

Minutes of Policy & Finance Committee

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 25 January 2011 starting at 6.30pm
Present: Councillor E M H Ranson (Chairman)

Councillors:

R Adamson	J Rogerson
D Eccleston	R E Sherras
J B Hill	D Smith
K Hind	J S Sutcliffe
J Holgate	R J Thompson
A Knox	N C Walsh

In attendance: Chief Executive, Director of Resources and Director of Commercial Services

622 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillor S Hirst.

623 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

624 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Knox declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda items 12, 14 and 19.

625 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Chairman welcomed Mr D Eddleston from Wiswell Parish Council who gave Committee an update on the current position in relation to the proposal to split the Wiswell Parish Council into two separate Parish Council's, one for Wiswell and one for Barrow.

Wiswell Parish Council had canvassed the views of all households in the Wiswell area and 221 had responded positively to the proposal to create two separate parish councils.

He recognised that a compromise of two area Committees for a trial period of 12 months was probably the only way forward.

The Chief Executive confirmed that discussions had been ongoing with the Parish Council to find a solution to the problem in the light of the non response from the majority of Barrow residents. He also commented that Ribble Valley Borough Council was willing to create one Parish Council for Wiswell but was not

happy about leaving the residents of Barrow without any representation at Parish Council level. The idea of the trial period for two separate parish meetings had met with the approval of Wiswell Parish Council.

Members made suggestions about ways in which the views of Barrow residents could be better encouraged.

626 REFERENCES FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY Committee

There were no references from Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

627 FEES AND CHARGES

The Director of Resources referred to Minute 482 of Committee dated 16 November 2010 which considered a number of fees and charges for implementation from 4 January 2011. There were three areas of charging which had not been agreed at the meeting for a variety of reasons and a further report had been requested in order to set these charges with effect from 1 April 2010. Those areas were meals on wheels service, court summons and use of Council Chambers and Committee rooms.

Charges for the provision of meals under the meals on wheel scheme fell within the remit of this Committee, however the current contract with Lancashire County Council for the provision of some meals was due for renewal and a meeting had yet to be held.

Due to current situation it was not felt appropriate to review this charge until future contract arrangements had been agreed and third party funding had been confirmed. It was proposed to return to Committee at a later date for the approval of these charges.

Following a review of charges on court summons made by other authorities it was recognised that these charges has not been increased since 1 April 2008 and the proposal was to increase the charges from £50 to £60 per summons. This increased charge would reduce the Committee's budget by a further £14,360 and would reduce the amount of savings which would have to be identified.

The charges for the use of Council Chamber and Committee rooms had met with some concern at the November meeting and on further analysis of the costs of the facility it had been recognised that these fees were somewhat lower than neighbouring authorities. A new set of charges had been proposed and if implemented these would increase the Council's income at present levels by £750.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. approve the increases in Court summons and use of Council Chamber and Committee rooms as set out in the report; and

2. a further report be submitted to Committee in relation to the meals on wheels service when all information was available.

628 REVISED CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2010/2011 AND PROPOSED PROGRAMME 2011/16

The Director of Resources sought Committee's approval to the revised programme for the current year and also the future five year programme for this Committee.

She advised Committee that the original capital programme for the current year included schemes at a total estimate cost of £32,750. However, unfinished schemes from 2009/10 totalling £8,840 had been added to the original programme. There had also been additional approvals to the programme of £163,950. In summary, the revised programme now totalled £201,290 of which £171,949 had been spent to date.

Committee also considered the current five year capital programme and were asked to submit any new schemes for consideration. One new proposal had been put forward to this Committee which was an increased request cost for the replacement customer relations management system now totalling £25,000.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. approve the revised capital programme for 2010/11 as set out in Annex 1; and
2. approve the future five year programme for 2011/16 for the replacement customer relations management system totalling £25,000.

629 REVISED REVENUE BUDGET 2010/11 AND ORIGINAL ESTIMATE 2011/12

The Director of Resources presented her report on a revised revenue budget for 2010/11 together with a draft revenue budget for 2011/12.

She commented that the much awaited grant settlement for the next financial year had been published on 13 December 2010. Overall the amount of funding for local government would fall by 12.1%. After allowing for adjustments to the formula grant to allow for the transfer of concessionary travel responsibilities to the Lancashire County Council, this Council would receive a reduction in formula grant funding of 14.8% or £558,000 for 2011/12 and £948,000 in 2012/13.

The proposed budget within the report for the next financial year represented the base budget for this Committee and did not account for any service or structure changes which had been identified to date. All savings proposals would be put forward and considered by the Budget Working Group in order for the Council to reach a sustainable and affordable budget over the longer term. Therefore the report sought the approval of Committee to the revised budget for 2010/11 and the draft base budget for 2011/12 subject to the further review of all savings proposed by the Budget Working Group.

She further reported that the revised budget for 2010/11 was £186,290 lower than the original estimate. A comparison between the original and revised budget was submitted to Committee and Members commented upon a number of areas.

