

Minutes of Policy & Finance Committee

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 8 June 2010 starting at 6.30pm
Present: Councillor E M H Ranson (Chairman)

Councillors:

R Croasdale	R E Sherras
J B Hill	D Smith
J Holgate	J S Sutcliffe
A Knox	R J Thompson
J Rogerson	N Walsh

In attendance: Chief Executive, Director of Resources, Director of Development Services, Director of Community Services, Legal Services Manager and the Revenues and Benefits Manager.

Also in attendance: Councillor J White, District Partnership Officer (LCC).

79 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors D Eccleston, K Hind and S Hirst.

80 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 March 2010 were approved as a correct subject to the deletion of Councillor Walsh from the attendance list and signed by the Chairman.

81 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following Councillors declared interest in the following agenda items as indicated.

Agenda item 7 – Revised Locality Plan – Councillor Knox
Agenda item 9 – Longridge FC Project – Councillor Rogerson
Agenda item 13 – Longridge Over 60s Club – Councillor Croasdale
Agenda item 22 – Disposal of Land to Ribble Valley Homes - Councillors Thompson and Knox
Agenda item 23 – Application for Discretionary Rate Relief – Councillor John Hill
Agenda item 27 – Roefield – Councillor J S Sutcliffe

82 REVIEW OF CITIZENS CHARTER

Committee received a report seeking their approval to an update of the Citizens Charter. Councillors were reminded that the Citizens Charter had been re-introduced in 2005 with its first edition being approved by this Committee in July of that year. It was reviewed in 2007 and decided that this document should then be reviewed on an annual basis. The main focus of the current revision had

been the updating of the service standards to reflect recent changes to service delivery and to ensure that all standards were measurable.

Key changes to service delivery included the changed enforcement responsibilities for parking, the development of a visitor website to enhance the Council's tourism provision and an increased focus on providing energy efficiency information and advice to all residents.

Members suggested a number of alterations and clarifications around the shared service contact centre, maintaining play areas, meeting targets and conditions imposed for art grants and future funding for CCTV.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the proposed amendments to the Council's Citizens Charter 2010.

83 RIBBLE VALLEY LOCALITY PLAN 2010

The Chief Executive presented for Council's approval, the Ribble Valley Locality Plan 2010. He explained that the plan summarised the activities of different tiers of local government working together in a defined area. The work was the main responsibility of this Council and the Lancashire County Council and its purpose was to inform citizens of major services being delivered in their area and to better understand the respective roles of the individual partners in delivering services to those citizens.

The Ribble Valley Locality Plan was structured around three headings and a number of priorities had been identified:

- **People**
 - Support and help older or vulnerable people
 - Build capacity of the children's trust
 - Promote and develop civic pride and local democracy
 - Improve community engagement
 - Improve access to services
 - Actively explore opportunities to 'social capital' volunteering and local lobbying
- **PLACE**
 - Improve street cleanliness
 - Winter maintenance
 - Develop allotment space
 - Improve the environment and local sustainability
 - Improve and expand culture, arts and leisure opportunities
- **Prosperity**
 - Develop town centre plans for Longridge and Whalley
 - Explore what we do as employers in terms of work experience, apprenticeships etc.

Members welcomed the plan as it showed good working relations between officers of both Ribble Valley and Lancashire County Council. Members asked a

number of specific questions around issues such as teletalk, the use of the multi agency bus and Lancashire County Council's future commitment to the Parish Lengthsmen scheme.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the Ribble Valley Locality Plan for 2010/11.

84 MOBILE RESOURCE UNIT

The Director of Community Services updated Members with changes made from the original performance reward grant (PRG) project that had been approved by Committee in March 2010. He commented that since the projects had been approved, the Council had been approached by Rossendale Borough Council who had been developing a similar project. They had managed to secure funding through the north west improvement and efficiency partnership with the aim of improving the take up of Council and partner services. The funding both capital and revenue was available over a three year period with a view that the project would be self sustaining after that period. In order to make it affordable in the short term, Rossendale had approached other Councils in Pennine Lancashire to take part. Pendle had committed to a three year agreement and this Council's Chief Executive had indicated if there were advantages over our current scheme, then this Council should do likewise.

The Director of Community Services explained the differences between the dedicated and shared resource which were as follows:

Dedicated resource entailed 'covering the full cost of purchase'.

The willingness of partners to contribute both in cash and kind to a full time operation.

