

## Minutes of Policy & Finance Committee

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 7 June 2011 starting at 6.30pm  
Present: Councillor E M H Ranson (Chairman)

Councillors:

R Bennett	A Knox
J Hill	J Rogerson (7.15)
T Hill	R E Sherras
S Hirst	R J Thompson
K Hind	N Walsh
K Horkin	A Yearling

Also in attendance: Councillor S Bibby.

In attendance: Chief Executive, Director of Resources, Director of Community Services, Head of Revenues and Benefits and Head of Regeneration and Housing.

### 66 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillor D Smith.

### 67 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 March 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### 68 MATTERS ARISING

#### a) Minute 781 - Event Safety Advisory Group

Councillor Yearling referred to this minute and asked why this item did not appear on the agenda for tonight's meeting. The Chief Executive explained that a report was in preparation and the subject had been discussed by the Corporate Management Team who had offered advice on potential changes which needed to be made to the operation of the Event Safety Advisory Group. Unfortunately, due to staff absences the report would now be submitted to the next meeting of this Committee in July.

Councillor Yearling stated that he had raised the matter in the light of an event which had been held at Clitheroe Skate Park over the previous weekend, which had not only lasted 8 hours but had been extremely noisy. The Chief Executive promised to ensure that this matter was referred to relevant officers from the environmental health section.

#### b) Minute 795 – Clitheroe Rugby Club Wall

The Director of Community Services reported that work on the Rugby Club wall was due to start in the foreseeable future.

c) Minute 797 – Insurances

The Director of Resources reminded Members that the renewal of our insurance had been delegated to her in consultation with the Chairman, she had agreed to extend the current insurance contract until 2013, thereby taking advantage of a 5% discount offered by the company.

69 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Knox declared a non-prejudicial interest in items 14 and 15 on the agenda.

70 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

71 REFERENCES FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no references from Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

72 BRIEFING ON THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

The Director of Resources gave Committee an overview of the work of Policy and Finance Committee, which roughly divided into two elements - policy matters and financial issues. In relation to policy matters, the following were the main headings covered by this Committee.

- The Ribble Valley Strategic Partnership
- Regeneration and Economic Development
- Public Relations
- Civil Contingencies
- Elections and Electoral Registration
- Communication Strategy
- Local Land Charges
- Community Safety Partnership
- Mayoralty
- Civic Functions
- Civic Ceremonial

She also explained in detail the work of the finance element of the Committee.

- Capital and Revenue Estimates – levy of local taxes
- Amendments to Standing Orders and Financial Regulations
- Administration of Housing Benefits and Council Tax benefits
- Collection, recovery and remission of local taxes
- Administration of Charities
- Insurances
- Receipt and Payment of Money by or to the Council
- Review and Monitoring of Council's Treasury Policy Statement
- Members' Allowances and Expenses

- Grants and Subscriptions to Outside Bodies
- Approval of the Budget Working Group Minutes

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

#### 73 APPOINTMENT OF BUDGET WORKING GROUP

The Chief Executive reminded Members that a Budget Working Group had operated very successfully for a number of years. The Working Group looked in more detail at the formulation of budgets for not only this Committee but for other service committees of the Council.

RESOLVED: That a Budget Working Group consisting of five Conservatives, one Liberal Democrat and one Independent member be appointed for the municipal year 2011/2012.

#### 74 MEALS ON WHEELS CHARGES

The Director of Resources sought Committee's approval to proposals for the Council's charge for the provision of meals on wheels service for 2011/2012. She reminded Committee that reports had been brought to Committee in November 2010 and January 2011 but it had not been possible to set charges due to uncertainties surrounding funding and the supply of meals. This had now been resolved and member approval was now sought for the level of charges for the current financial year. Details were given of the cost of meals and volunteer mileage and it was also reported that this Council received a grant from the Lancashire County Council which was based on 50% of the Council's meals on wheels and luncheon clubs up to a ceiling calculated using the pensionable population of the Borough and per Capita multiplier. For the financial year 2010/11 this grant amounted to £24,180.

Members then discussed the actual take up of the meals on wheels service which seemed to be reducing year on year. The Director of Resources reported that there was now another supplier who were also supplying meals on wheels in the Ribble Valley area with all new referrals by Social Services being passed to this new company. This inevitably had an impact on the Council funded element of the service. Members also discussed the provision of funding for luncheon clubs.

