerned.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

596 OVERALL REVENUE MONITORING 2009/10

Committee received the report of the Director of Resources giving the overall position on the revenue budget for the first half of the financial year.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

597 PLACE JOINT COMMITTEE AND THE PENNINE LANCASHIRE DEVELOPMENT COMPANY

The Chief Executive submitted his report on the progress on establishing the PLACE Joint Committee and the Pennine Lancashire Development Company. He commented that there had been a slight change in relation to the name of the new company which would now be known as the Pennine Lancashire Development Ltd. He confirmed that following a meeting of Elevate on 23 November 2009, the new company was now in existence and the Council was a member.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

598 CAPITAL MONITORING 2009/10

Committee were informed of progress to date with the capital programme for this Committee for the current financial year.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

599 OVERALL CAPITAL MONITORING 2009/10

The Director of Resources reported on the progress on the overall capital programme for the current financial year.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

600 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MONITORING 2009/10

Committee considered a progress report on treasury management activities for the period 1 April 2009 to 30 September 2009. This included sections on borrowing requirements, investments, Prudential indicators and approved organisations.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

601 CALCULATION OF COUNCIL TAX BASE

The Director of Resources reported on the Council Tax Base for 2010/11.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

602 REVENUES AND BENEFITS GENERAL REPORT

The Director of Resources submitted a report detailing the following items:

- National Non-Domestic Rates (NDR);
- Council Tax;
- Sundry Debtors;
- Housing Benefits – performance;
- Housing Benefits – benefit and right time indicators;
- Housing Benefit fraud;
- Housing Benefit overpayments.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

603 REPORT FROM REPRESENTATIVE ON OUTSIDE BODY – RIBBLE VALLEY CITIZENS' ADVICE BUREAU

Committee received a report from Councillor L Rimmer on the work of the Ribble Valley Citizens' Advice Bureau.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

604 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That by virtue of the next items of business being exempt information under Category 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be now excluded from the meeting.

605 CAA REPORT – ORGANISATIONAL ASSESSMENT

Committee were informed of the outcome of the Comprehensive Area Assessment and our Organisational Assessment report. Whilst Committee were given the detail on this, it was recognised that this information was embargoed hence the need for this item to be discussed in Part 2.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

606 RESTRUCTURE OF CORPORATE POLICY SECTION

Committee considered the report, which had previously been considered by Personnel Committee, on the restructure of the Corporate Policy Section, which currently consisted of four posts. The Chief Executive gave his comments in relation to each of those posts and the suggested changes he was making. Committee then discussed this matter in some detail.

RESOLVED: That Committee agree

1. the post of Corporate Services Manager be deleted from the establishment;
2. agree to the changes to the duties of the Corporate Policy Officer now entitled Principal Policy and Performance Officer;
3. agree to the changed duties of the Assistant Corporate Policy Officer; and
4. do not agree to the creation of an additional Corporate Communications Officer post as set out in the report, but agree to consider the matter at a later date if necessary.

607 BUDGET WORKING GROUP MINUTES

Committee received, for information, the minutes of the Budget Working Group held on 15 September 2009.

608 CLITHEROE CASTLE CAFÉ

The Director of Resources submitted a report on the financial performance of the Clitheroe Castle Café following the conclusion of the first full month of operation by this Council since the voluntary liquidation of Gold and Brown.

The report included the overall financial position including food purchases, labour costs and other costs.

Members then discussed this matter in some detail.

RESOLVED: That

1. the report be noted; and
2. further updates on the financial position be presented to the next meeting of the Community Committee and the Policy and Finance Committee.

609 NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES/COUNCIL TAX WRITE-OFFS

The Director of Resources submitted her report seeking Committee's approval to write-off certain National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) and Council Tax debts where the whereabouts of the debtor was unknown or they were in respect of bankrupt persons.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the writing off of £44,152.61 of NNDR debts and £2,691.37 of Council Tax debts where the debtors whereabouts was unknown.

(Councillors E M H Ranson and J S Sutcliffe declared an interest in the next item of business and left the meeting.) (Councillor R E Sherras acted as Chairman)

610

ROEFIELD EXTENSION AND CHANGING ROOMS – UPDATE

The Chief Executive reported on the latest position on the Roefield Scheme. He reminded Committee that the Council had agreed to a joint scheme with the Ribble Valley Sports and Recreation Association to extend the Roefield Leisure Centre and create new football changing rooms at Edisford. He gave details of the initial tender results, the tender evaluation process and potential savings and the new tenders which have subsequently been invited.

He reported on the results of those new tenders and the next steps in the negotiations.

RESOLVED: That

1. the report be noted; and
2. that if necessary a meeting of the Council's Emergency Committee be convened to discuss this matter further.

The meeting closed at 8.50pm.

If you have any queries on these minutes please contact Jane Pearson (414451).

(241109)

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