

Minutes of Policy & Finance Committee

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 26 July 2011, starting at 6.30pm
Present: Councillor E M H Ranson (Chairman)

Councillors:

R Bennett	K Horkin
J Hill	R E Sherras
T Hill	D T Smith
S Hirst	A Yearing

In attendance: Chief Executive, Director of Resources, Director of Community Services, Head of Revenues and Benefits, Head of Environmental Services (Agenda Item 7 only) and Emergency Planning Officer (Agenda Item 7 only).

Also in attendance: Councillor S Bibby.

224 CLIVE BALDWIN – BUILDING SURVEYOR

The Chairman reported on the sudden death of Clive Baldwin, one of the Council's Building Surveyors. The Chief Executive reported that Clive had been employed by Ribble Valley Borough Council for 24 years and had taken ill-health retirement in 2009. However, he had returned to work on a part-time contract and was due to retire at the end of this week. Members stood for a minute's silence in Clive's memory.

225 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors K Hind, A Knox, R Thompson and N Walsh.

226 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 June 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

227 MATTERS ARISING

(a) Minute 83 – Exercise Watergate

The Chief Executive commented that the exercise had been very successful with a number of different agencies taking part. Feedback from a member of the Cabinet Office present had been very positive. A detailed report would be submitted to the next Health and Housing Committee meeting.

(b) Minute 88 – Membership of PLACE/Regenerate Pennine Lancashire

The Chief Executive confirmed that the Council were no longer a member of PLACE and that issues regarding this Council's membership of Regenerate Pennine Lancashire would be resolved in the near future.

(c) Minute 89 – Land Charges System

The Chief Executive reported that a new land charges system had now been selected by the Head of Democratic and Legal Services; and confirmed that this would include data transfer of the existing information.

228 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor A Yearling declared a pecuniary and non-prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 25 Discretionary Rate Relief.

229 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

230 REFERENCES FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

There were no references from Overview and Scrutiny Committee

231 EVENTS SAFETY ADVISORY GROUP

The Head of Environmental Health Services referred to Minute 781 of Committee dated 29 March 2011 and now submitted his report which aimed to clarify the role and confirm the enforcement powers of the Council's Event Safety Advisory Group (ESAG).

Members were reminded that they had considered a detailed report that had outlined the work of ESAG and the findings and recommendations of a detailed review carried out by the Chief Executive with regard to recommendations of a related complaint panel which concluded as follows:

- That ESAG had been broadly successful and had an important and ongoing role to co-ordinate multi-agency response and resources to deal with large events.
- That ESAG was there to provide advice and guidance to ensure that events took place successfully and safely.
- That the event organisers remain ultimately responsible for event planning and health and safety including public safety.
- That the Local Authority (Environmental Health) was the enforcing authority for work activities where the main activity included cultural, entertainment or sporting activities.
- That the Local Authority had a duty to enforce the relevant statutory provisions to ensure the health, safety and welfare of employees, members of the public and any other persons affected by the work activity.

Committee had considered that report and asked for officers to prepare a further report to this meeting specifically addressing the following issues:

1. The role and responsibility of ESAG.
2. Clarify what authority ESAG had in enforcing matters of concern, particularly in relation to the authority of other agencies such as the Police or LCC Highways.
3. Whether ESAG should involve themselves in every outdoor event whether large or small.

Discussions had taken place with the Council's Corporate Management Team in the light of Committee's concerns and to establish a better understanding and direction. It was now proposed to proceed as follows:

- No direct involvement by ESAG with events of a collective capacity below 5,000 unless a significant impact upon the local community had been identified.
- Where the Council receive notification/information from event organisations a list of those events be compiled to be circulated to all ESAG member agencies for their information and involvement.
- A meeting of ESAG would only be convened for events above 5,000 or at the specific request of an ESAG member agency.
- Where we have received notification/information from event organisations, the list of events will be entered on the website for Members, residents and event organisers to refer to.
- Where information relating to a new event was identified (exceeding 5,000) the Ward Members would be informed and invited to be involved.