Staff time to both programme the vehicle and provide a full time presence, whereas a shared resource meant that there was no purchase costs but a revenue contribution of £15,000 per annum, provision of a dedicated driver and customer advisor through help direct would be available for each partners use. The use of the vehicle for one week in three rather than full time and less commitment was needed from partners and staff.

The Director of Community Services commented that having reflected on the two options, it was felt that the shared resource would be preferable.

Members then discussed the livery, publicity arrangements and the need for a three year trial for this project.

RESOLVED: That Committee endorses the change to a shared facility with Rossendale and Pendle Borough Councils.

85 LONGRIDGE GRANTS UPDATE REPORT

The Director of Development Services provided an update report for the only remaining Longridge grant capital scheme, Longridge Town Football Club and asked Committee to consider extensions to the programme deadlines. He

reminded Members that the Longridge Town Football Club had been delayed pending the outcome of a funding bid to the Football Foundation. Unfortunately, the scheme proposed for Longridge by the Football Foundation was out of reach for the club and as a consequence they had revised the project resulting in a considerable change from the scheme originally proposed. This revised project, whilst still proposing the construction of a clubhouse, meeting and changing room facilities, would be developed with substantially reduced costs of around £100,000 from that originally proposed. The project had originally anticipated that match funding would be secured through a variety of organisations. Unfortunately, the football club was unsuccessful in obtaining grant funding from the Football Foundation, National Sports Foundation and Ribble Valley Borough Council's recreation grants. However, a successful application had been made to SITA Trust without match funding being available for other sources this offer had lapsed and subsequently been withdrawn.

The Borough Council was able to contribute £10,000 towards the scheme instead of the £20,000 that the project had originally applied for. The original working group set up to appraise projects under the Longridge grant scheme had considered the revised scheme and still considered it to be in line with the original objectives set out in the project application form. The group considered the issue of reduced funding in line with the new total expenditure anticipated.

The revised scheme proposed by Longridge Town Football Club represented a considerable change from the original scheme both in terms of expenditure and scope. However, the project had retained its original aim and objectives under which it applied for the funding. The original £10,000 grant allocated to the project was still available and had been carried forward into the current financial year in anticipation of the project completing its works this year.

Councillor White was given permission to speak on this item and he urged Committee to support the extension of the deadline to September 2010.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. note the information provided; and
2. agree that £10,000 be paid to the project forthwith subject to satisfactory safeguards relating to the implementation of the scheme within an acceptable timetable and its use.

86

DUTY TO RESPOND TO PETITIONS

Committee received a comprehensive report on the new duty to respond to petitions which would come into effect on 15 June 2010 and also to seek approval for the elements of the Ribble Valley Petition Scheme that had been modified when tailoring the model scheme to meet the Council's needs. The report provided a summary of requirements and details were given as to how to design and to respond to petitions. There were also a number of exclusions including petitions which were vexatious, abusive and otherwise inappropriate.

Members then discussed at some length, the minimum number of signatories required for a petition to be heard by the Council. It was agreed to change the requirement to 600 signatories which would trigger a debate at Full Council and 300 signatories for calling a senior officer to give evidence at Overview and Scrutiny. A petition with 10 or more would be referred to the relevant Service Committee.

*** RESOLVED: It be a recommendation to Council to approve the petition scheme as included at Appendix A to these minutes subject to approving the proposals outlined in Section 9 above and subject to the changes relating to the numbers of signatories required to trigger a debate at Full Council and senior officers to give evidence at Overview and Scrutiny Committee. ***

87 REVISION OF GAMBLING STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

The Legal Services Manager reported that this Council was required to formulate a Statement of Principles (Gambling) which was to be reviewed every three years. The Council's Licensing Committee had considered the current statement of principles at its meeting on 17 November and again on 16 March 2010 following a consultation exercise. The Licensing Committee had decided to make no changes to the Council's Statement of Principles other than to update addresses, contact details etc.

Only one response had been received in relation to the consultation exercise which did not materially affect the Council's proposals.

*** RESOLVED: That Committee approve the Gambling Statement of Principles and refer it to Full Council. ***

88 REVENUES AND BENEFITS SERVICE PLAN 2010/11

The Revenues and Benefits Manager submitted a report seeking Committee's approval for the annual service plan that covered the work of the revenues and benefits section of the Director of Resources' department.

He highlighted the increase in benefit claims which had happened over the recent months and the difficulties currently being experienced in collecting business rates (National Non Domestic Rates) in the current financial climate. He also explained some overtime was necessary to keep on top of the sheer volume of benefit claims and that this had been funded from the extra benefit admin grant allocated to us by the Government for this purpose. Members questioned the number of performance indicators currently being produced.