RESOLVED: That

1. Committee agree to freeze the meals on wheels charge at £1.50 for the financial year 2011/12; and
2. a full report on the operation and funding of meals on wheels and luncheon clubs operating in the Ribble Valley be presented to the next meeting of this Committee.

#### 75 CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC AUDIT

The Director of Resources asked for Members' views on how the current system of public audit would operate once the government's proposals to disband the Audit Commission came into operation. The consultation paper set out the

government's aim to replace the current centralised audit systems managed by the Audit Commission with a new de-centralised regime.

In proposing a new framework for local public audit, the government state they had followed a set design of principles:

- Localism and decentralisation.
- Transparency.
- Lower audit fees.
- Higher standards of auditing.

She felt that the key framework for the new audit would be looking at audit quality being regulated within the statutory framework and overseen by the National Audit Office and also local public bodies with a turnover of more than £6.5m would appoint their own independent auditor.

In summary, the following areas showed the scope of the consultation paper:

- Regulation of local public audit.
- Commissioning the local public audit services.
- Scope of audit and the work of auditors.
- Arrangements for smaller bodies.

She suggested that given the complexity and importance of this exercise, a small working group be formed who together with the Director of Resources and the Head of Financial Services would consider the issues raised in more detail and respond on behalf of the Council.

**RESOLVED:** That Committee agree to the suggestion of the Director of Resources and set up a working group consisting of the Chairman of Policy and Finance Committee, the Leader of the Opposition, the Chairman of the Accounts and Audit Committee and Councillor Sherras, together with the Director of Resources and Head of Financial Services to respond on behalf of the Council.

## 76 INDEPENDENT PANEL REPORT ON REVIEW OF MEMBERS' ALLOWANCE SCHEME

Committee considered the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel on Members' allowances following their review of the current scheme. Members were reminded that they were required to agree and publicise its member allowance scheme each year and have an independent review at least every four years. A panel was established in November 2010 with a view to completing the review in time for this municipal year. It was agreed at Policy and Finance Committee on 29 March 2011 that the current scheme would be extended until the outcome of the review by the independent panel.

The Chief Executive reported that the panel had now met a number of times and interviewed a number of Members as part of the review. Committee were asked to consider the report and decide whether to accept the recommendations of the panel and/or to make further recommendations for Full Council to consider at their meeting on 12 July 2011. Members then discussed the report in some detail. There was concern about the proposal which recommended there being an increase in the Members allowances backdated to the start of the municipal

year, particularly in the current economic climate. There was also concern about the proposal to no longer pay a special responsibility allowance to Vice Chairmen of Committees. Other issues discussed within the report were about the future role of and payment of the Standards Committee and the panel's supposition that the Leader of the Council should always be the Chairman of this Committee.

RESOLVED: That Committee, after considering the report of the independent panel on Members' Allowances, recommend to Full Council the acceptable of the panel's recommendations with the following exceptions:

- The increase in Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances be deferred until 1 April 2012.
- That the Special Responsibility Allowances for Vice-Chairman be retained.

77 RIBBLE VALLEY COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

Committee received an update report on the work of the Ribble Valley Community Safety Partnership, which gave details of budgets, current initiatives and future funding and partnership working. In particular, the report highlighted the good news that the Community Safety Partnership had been able to identify funding to secure the employment of a second Police Community Support Officer in the Ribble Valley for a further 12 months.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

78 REVIEW OF CONTACT CENTRE IT SYSTEMS

The Head of Revenues and Benefits reported that the shared service contact centre and the customer relations management software had been in place since November 2004 and that the original contract was coming to an end. Discussions had been taking place as to how to take this project forward.

Initial discussions had identified that it was unlikely for the partnership to continue in its present form and as a result each authority would need to identify a replacement for the current system and have it in place for November 2011. As the hardware for the system was situated at Lancashire County Council's offices and was due to be upgraded - this would require the purchase of new hardware to be located in the Ribble Valley offices and a migration of the data would have to be undertaken. The suppliers had proposed an extension to the current arrangement giving time for individual authorities, which would allow the transfer of the licences purchased by the partnership at no extra cost. A decision to change suppliers would result in much higher initial costs, as it would be necessary to purchase new licences and arrange for the migration of data from the current system.

RESOLVED: That Committee note the report.

79 PERCEPTION SURVEY 2011

Committee received a comprehensive report on a recent conducted perception survey conducted by Collaborative Consultation and Research Service (CRACS).

