

## Minutes of Policy & Finance Committee

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 27 March 2012, starting at 6.30pm  
Present: Councillor E M H Ranson (Chairman)

Councillors:

R Bennett	A Knox
T Hill	R E Sherras
K Hind	R J Thompson
S Hirst	N Walsh
K Horkin	A Yearing

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

### 827 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors J Hill, J Rogerson and D T Smith.

### 828 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2012 and 7 February 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### 829 MATTERS ARISING

Councillor Walsh questioned the accuracy of Minute 667 in relation to comments he had made at a meeting held on 22 November 2011. He felt that his comments about the need for an Environmental Impact Assessment in relation to the British Aerospace Enterprise Zone had not been accurately reflected within the Minutes. Members then discussed this matter in some detail and did not share his views. The Minutes were approved unamended.

### 830 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors A Knox and A Yearing declared an interest in Agenda Item 9, Requests for Grant Aid, and Councillors A Yearing and N Walsh declared an interest in Agenda Item 10, Allocation of Voluntary Sector Grants.

### 831 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

### 832 REFERENCES FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillors were informed that Overview and Scrutiny Committee had received a report on Outside Bodies at their December meeting and had asked that it be referred to both Corporate Management Team and to this Committee. The report had not yet been considered by Corporate Management Team and had also not been included on the Agenda for this Committee. It had however been agreed

with both Councillor MJ Thomas, the Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and Councillor J White, the report author, that the report could be tabled tonight with a view to it being considered at the Annual Meeting of the Council.

The Chairman commended the report to Members, particularly the need to provide a regular format whereby Members serving on Outside Bodies could report back to a parent committee.

\*\*\* RESOLVED: That the report from Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Outside bodies be considered at the Annual Meeting of the Council on 15 May 2012. \*\*\*

### 833 DRAFT CYCLE OF MEETINGS

Committee considered a report from the Chief Executive which set out the proposed meeting cycle for Committees for the Municipal Year 2012/13. This matter had been considered at the meeting held in January (Minute 677 refers) and a number of changes had subsequently been made to the draft cycle. The final report was now before Members for their approval.

\*\*\* RESOLVED: That Committee ratify the draft meeting cycle at Appendix A to the report with the amendment that Full Council should take place on the 9 October 2012, rather than the 23 October 2012 in the third cycle of meetings and this be submitted to the Annual Meeting on 15 May. \*\*\*

### 834 MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES 2012/13

The Director of Resources asked Committee to agree the Council Scheme of Members' Allowances for the 2012/13 financial year.

She reminded Members that an independent panel had reviewed the scheme for 2011/2012. They had recommended an increase in the basic allowance for 2011/2012.

However, Full Council had agreed to defer the increase in the basic allowance recommended by the panel from £2,685 to £2,775 until 1 April 2012. This allowance increased by a further 2.5% based on the increase in the minimum wage rate in October 2011 resulting in a new basic allowance of £2,844. The new allowances are as set out below:

Basic Allowance	£2,844
<b>Special Responsibility Allowances –</b>	
Leader of the Council	£14,222
Deputy Leader of the Council	£8,533
Leader of the Opposition	£8,533
Committee Chairmen	£5,689
Planning & Development Committee Chairman	£7,111
Committee Vice Chairmen	£2,844
<b>Co-optee Allowances -</b>	
Co-optee Chairman of Standards Committee	£948
Independent Members of the Standards Committee	£316
Dependant Carers' Allowance	£6.08 per hour

RESOLVED: That Committee agree the scheme of Members' allowances for 2012/13.

(Councillors A Knox and A Yearling declared an interest in the next item of business and left the meeting.)