Following the recently announced grant settlement an updated budget forecast predicted the estimated amount of savings were needed as being £666,000 for 2011/12 and £1,043,000 in 2012/13. These figures would be updated as detailed estimates were agreed by Committee. It had therefore been paramount that the Council prepare now for the future need to reduce budgets and, as such, the second phase of the Council's restructure view was underway following the identification of savings from the review of the Council's management structure.

In view of the amount of savings needed the budget requiring approval for 2011/12 represented the draft base budget.

Members then discussed the budget in some detail.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. approve the revised budget for 2010/11; and
2. agree the revenue budget for 2011/12 and growth item in relation to the GCSX connection for benefits in the sum of £15,500 on an annual basis and to submit this to Special Policy and Finance Committee subject to the consideration of savings for 2011/12 by the Budget Working Group.

630 REVENUES AND BENEFITS GENERAL REPORT

The Director of Resources submitted a detailed report on the following items:

- national non domestic rates (NNDR);
- council tax;
- sundry debtors;
- housing benefits – performance;
- housing benefits – right time indicator 2010/11;
- housing benefit fraud;
- housing benefit overpayment.

The report also sought Committee's approval to the authorisation of various officers to represent the Council at Court proceedings for the recovery of tax and business rate arrears.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. Committee note the continuing progress the Council continues to make in collecting these debts and the performance of the housing benefit section in particular; and

2. authorise the following officers to represent the Council at Court proceedings for the recovery of council tax and business rate arrears:

Jane Pearson.
Diane Rice.
Mark Edmondson.
Debbie Kelly.
Lesley Haworth.
Angela Hampson.

631 ASSISTED BIN COLLECTION PROJECT

The Director of Resources informed Committee of the Contact Centre's assisted bin collection project.

She informed Committee that the shared Contact Centre partnership with the Lancashire County Council as the lead authority had secured funding for this project from the Communities and Local Government Customer Led Transformation Programme. The aim of the programme was to identify where a range of agency could work together to make the way services were provided more proficient and to delivery savings and benefits to customers in the future. Ribble Valley Borough Council had 1,147 people on the assisted refuse collection service and Lancashire County Council had obtained customer telephone numbers through a process known as teleappending and 597 had been matched.

The services being offered to customers were:

- home fire safety checks;
- help direct;
- welfare rights, benefit reviews;
- warmer homes grant;
- blue badges; and
- prescription delivery services.

During January and February 2011 Contact Centre staff would be telephoning all those residents on the list where contact details have been identified. Early indications showed that this project had been well received with over 80% of those contacting requesting at least one service and with no negative comments.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

632 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MONITORING 2010/11

The Director of Resources presented her monitoring report on the Council's treasury management activity for the period 1 April 2010 to 31 December 2010.

The report included information on the following areas of business.

- borrowing requirements;

- investment;
- prudential indicators;
- approved organisations.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

633 SIX MONTHLY REVIEW OF THE RIBBLE VALLEY LOCALITY PLAN FOR 2010

Committee considered a report from the Principal Policy and Performance Officer on a six monthly review of the Ribble Valley locality review for 2010.

The purpose of the Locality Plan is two fold. One to inform citizens of the major services being delivered by local government in their area and two to better understand the respective roles of individual partners (Lancashire County Council and Ribble Valley Borough Council) in delivering services to the citizens of the Ribble Valley. The Ribble Valley Locality Plan was structured around three main headings and a number of priorities had been identified below each. The three main headings were:

- people;
- place;
- prosperity.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

634 BUDGET WORKING GROUP

Committee received the minutes of Budget Working Groups held on 21 October, 12 November and 15 December 2010.

635 PLACE JOINT COMMITTEE

Committee received the minutes of the PLACE Joint Committee held on Thursday 21 October 2010.

636 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODY – RIBBLE VALLEY CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU

Committee received a report from Councillor Beverley Jones, one of the Council's representatives on the Ribble Valley CAB, indicating the work the Bureau had undertaken over the past twelve months.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

637 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.

638 NATIONAL NON DOMESTIC RATES – WRITE OFFS

The Director of Resources submitted a report seeking Committee's approval to write off certain national non domestic rate arrears.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the writing off of £3,585.52 of NNDR debts where it has not been possible to collect the amounts due.

639 MEMBERSHIP OF PLACE AND REGENERATE PENNINE LANCASHIRE LIMITED – RPL

The Chief Executive presented a report reviewing the Council's membership of the PLACE Joint Committee and Regenerate Pennine Lancashire Limited. He reminded Committee that in August 2009 this Committee and, subsequently, the Council, had endorsed the proposal to join the PLACE Joint Committee and the Regenerate Pennine Lancashire Company. He reminded Members of the make up of the Joint Committee and went through a brief history of how both the Committees and the Company were operating. Members discussed the Council's membership of PLACE and expressed some concerns about its relevance to this Council. Members gave the Chief Executive a clear steer on the Council's future involvement.

RESOLVED: That this Committee delegates to the Chief Executive in consultation with the chairman the decision when to bring a report regarding the Council's continued membership of PLACE to Council.

The meeting closed at 8.21pm.

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