RESOLVED: That the service plan be approved.

Councillor R Croasdale declared an interest in the next item of business, left the meeting and took no part in the discussion thereon.

LONGRIDGE OVER 60s CLUB GRANT REQUEST

The Director of Resources presented a request from Longridge over 60s Club for a grant towards the cost of the new rent proposed for the use of Towneley Buildings, Longridge. Committee were reminded that in 1974 the former Longridge Urban District Council had granted a lease to the Trustees of Longridge over 60s Club for the ground floor premises of Towneley Buildings, Longridge. That lease was for a term of 25 years at a nominal rent of 75p per annum. Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 allowed the Council to charge less than the market rent if the lease it granted did not exceed 7 years. The Council had granted three subsequent leases at an annual rent of £1.

In June 2009 this Committee agreed to grant both Lancashire County Council who occupy part of the building for the youth and community centre and the over 60s club a new 15 year lease. As a result of the North West Valuation Officer had been consulted and recommended that the Council charge Longridge over 60s Club an annual rent of £7,850 per annum for a 15 year lease with five year rent reviews. The new rent level had now been set and the organisation had been contacted. The substantial increase in the proposed rent had a serious impact on the financial position of the club. The club had therefore requested the Council consider a grant towards the cost of the rent increase.

Members then discussed the issues of the need to charge a realistic rent whilst taking into consideration the ability of the over 60s club to pay such a significant increase.

RESOLVED: That Longridge over 60s Club be given a grant over the next five years as follows:

2010/11 - £7,750
 2011/12 - £7,650
 2012/13 - £7,550
 2013/14 - £7,450
 2014/15 - £7,350

thereafter, the Borough Council will review the grant to be awarded as part of its five yearly rent review.

REVENUES AND BENEFITS GENERAL REPORT

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

- a) National Non Domestic Rates
- b) Council Tax
- c) Allpay update
- d) Sundry debtors
- e) Housing Benefits Performance
- f) Housing Benefits – Benefit and right time indicators
- g) Housing Benefit fraud
- h) Housing Benefit overpayments

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

91 2009/10 PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

Committee received a comprehensive report on the 2009/10 performance against national and local performance indicators for this Council. Analysis showed that of the 80 indicators that could be compared to target, 62.5% of PIs met the target, 27.5% were close to the target with 10% that had missed the target. Details were also given on those indicators which had improved, stayed the same or worsened over the same period.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

92 MINUTES OF BUDGET WORKING GROUP

Committee received the minutes of the Budget Working Group dated 27 January 2010.

93 PLACE JOINT COMMITTEE

Committee received the minutes of the PLACE Joint Committee for a meeting dated 18 March 2010.

94 HEALTH AND SAFETY

Committee received a report which reviewed the health and safety performance of the Council during the period March 2009 to April 2010. The report detailed areas of policy development, identified the significant hazards for the Council, gave a summary of achievements, detailed accidents and incidents statistics and highlighted the Council's targets for 2010/11.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

95 UPDATE ON COMPREHENSIVE AREA ASSESSMENT (CAA)

The Council had been informed by our auditor that the Audit Commission had been told to stop work on the Comprehensive Area Assessment.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

96 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That by virtue of the following items being exempt information under Categories 1 and 7 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be now excluded from the meeting.

97 NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATE WRITE OFFS

The Director of Resources submitted a report seeking Committee's approval to write off certain National Non Domestic Rates (NNDR) in respect of bankrupt persons/companies which had ceased trading.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the writing off of £38,416.66 of NNDR debts where the debtors had been declared bankrupt or ceased trading.

(Councillors Knox and Thompson declared an interest in the next item of business, left the meeting and took no part in the discussion.)