Each participating agency had its own powers of enforcement and could choose to implement either individually or collectively. Committee were advised that in future the role of ESAG would be to advise and support event organisers, to act as a single point of contact for the collation and dissemination of information to member agencies and to develop policy for the improvement of standards and co-ordination of approach of large events.

Members were pleased with the contents of the report but sought assurances that all partner agencies would continue to offer advice, guidance and enforcement where appropriate. They noted the fact that major events would still receive involvement from ESAG, whereas smaller-scale events would be subject to a 'lighter touch' but would still need to comply with relevant health and safety legislation.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the recommendations for implementation as set out in the report.

MINOR MODIFICATIONS TO TERMS OF REFERENCES OF COMMITTEES AND OFFICER DELEGATION SCHEME

Committee were asked to make minor modifications to the Terms of Reference of various Committees and to the Officer Delegation Scheme. On 29 March 2011, Committee considered and approved the Officer Delegation Scheme and referred suggested changes to the articles of the Council's Constitution to Full Council for approval. These had been approved on 26 April 2011. Since then it had become apparent that a small number of minor changes were necessary both the Council's Terms of References for Committees and the Officer Delegation Scheme. These proposed modifications were as follows:

1. Committee were made aware of a number of anomalies in relation to the remit of Committees, in particular reference was made to the changes in legislation around sexual entertainment venues (SEV's) which it was felt were more appropriately dealt with by Licensing Committee rather than the Health and Housing Committee. Other changes related to Community Committee, Parish Councils Liaison Committee and Accounts and Audit Committee. These changes are set out below:

Licensing Committee – "To carry out the Council's duties and powers relating to the licensing of sex establishments under Schedule 3 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982."

Community Committee – "To promote healthy lifestyles and to work with partner agencies to improve the health of the people of the Ribble Valley."

Parish Councils' Liaison Committee – "There shall be a Chairman and Vice-Chairman appointed at the annual meeting. The Chairman shall be a Parish Councillor who is not also a Borough Council. The Vice-Chairman shall be a Borough Councillor."

Audit and Accounts Committee – The Director of Resources had requested that changes be made to the Term of Reference to reflect the changes to the audit regime.

2. There were a number of consequential changes to the Scheme of Delegation, particularly in the light of a letter from the Health Protection Agency concerning delegations on certain public health matters. On the basis of the Health Protection Agency letter, the Council's Solicitor had drafted amendments to the table of proper officers which were included in Part 5 of the Scheme of Delegation.

*** RESOLVED: That the proposed modifications to the Terms of References to Committee and Officer Delegation Scheme be referred to Full Council for their approval. ***

CONCURRENT FUNCTION GRANTS

The Director of Resources referred to the meeting of this Committee held in November 2008 where they had approved a Concurrent Grant Scheme. The Scheme gave grant assistance to those Parishes and Town Councils who provide services in their areas which elsewhere were provided by the Borough

Council. A revenue budget allocation had been approved of £20,000 for the current year. The Council agreed to support Parish and Town Councils' net revenue expenditure on the following concurrent functions:

- Burial grounds.
- Bus shelters.
- Footpaths.
- Footway lighting.
- Litter collection.
- Dog-waste bins.
- Park and play areas.

The Council stated that it would not support capital expenditure or large one-off items through this scheme. Support was set at a rate of 25% of eligible net revenue expenditure in the previous year, subject to the overall cost not exceeding £20,000.

Twenty applications had been received for this year's grants, net revenue expenditure to be supported total £50,024, excluding some large project work; based on a grant rate of 25%, the total amount of grant payable would be £12,506.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. approve the allocation of grants as proposed; and
2. agree to the payment of the approved grants in a single instalment, rather than two instalments as previously.

234 MEALS ON WHEELS SERVICE

The Director of Resources referred to Minute 74 of Committee dated 7 June 2011 and now submitted a detailed report into the operation of luncheon clubs and the meals on wheels service in Ribble Valley.