#### 835 REQUESTS FOR GRANT AID

Committee considered a report from the Chief Executive asking them to consider two requests for financial support:

- Queen's Diamond Jubilee – Lancashire County Council - £2,000. This money was to stage a number of events including a Lancashire Service of Thanksgiving to be held in Blackburn Cathedral on Sunday, 13 May 2012.
- Clitheroe Torchlight Committee - £2,000. A number of events would take place over the weekend of 24, 25 August 2012, with the centrepiece of the celebrations being the Torchlight Procession and firework display.

RESOLVED: That Committee agree the request for grant aid from Lancashire County Council and Clitheroe Torchlight Committee.

(Councillor A Knox returned to the meeting.)

(Councillors N Walsh and A Yearling declared an interest in the next item of business and left the meeting.)

#### 836 VOLUNTARY GRANT APPLICATIONS 2012/13

Consideration was given to the allocation of Voluntary Sector Grants as proposed by a sub-group of this Committee in accordance with the approved Voluntary Sector Grant Scheme. Councillor Hore was given permission to speak and spoke in favour of the Crossroads grant application. He stated that Crossroads had requested an increase on their previous year's grant in order to cover their particularly high fuel costs associated with serving the whole of the borough area.

The Director of Resources set out for Committee the statutory guidance framework around the Council's Best Value duty. She also gave details of the application process.

The grant pot available for 2012/13 was £96,670 which was a 2.5% increase on the previous year's budget. The Council had received 15 applications totalling over £134,100. 11 of the applications were from previous applicants. The Sub Group had met on 12 March 2012 and after careful consideration had recommended the allocation of grants, as detailed to the report.

The Sub Group recommended that further information was needed regarding the Little Green Bus application and that this application should therefore be deferred.

Members suggested the Sub Group should meet again to consider the deferred application. They also commented that a large proportion of the total funding available each year was allocated to the Citizens Advice Bureau. They felt strongly that this level of support should be reviewed to enable other worthwhile organisations to be supported.

A balance of £8,720 was left in the grant pot which could be utilised should any grant be awarded to the deferred application (Little Green Bus) in the future.

RESOLVED: That

1. Committee approve the allocation of grants as proposed by the Voluntary Grant Sub-Committee as set out in the report; and
2. the Citizens Advice Bureau be informed that in future years, the Council could not guarantee they would be granted the same level of funding.

(Councillors N Walsh and A Yearling returned to the meeting.)

#### 837 LONGRIDGE STATION GRANT

The Chief Executive presented a report giving an update on the Longridge Station Building grant from Ribble Valley Borough Council and other funding sources. Committee were reminded that the newly renovated Longridge Station Buildings project was a key regeneration initiative for the town funded by a number of grant sources including £89,900 from the Borough Council to Longridge Town Council as part of the Longridge and Parish Grants Programme which had been approved by this Council in 2007.

A list of other funders for the project including the Heritage Lottery Fund was included within the report.

During 2009 when work had commenced on the project it was reported that work on the main building could not begin until the gas mains supplying the building had been diverted and the National Grid commenced work in November 2009 which then allowed the main contractor to commence refurbishments of the building. National Grid had charged £19,436 to do this work which was covered within existing budgets, however, later in 2011 Longridge Town Council had received a reimbursement of £12,637 from National Grid as the actual cost of the work had proved to be considerably less than originally charged. Following this the Clerk to the Longridge Town Council contacted Ribble Valley Borough Council along with other funding bodies seeking confirmation of the terms and conditions under which the original grants were made and whether they would have any claim on the money refunded.

RESOLVED: That

1. Committee agree that Longridge Town Council retain the RVBC's share of the National Grid Refund with the condition that the funds be used towards further maintenance and refurbishment of the Longridge Old Station Buildings and grounds or on activities that enable people to learn about and participate in its heritage; and

2. details of the planned expenditure should be provided to Ribble Valley Borough Council before the £2,630 share of the refund is expended.

