

Minutes of Policy & Finance Committee

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 20 November 2012, starting at 6.30pm
Present: Councillor E M H Ranson (Chairman)

Councillors:

R Elms	A Knox
J Hill	J Rogerson
T Hill	R E Sherras
K Hind	D T Smith
S Hirst	R J Thompson
S Hore	N Walsh
K Horkin	

In attendance: Chief Executive, Director of Resources, Director of Community Services, Financial Services Manager, Head of Revenues and Benefits and Solicitor.

Also in attendance: Councillor J White (until 7.50pm)

435 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence from the meeting as submitted on behalf of Councillor A Yearling.

436 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2012 were approved as a correct record with the addition of Councillor N Walsh to the attendance list and signed by the Chairman.

437 MATTERS ARISING

Minutes 362 – Clitheroe Food Festival

The Chief Executive referred to the above minute, in particular to resolution 5 and now reported that it was unlikely that the Council's bid for RDPE funding would be successful. He therefore sought Committee's instructions on their future support for the staging of the 2013/14 Food Festival on the basis of resolution 5 pending a detailed report to the next meeting. He also sought approval for the Council to pay for a modest amount of advertising for the event.

RESOLVED: That Committee agree to funding the advert for the event and for a detailed report to be brought to the next meeting setting out the implications of the Council's involvement in staging the 2013 Food Festival.

438 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor R Thompson declared an interest in Agenda Item 13 (Wiswell/Barrow Parish Council Review of Electoral Arrangements) and minute 28 Reference from Community Services Committee – Disposal of Public Conveniences).

Councillor T Hill declared an interest in Agenda Item 16(a) (New Capital Schemes from Community Committee).

439 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was public participation in relation to Agenda Item 13, Wiswell/Barrow Parish Council Review of Electoral Arrangements.

(Councillor R Thompson declared an interest in the next item of business and left the meeting.)

440 WISWELL/BARROW PARISH COUNCIL REVIEW OF ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

Mrs Maureen Robinson from Wiswell Parish Council was given permission to speak under Public Participation and spoken in favour of the proposal to split the Parish of Wiswell into two separate Parish Councils of Wiswell and Barrow.

The Council's Solicitor asked Committee to consider the results of the 2012 consultation on whether to divide the Wiswell Parish into two separate Parishes, thereby creating a new Parish for Barrow and to determine whether Wiswell Parish Council should be so divided.

Following a request from Wiswell Parish Council and this Council to proceed with the division in March 2012, the Council's Solicitor had submitted a further report to the June meeting seeking their decision on how to proceed. The report explained that another Community Governance Review was a pre-requisite to taking steps to change the Parish arrangements in respect of Wiswell. Committee decided that the Council should undertake a CGR without any need for a valid Community Government Petition.

The Council's Solicitor had carried out a five-year forecast in June 2012. Limited data was available on Wiswell Parish and even less on the Parish Wards of Wiswell and Barrow; however, the vast majority of the data that was available suggested that changes were likely to take place to the ward of Barrow and it was probable that Barrow would continue to increase in size as new developments were completed. If the increase to Barrow Ward occurred, it would inevitably have an effect on Barrow and may well further exacerbate the identity divide that the current Wiswell Parish Council felt existed between the Parish Wards of Barrow and Wiswell.

Given that this was the second consultation in as many years the Council had undertaken on this issue, the Council's Officers were mindful of costs. The Council's Solicitor also was conscious of criticisms about some aspects of how

the 2010 review had been carried out. She had liaised in advance with the Parish Council in relation to the proposed scope of the consultation.

Details were given on how the CGR had been undertaken including letters sent to all residents, paper and online copies of the return form and information on the review which had also been placed online.

In relation to consultation responses 237 residents had taken part in the survey with a majority of respondents agreeing that Wiswell Parish Council should be split: 100% of the respondents from Wiswell Ward and 28.6% of the respondents from Barrow Ward were in favour of the split. Wiswell Ward was well represented with 173 out of 256 electors making their feelings known but only 63 Barrow residents had responded.

Committee were advised that on the 28 September 2012 a petition on behalf of Wiswell residents had been submitted to the Council's Solicitor. Members then discussed this matter in considerable detail.

There was some discussion about whether the Parish boundary should be the ward boundary or the A59. It was agreed that it would be the ward boundary as per the recommendations.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. receive the report;
2. adopt the recommendations at Appendix 7;
3. agree the reasons at Appendix 7; and
4. authorise the Council's Solicitor to draft a Reorganisation Order, liaise with the Boundary Commission and other Officers to carry out any work necessary to implement the recommendations.

(Councillor Thompson returned to the meeting.)

441 REVIEW OF EVENTS SAFETY ADVISORY GROUP

Committee considered a report which reviewed the work of the Events Safety Advisory Group (ESAG).

Committee were reminded that a working group had been formed to review ESAG's policies, constitutions and procedures to ensure that all the advice it provided was done in a constructive, helpful and timely manner.

The working group comprised of Councillors T Hill, A Knox, K Horkin, J Rogerson and Councillor J Alcock and had met three times since the Council meeting. The working group agreed that the main problem of the existing Events Safety Advisory Group related to:

- conflicts of interest between various roles of Officers involved and the role of the Chairman;
- public perception that the Chairman of ESAG was solely acting on behalf of the Council and not the other agencies involved;
- that the Event Safety Advisory Group was still seen as a regulatory/enforcing body rather than one being helpful and advisory;
- a lack of clarity regarding governance, the role and responsibilities of individual members of the Events Safety Advisory Group and the relationship between the group and the Local Authority.