Details were given of the five luncheon clubs financially supported by the Council which cost £5,670. She further commented that the Council received grant funding from Lancashire County Council towards grant payments and administrative costs which was estimated at £3,370. In relation to meals on wheels the provision was based on a referral from Lancashire County Council Social Services. The current contractor who delivered meals across Lancashire was the iCare Group. Historically the meals on wheels service was delivered within the borough by WRVS. However no new referrals were being made to the WRVS for the provision of meals which had resulted in a dramatic fall in numbers.

The Council provides financial support towards the provision of meals on wheels within the borough where meals were still provided by WRVS. In order to provide some comparison to the current provision in 2003/04, WRVS meals on wheels service had 13 operations across the borough, providing 16,000 meals. In

2010/11 this had fallen to 6 operations providing just over 7,600 meals. The vast majority of which were provided in the Clitheroe area.

The Council receive a grant from Lancashire County Council under the Health and Social Security Adjudications Act based on 50% of the Council's meals on wheels and luncheon club costs up to a ceiling calculated using the pensionable population of the borough and a per capital multiplier. For the financial year 2010/11 this grant amounted to £20,800 for the meals on wheels service. In addition the Council received income from the provision of each meal to eligible residents based on the charges set at the last meeting of £1.50 per meal. This raised income of £11,360.

The grant given to the WRVS for administration had remained the same since 2003/04, even though the number of meals had fallen significantly.

Members then discussed the report in some detail including the future or WRVS provision of meals on wheels, the growth of the iCare organisation and future funding implications.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

235 CAPITAL OUTTURN 2010/11

The Director of Resources reported on the Capital Outturn for this Committee for 2010/11.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

236 OVERALL CAPITAL OUTTURN 2010/11

The Director of Resources gave details of the Capital Outturn for all Committees for the year ending 31 March 2011. During the year the Council spent £1,874,266 on capital schemes. The main areas of expenditure included:

- football changing room refurbishment;
- replacement vehicles and plant;
- flood prevention work;
- acquisition of land for an extension to Clitheroe Cemetery;
- grants to Roefield Leisure Centre; and
- renovation and disabled facilities grants.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

237 CAPITAL MONITORING 2011/12

The Director of Resources informed Members of progress with the Capital Programme for the first quarter of this financial year. She commented that there was only one scheme for this Committee for the replacement of the Contact Centre Customer Relations Management (CRM) system, costing £25,000.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

238 OVERALL CAPITAL MONITORING 2011/12

The Director of Resources submitted a progress report on the Council's Overall Capital Programme for the first quarter of the financial year. Within the approved Capital Programme for 2011/12 there were 8 schemes totalling £605,000. Overall expenditure to the end of June was £42,452.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

239 REVENUE OUTTURN 2010/11

Committee considered a report on the Revenue Outturn for this Committee for 2010/11. The report highlighted an overall under-spend on £1,271,914. However, after allowing for transfers to and from earmarked reserves, this under-spend had been reduced to £222,108.

The report also highlighted some of the more significant variations and she gave explanations for these differences.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

240 OVERALL REVENUE OUTTURN 2010/11

Committee considered a report on the Overall Revenue Outturn 2010/11. The Council had made a surplus of £227,000 during the year compared with the revised estimated surplus of £202,000 and the original estimate of a deficit of £42,000. This would be added to general fund balances.

The Director of Resources highlighted the most significant variations between actual expenditure and the budget. She also explained in some detail the Council's earmarked reserves.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

241 REVENUE MONITORING 2011/12

Committee considered a report from the Director of Resources which informed them of the position for the first three months of this year's revenue budget as far as this Committee was concerned.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

242 OVERALL REVENUE MONITORING 2011/12

The Director of Resources presented a report on the Council's Revenue Budget for all Committees for 2011/12.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

243 OMBUDSMAN'S ANNUAL REVIEW REPORT 2010/11

Committee considered a report from the Head of Legal and Democratic Services outlining the six cases which had been referred to the Local Government Ombudsman over the past 12 months. Of those six cases three were still being dealt with when the report had been compiled whilst the other three cases had found no maladministration.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

244 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MONITORING 2011/12

Committee considered a Monitoring Report on our Treasury Management activities for the period 1 April 2011 to 30 June 2011. Details included in the report were borrowing requirements, investments, Prudential indicators and approved organisations.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