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#### CHANGES TO GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS IN CONSEQUENCE OF THE LOCALISM ACT 2011

The Chief Executive presented a report from the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which set out changes made by the Localism Act to the arrangements which Council's must adopt to ensure that decisions were taken in an efficient, transparent and accountable way. The report pointed out that this Council currently operated alternative arrangements and the new Localism Act provided that with effect from 4 May 2012 alternative arrangements would no longer be available to Councils. No action was required by the Council in consequence of the cessation of those arrangements.

There were however two matters which Committee should consider:

1. Overview and Scrutiny Committee – The alternative arrangement system required the Council to have arrangements in place for Overview and Scrutiny. With effect from 4 May 2012 the obligation to have an Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been removed. The Council could adopt any of the following options:
  - (i) Continue with the present arrangements for Overview and Scrutiny.
  - (ii) Cease operation of a separate Overview and Scrutiny Committee but transfer responsibility for the matters currently set out in the Terms of Reference of the Committee to another Committee or Committees.
  - (iii) Cease operation of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and cease to perform the functions set out in the Term of Reference.
2. Effective Governance Models – The Council could decide that it would like to consider adopting one of the alternative Governance Models referred to in the letter at Appendix 1 eg either the Leader and Cabinet Executive Model or the Mayor and Cabinet Executive Model. Alternatively the Council could resolve to hold a referendum on whether to move to a different system of Governance.

Members then discussed this matter in some detail, particularly in relation to the future of its Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED: That

1. whilst this Committee was minded to cease the operation of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, a sub-committee be appointed of four Members to make recommendations in relation to its future; this sub-group to consist of three Conservatives and one Liberal Democrat with a report being taken to the Council meeting to be held on 23 April 2012; and

2. confirm the Council's commitment to retaining the existing Committee system.

839 LOCALISM ACT – STANDARDS

The Chief Executive presented a report from the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which informed Committee of the recommendations of the Standards Committee in relation to future arrangements for Standards.

This matter was considered by Committee at its January meeting and by the Standards Committee on 1 February 2012. Responsibility for Standards remains with the Standards Committee until July 2012. Responsibility for allocation of the Council's duties between the Council's various Committees is a matter for Policy and Finance Committee.

The Standards Committee were unanimous in their view that the Council should retain a separate Standards Committee, comprised of Borough Members and if possible, Parish Council Members but without the involvement of any Independent Members as the independent role could be taken up by the independent persons. The Standards Committee had resolved to commence the process to recruit two independent persons for the new regime. The Committee agreed to form a sub-group of six Members comprising Chair and Vice of Standards Committee, two representatives from Policy and Finance Committee and two representatives from Personnel Committee to carry out the selection process and make recommendations to the Council about recruitment.

Members then discussed this matter in some detail.

RESOLVED: That consideration of this matter be deferred with a further report coming to the June Policy and Finance Committee.

840 RIBBLE VALLEY ECONOMIC STRATEGY REVIEW 2012

Committee considered a comprehensive report from the Chief Executive on the Ribble Valley Economic Strategy Review 2012.

The Head of Regeneration and Housing referred to Minute number 516 of Policy and Finance Committee dated 22 November 2011 detailing events that had followed on from the Government's announcements that all regional development agencies would be closed and new arrangements put in place for economic development.

Over this same period a new National Business Link service had been established and Business Link North West Regional Business Support Service had closed at the end of 2011.

A draft Economic Strategy Review Document 2012 had been prepared and a summary of the document and its strategic objectives were explained in more detail in the following section of the report:

- Regeneration and Economic Development;

- Business Support and Development;
- Infrastructure and Communications;
- Image, Marketing and Promotion;
- Employment and Skills.

RESOLVED: That Committee agree that the draft Strategy Review should now go out to public consultation for a six week period to enable local stakeholders and private sector to comment on any issues contained in the document. A copy of the document would be made available through the Borough Council's website throughout the consultation process.