98 SALE OF LAND ON THE WEST SIDE OF HENTHORN ROAD, CLITHEROE

The Legal Services Manager submitted a report seeking Committee's instructions relating to the sale of land on the west side of Henthorn Road, Clitheroe. The report gave details of numerous negotiations which the Council had been undertaking with Ribble Valley Homes and its parent company, Liverpool Housing Trust over the sale and development of land at Henthorn Road for affordable housing. She was now seeking Committee's instructions on how to proceed with this sale.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. agree to sell the land on the west side of Henthorn Road, Clitheroe to the Liverpool Housing Trust; and
2. authorise the Chief Executive to negotiate to sell the land on the following terms that:
 - i) Ribble Valley Homes continue to manage the site until development commences;
 - ii) the site, once developed, is managed by Ribble Valley Homes in accordance with its covenants under the Transfer Agreement dated 31 March 2010, or the Liverpool Housing Trust agree to comply with similar covenants;
 - iii) provided completion takes place on or before 29 July 2011 the sale price remains at £60,000; and
 - iv) the Liverpool Housing Trust accept the site without clearance or vacant possession and to use the site solely for the development of 9 affordable houses to be completed within a timescale to be negotiated to secure early delivery.
3. Negotiate with Ribble Valley Homes the removal of the Henthorn site from the call option.

99 APPLICATION FOR DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF

The Revenues and Benefits Manager asked Committee to consider a request from Girl Guiding UK in respect of Waddow Hall, Waddington for discretionary rate relief. He commented that 80% mandatory rate relief was already granted to Waddow Hall and this request was for the remaining 20% of the bill.

RESOLVED: That Committee does not exercise its discretion to grant discretionary rate relief in respect of Waddow Hall.

100 BARROW BUSINESS PARK

The Director of Development Services reported on various funding opportunities which were being negotiated in relation to Barrow Business Park. He highlighted the pros and cons of proceeding along the lines he was now recommending to Committee. Members then discussed this matter in some detail.

RESOLVED: They confirm the action of the Chief Executive in agreeing to contribute £25,000 to support phase 1 of the project and that the Director of Development Services be asked to keep Members informed of progress in securing the funding through the PLACE joint investment plan.

101 ASSET MANAGEMENT GROUP

Committee received the minutes of the Asset Management Group for meetings dated 10, 13 and 25 May 2010.

102 ENCROACHMENT ON LAND – POPE CROFT/CHURCH STREET CAR PARK, RIBCHESTER

The Legal Services Manager presented a report which informed Committee of an encroachment of land at the Council's car park at Pope Croft/Church Street, Ribchester adjacent to 8 Fort Avenue, Ribchester and a request by the owner of that property to buy the land subject of the encroachment from the Council. Committee discussed this matter in some detail.

RESOLVED: That Committee agree to sell the land to the owner of 8 Fort Avenue, Ribchester on the following terms:

1. The price to be decided on building land valuation undertaken by the District Valuer with valuation fees and costs to be paid by the owner of 8 Fort Avenue, Ribchester.
2. A restrictive covenant be put on the land in the transfer deed not to use the land other than as a domestic garden.
3. The sale to be upon terms that the owner cements, renders or pebbledashes or paints the wall to improve its cosmetic appearance prior to any such transfer.
4. The owner of 8 Fort Avenue, Ribchester decides not to proceed with the sale the Council will request that the wall is taken down and the land reinstated to its former condition.
5. In the event that this is not done, the Council itself take down the wall and reinstate the land and send the invoice for the work to the owner of 8 Fort Avenue, Ribchester.

6. In the event of non-payment, pursue the debt as a claim for damages for trespass through the Courts if necessary.

(Councillor J S Sutcliffe declared an interest in the next item of business, left the meeting and took no part in the discussion.)

103

ROEFIELD – APPLICATION FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Prior to commencement of discussion on this item, committee agreed to suspend Standing Orders to allow the debate on this matter to continue beyond the agreed 9.30pm cut off time.

The Chief Executive presented his report and referred to minute 926 of Committee dated 23 March 2010 and to the subsequent visit to Roefield by Members to view the facilities.

Members were again being asked to provide a loan, this time for £360,000 subject to a number of conditions and caveats.

The Legal Services Manager also commented on the legal position in relation to the granting of such a loan and on the current lease of the Roefield building. She advised Members of the options they could consider for ensuring, so far as possible, but not absolutely, that the Council's position was protected should there be a default in payments relating to the loan. Members then discussed this matter in some detail.

RESOLVED: That

1. Ribble Valley Borough Council agree to lend £360,000 to Roefield from the Public Works Loan Board;
2. the Director of Resources be authorised to borrow £360,000 for this purpose;
3. the Council agree to provide a grant to Roefield of £130,000 from the balance of the former Clitheroe the Future monies.
4. the Council delegate to the Chief Executive and Legal Services Manager for them to secure the Council's investments in this matter; and
5. the Council's revenue funding cease 12 months after the extension becomes operative.

The meeting closed at 9.42pm.

If you have any queries on these minutes please contact Jane Pearson (414430).

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