245 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES 2010/11

The Director of Resources submitted a report on Treasury Management activities for 2010/11 which covered the following areas; borrowing requirements, investments and Prudential indicators.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

246 REVENUES AND BENEFITS GENERAL REPORTS

The Head of Revenues and Benefits presented his report to Committee. The report covered the following areas:

- National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR);
- Council Tax;
- Sundry Debtors;
- Housing Benefits;
- Performance;
- Housing Benefits Right Time Indicator;
- Housing Benefit Fraud; and
- Housing Benefit Overpayments.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

247 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That by virtue of the nature of the next 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.

REVIEW OF DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF POLICY

The Head of Revenues and Benefits referred to Minute 87 of Committee dated 7 June 2011 and now reported on an analysis of cases dealt with and how those had been determined. Whilst it was clear that relief had been granted over many years for different reasons, the Head of Revenues and Benefits recommended that no overhaul of the system should be commenced until Central Government Policy on Business Rates was clarified.

He also referred to the Localism Bill currently going through Parliament which would extend the powers of Local Authorities to grant Discretionary Rate Relief to include any circumstances it so wished. However the cost of any additional discretionary relief granted above the current existing conditions would be met in full by the Local Authority.

Committee were then asked to reconsider the application from Making Space in respect of two premises located in Clitheroe and Rock Mount and 30 Mitchell Street. This was for the Discretionary Rate Relief element.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. given the Government's proposals to return business rates to local authority control, it was agreed to delay any review of the grants currently given; and
2. refuse the application from Making Space for Discretionary Rate Relief.

REVIEW OF CONTACT CENTRE IT SYSTEMS

The Head of Revenues and Benefits provided a progress report on the review of the Contact Centre IT systems. He reminded Members that the original contract was coming to an end and 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. The report discussed both the telephony and CRM systems elements of the current system together with three possible options for consideration. It seemed likely to achieve the deadline required that a decision would need to be made before the next meeting of this Committee in September; for this reason it was suggested that the decision should be delegated to the Director of Resources in consultation with a small Working Group.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. note the various options available for the replacement of the current systems;
2. and delegate the decision as to which options to pursue to the Director of Resources and a small Working Group of Councillors consisting of Councillor EMH Ranson, Councillor RE Sherras and Councillor JB Hill.

COMMUNITY TRANSPORT – FUTURE FUNDING

Committee considered a request for financial support from the Little Green Bus towards the cost of community transport in Ribble Valley.

The Little Green Bus currently provides community transport in the Ribble Valley. Prior to April 2011, the cost of providing the service had been borne by Lancashire County Council and partly by this Council under the Concessionary Travel Scheme. However, the Government had announced that responsibility and funding for concessionary travel would be transferred to County Councils from Districts from April 2011. Lancashire County Council had refused to continue with the discretionary element of the scheme. After discussions with districts they agreed to continue to provide funding for a three month period, partly funded by Districts to enable a review to be carried out and to give community bus operators time to make alternative arrangements.

The County Council had also set aside £100,000 to secure the stability of community transport operators in the short term.

The Little Green Bus company had now reached an agreement with the County Council on a fare structure for the Ribble Valley. The company had also made income and expenditure projections based on that fare structure and estimates of usage and were seeking financial support from this Council. The request was considered by the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive and the Director of Resources who had indicated, subject to this Committee's approval, that they were prepared to agree to a grant of up to £12,000 towards the Little Green Bus company to cover possible spending shortfall but had made it clear to the company that this would be drawn down as a last resort after the company had explored all other options.

RESOLVED: That the action taken by the Chief Executive, Director of Resources and Leader of the Council be endorsed.

COUNCIL TAX AND NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATE WRITE-OFFS

The Head of Revenues and Benefits sought Committee approval to write-off certain Council Tax and National Non-Domestic Rate debts.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the writing-off of £2,572.35 Council Tax and £2,970.60 of National Non-Domestic Rate debts where it had not been possible to collect the amounts due.

The meeting closed at 8.08pm.

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