#### 841 SAFEGUARDING POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Committee considered a report from the Head of Cultural and Leisure Services asking Members to endorse the adoption of a Safeguarding Policy for children and vulnerable adults. He commented that the Borough Council had had a Child Protection Policy in place for a number of years but in recent years the role the Council had expanded and now involved a number of partnership activities that had a connection with children and vulnerable adults eg crime reduction, health and wellbeing and children's trusts.

The Council had recently been contacted by Lancashire Safeguarding Children's Board along with NHS East Lancashire and asked to review our policies and procedures in line with good practice within the sector. It was recognised that there was a need for more robust procedures and these were urgent within the current arrangements within East Lancashire where we were commissioned to deliver a range of healthy lifestyle programmes.

The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee had taken on the task of reviewing the Council's approach to safeguarding and at their meeting on 31 January 2012, a draft policy had been discussed, along with an action plan that would address actions required to implement these new policies. The action plan identified a range of issues, how they should be addressed and a timetable for their implementation.

The main underpinning document is the proposed Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy and Procedures which set out definitions, required action in the event of an incident and the main points of contact.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. note the content of the report and enclosed Action Plan;
2. agree to the adoption of the enclosed Safeguarding Policy and Procedures; and
3. review this document on a regular basis.

#### 842 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2012/13

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking for Committee's approval to the Council's Treasury Management Strategy for 2012/13.

The Prudential Code for Capital Finance had come into effect on 1 April 2004. This had been fully revised in 2009 to incorporate changes as a result of the move to international financial reporting standards and had since been updated following regulatory changes resulted in the Localism Bill 2011.

The Prudential Code required authorities to self regulate the affordability, prudence and sustainability of their capital expenditure and borrowing plans by setting estimates and limits and by publishing actuals for a range of Prudential Indicators.

The revised Treasury Management Code of Practice had been published in 2009. Key changes included enhanced scrutiny roles for those charged with governance, more transparent reporting requirements and greater emphasis on the requirements for insuring those charged with governance had sufficient skills to adequately perform their role. The key changes included the following requirements: minimum reporting requirement – one prior to the start of the financial year, a mid year review and one after the close of the financial year reporting operational activity, scrutiny, training and approval.

The strategy covered the following areas:

- The current treasury position.
- A review of the prospects for interest rates.
- The Council's borrowing and debt strategy.
- The Council's investment strategy.
- Capital programme financing strategy.
- Limits on treasury management activities and Prudential Indicators.
- Current debt portfolio position.
- Annual investment strategy.

\*\*\* RESOLVED: That Committee recommend to Full Council the Treasury Management Strategy as set out in Appendix 1 to the report. \*\*\*

#### 843 TREASURY MANAGEMENT POLICIES AND PRACTICES TO 2012/13

The Director of Resources asked Committee to review, approve and adopt the Treasury Management Policy Statement and Practice for 2012/13. The Treasury Management Policies and Practices document governed the way the Council managed its investments. It is reviewed on an annual basis to comply with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Code. The code identified 12 areas where statements of Treasury Management practices should be developed to implement the full requirements of the code.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. review, approve and formally adopt the Treasury Management Policies and Practices document as attached at Appendix 1, incorporating the Treasury Management key principles, Treasury Management Policy Statement, Treasury Management clauses and Treasury Management Practices and Schedules; and



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2. recommend to Full Council the Treasury Management Policies and practices 2012/13.

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844 DISCRETIONARY DISCOUNT POLICY FOR COUNCIL TAX AND BUSINESS RATES

Committee were asked to agree a policy for discretionary discounts for Council Tax and Business Rates. Local Authorities were required to develop their own discretionary discount policies to enable them to exercise additional powers which had been given to them under Clause 69 of the Localism Act 2012. Unlike other specific types of discretionary business rate reliefs eg rural rate relief top-up where the Government stands 75% of the amount awarded and we meet 25% of the costs, in these instances (discretionary discounts) we would be liable to the full amount awarded.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. note the additional powers introduced in the Localism Act; and
2. approve the policy attached at Appendix 1 to this report.