Initial results had been presented to the Corporate Management Team and these showed a number of positive findings as follows:

- High satisfaction with local area and home.
- High satisfaction with waste collection services.
- High satisfaction with the way the Council runs things.
- Encouraging proportion feel that they can influence local decisions.
- High levels of perceived safety (during the day and after dark) but not many believe that crime is decreasing). However, less positive findings were also noted:
  - Low satisfaction for police and hospital services.
  - Low satisfaction for local bus services.
  - Low satisfaction with leisure facilities.
  - Potential issues arising around inappropriate use of GP time.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

#### 80 REVENUES AND BENEFITS GENERAL REPORT

The Head of Revenues and Benefits presented his report to Committee. He commented that this Council's collection rate for 2010/11 was 99.1% which would probably place the Council in the top 10 performing authorities in the Country. This year's collection rate was on target once again to achieve a similar rate.

The report covered the following:

- national non domestic rates;
- council tax;
- housing benefit – performance;
- housing benefit right time indicator 2010/11;
- housing benefit fraud;
- housing benefit overpayments.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

#### 81 PERFORMANCE REWARD GRANT – FURTHER FUNDING FROM DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Committee received a report informing Members of the further funding that had been received from the government for distribution by the Ribble Valley Strategic Partnership through the Council as performance reward grants.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

#### 82 BUDGET WORKING GROUP

Committee received the minutes of the Budget Working Group held on 16 February 2011.

83 EXERCISE WATERGATE

The Chief Executive reported on a real time emergency planning exercise which was being organised in the Ribble Valley between all emergency services and relevant service providers in the event of a major flooding incident. The aim was to test the robustness of each service and its reaction in the event of such an emergency.

The event had national significance with a member of the Cabinet Office coming to see the exercise at first hand.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

84 CLITHEROE TOWN TEAM UPDATE

The Head of Regeneration and Housing presented an update report on the Clitheroe Town Team and activities in connection with the Clitheroe Town Centre Master Plan. He reminded Committee of the background behind the setting up of the Clitheroe Town Team and how it was working along with many different organisations including the Clitheroe Chamber of Trade, Clitheroe Civic Society, Ribble Valley Strategic Partnership and Clitheroe Town Council to develop a master plan for Clitheroe. A copy of the Town Centre Master Plan was available for Members at close of the meeting. This gave details of work proposed on a number of themes. Information on progress on a number of individual projects identified was included in his report.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

85 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That by virtue of the next items being exempt information under Categories 1 and 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be now excluded from the meeting.

86 NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATE WRITE-OFFS

The Head of Revenues and Benefits sought Committee's approval to write off certain national non-domestic debts.

He explained the process of trying to collect business rates particularly from businesses that were experiencing difficulty in the current economic climate.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the writing off of £15,318.08 of NNDR debts where it had not been possible to collect the amounts due.

87 APPLICATION FOR DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF

The Revenues and Benefits Manager submitted a request for discretionary rate relief from Making Space in respect of two offices located at Rockmount, Pimlico Road and 30 Mitchell Street, Clitheroe. He went on to explain the parameters of mandatory and discretionary relief elements and the Council's policy on such applications.

RESOLVED: That

1. consideration of this request be deferred pending a review of how the Council awards discretionary rate relief; and
2. a report on all recipients of discretionary rate relief be submitted to the next meeting.

88 VERBAL UPDATE ON MEMBERSHIP OF PLACE/REGENERATE PENNINE LANCASHIRE

The Chief Executive referred to minute 776 of the last meeting of this Committee and now reported that the Borough Council had given notice to both organisations of our intention to leave. He reported on some of the potential issues which may arise as a result of this decision and promised to keep Committee informed of any developments.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

89 REPLACEMENT OF THE LAND CHARGES SOFTWARE SYSTEM

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services had submitted a report which gave Committee an update in relation to the replacement of the Land Charges software system further to the report submitted to Committee in November 2010.

Committee were given a brief history of the negotiations for a new system with both the present supplier and with other companies. Details were given as to the potential cost of either switching supplier or moving to a new system.

RESOLVED: That Committee note the progress made to date to resolve this matter and authorise the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to replace the Land Charges system and report on the system chosen to a future meeting of this Committee. Committee stressed that the replacement system chosen must include the provision for data transfer.

The meeting closed at 8.15pm.

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