845 NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES AND COUNCIL TAX WRITE-OFFS

The Head of Revenues and Benefits sought Committee approval to write-off certain Council Tax and National Non-Domestic Rate debts. He answered Members' questions on individual cases.

846 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That by virtue of the next item 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.

Committee were then given details in relation to one of the cases before them and discussed the matter in some detail. They were supportive of the action already taken and agreed a further course of measures for officers to take.

Committee then moved back into Part I of the Agenda.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. approve the writing off £1,019.93 Council Tax and £31,944.77 of NNDR debts where it had been impossible to collect the amounts due; and
2. the Council write to Her Majesty's Revenues and Customs and the Department of Trade and Industry in relation to the case discussed in Part II of this report.

847 REFERENCES FROM COMMITTEE

Core Strategy Costs – Members were asked to consider a request from Planning and Development Committee to transfer funding from the planning earmarked

reserve of £37,000 to cover the remaining costs of completing the Council's Core Strategy. The estimated costs for completing the Core Strategy were £86,000 and available from the residual planning delivery grant monies was a sum of £49,000 leaving a potential shortfall of £37,000.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. agree to the request for additional funding and create a specific budget for the Core Strategy;
2. transfer a sum of £37,000 from the earmarked planning reserve to this budget along with the residual planning delivery grant monies of £49,000;
3. ask the Budget Working Group to monitor the Core Strategy budget until its completion.

848 REVENUES AND BENEFITS GENERAL REPORT

The Head of Revenues and Benefits reported on a number of area under his control:

1. National Non-Domestic Rates.
2. Council Tax.
3. Sundry Debtors.
4. Housing Benefit performance.
5. Housing Benefit fraud.
6. Housing Benefit overpayments.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

849 CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2012/13

Committee considered a report which informed them of the new schemes which had been approved for inclusion in the Capital Programme for this Committee for the forthcoming financial year 2012/13. These were as follows:

1. IT Services – server and network infrastructure £25,000
2. Economic Development initiatives £100,000

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

850 MINUTES OF BUDGET WORKING GROUP

Committee received the minutes of the Budget Working Group held on 19 December 2011.

RESOLVED: That the minutes be noted.

851 PORTAS PILOTS

Committee received a report, for information, regarding a bid proposal for Clitheroe Town Centre following the Government's proposal to establish 12

Portas Pilots in UK town centres. The bid documentation stated that each town centre could receive up to £100,000 of funding if bids were successful. Following discussions with Clitheroe Chamber of Trade, representatives felt that this would be an excellent opportunity to further explore different ways of encouraging more people to visit Clitheroe, identify and highlight its potential for improvement and find innovative ideas and projects through a reinvigorated Clitheroe Town Team.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

#### 852 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That by virtue of the next items of business being exempt information under Category 1, 7 and 9 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be now excluded from the meeting. Committee were then given details in relation to one of the cases before them and discussed the matter in some detail.

#### 853 NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES AND COUNCIL TAX WRITE-OFFS

The Head of Revenues and Benefits sought Committee's approval to write-off certain Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rate debts relating to individuals or sole traders.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the writing off of £4,879.75 Council Tax and £4,236.22 of NNDR debts where it had not been possible to collect the amounts due.

#### 854 SUNDRY DEBTOR WRITE-OFFS

The Director of Resources sought Committee approval to write-off two sundry debtor invoices where the companies had been dissolved.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the write-off of two sundry debts totalling £9,998.00 where the debtors were dissolved.

#### 855 NEW PLATFORM GALLERY AND INFORMATION CENTRE BUSINESS PLAN

Committee considered a Business Plan for the new combined service as a result of a request by Committee at its meeting held on 7 February 2012 (Minute 720 refers). Members considered this plan in some detail.

RESOLVED: That

1. the report be noted; and
2. the matter be further considered at the next Policy and Finance Committee as an update report.

The meeting closed at 8.56pm.

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