A draft protocol had been produced which clarified that:

event organisers were responsible for organising and managing their own event safely but made it clear that ESAG was there to advise and give guidance; a senior officer of the Council should now chair the new Ribble Valley Safety Advisory Group that would recommend roles and responsibilities for Council Officers and other agencies that make absolutely clear the involvement of Borough Council Officers, Lancashire Police, Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service and other bodies in advising and guiding those organising events and clarify the governance arrangements including meetings, minutes, reporting lines and Member involvement.

Members then discussed this matter in some detail and were supportive of the progress being made by the working group.

RESOLVED: That Committee note the progress with the review of the Event Safety Advisory Group.

442 REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES

The Director of Resources sought Member approval to proposals to increase the Committee's fees and charges with effect from 1 April 2013. She reminded Members that in September 2012 a report had been taken to Budget Working Group on the review of the Council's fees and charges. At that meeting the Budget Working Group had agreed with those proposals to increase fees and charges generally by 2.5%.

Following discussions a proposed set of fees and charges for implementation from 1 April 2013 had been produced for this Committee and was shown as an Appendix to the report.

Work was still underway on forecasting income budget levels for 2013/14 and such budget proposals would be reported back to Committee in January 2013 for approval.

RESOLVED: That Committee agree fees and charges for implementation with effect from 1 April 2013.

443 CORPORATE STRATEGY REVIEW 2012

Committee received a report on the recent review of the Council's Corporate Strategy. The Strategy contained five corporate strategies to address issues that matter most to the borough, each priority had a number of objectives, objectives were supported by key actions and key measures of success were also outlined.

Actions and measures of success would be developed in detail in the 2013/14 Service Plans and performance against our priorities would be regularly published in accordance with good practice on the website.

A short review had been carried out to ensure that the Strategy was still relevant and reflected the Council's priorities. Members then discussed the review document in some detail.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the revised Corporate Strategy 2011/15.

444 2013 BOUNDARY COMMISSION REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES – REVISED PROPOSALS

Committee considered a report on the Review of Parliamentary Constituencies in England. These had previously been considered by Committee at their meeting in September 2011. The Council's Chief Executive had written to the Boundary Commission for England with the Council's comments on those initial proposals. The Boundary Commission for England published its revised proposals on 16 October 2012 and the consultation period would end on the 10 December 2012.

The Boundary Commission for England's revised proposals report explained why the initial proposals for the Ribble Valley had been rejected. There are very close ties between Chipping and other wards in the valley which instead of being included in the Ribble Valley constituency had been included with Lancaster constituency in the initial proposals. There was a considerable body of public opinion that opposed the removal of those wards from the Ribble Valley constituency. The initial proposals had included the city centre ward of Fishwick in the Ribble Valley constituency; this again, had been opposed by various organisations.

Under the new Boundary Commission proposals the western Hyndburn wards of Overton and Netherton would be included within the Ribble Valley constituency with the whole of the Borough of Ribble Valley being kept together as part of the revised proposals.

RESOLVED: That Committee note the revised proposals for the Ribble Valley constituency and the Chief Executive formally respond supporting these new proposals to the Boundary Commission for England.

445 FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

Committee considered a report, which gave details of changes to financial regulations.

The Director of Resources commented that the existing financial regulations were reviewed on an annual basis and any amendments were reported to Committee for approval. Most of the amendments that had been required were minor and reflected updates in regulations and changes within the Council since they were last approved.

*** RESOLVED: That it be a recommendation to Full Council for the acceptance of the revised financial regulations. ***

446 ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT

Councillor Jim White was given permission to speak in relation to this item and he spoke in support of this report and its aims and objectives. Committee gave consideration to a report to form the basis of an annual report and to supplement Section 4 of the Ribble Valley Armed Forces Community Covenant as a working document.

The Borough Council had been approached in December 2011 by 42 (North West Brigade) regarding the new Armed Forces Community Covenant currently being taken up by Council's throughout the country. A request had been made by 42 (NW Brigade) for the Borough Council to consider setting up their own Community Covenant.

The Leader and Chief Executive had asked Councillor White to act on the Council's behalf to investigate and report back and in April 2012 Councillor White was appointed as the Armed Forces Community Champion for the Ribble Valley.

A draft Armed Forces Community Covenant for the Ribble Valley had been prepared to be presented to Council for ratification in December 2012. Section 4 of the draft Community Covenant requested that the Armed Forces Champion co-ordinated and kept the Council informed of ongoing issues relating to the Covenant.

Members then discussed the report and complimented Councillor White on his hard work in preparing the document.

*** RESOLVED: That Committee:

1. approve the draft Community Covenant as outlined in Appendix 1 for ratification by Council in December 2012; and
2. approve the Section 4 measures as outlined in Appendix 2 subject to any additions or alterations to be appended to the Community Covenant and keep the Council informed of future developments.

447 RIBBLE VALLEY ECONOMIC STRATEGY REVIEW 2012

Committee were asked to consider an update on the Ribble Valley Economic Strategy. Committee were reminded that the original Economic Strategy had

undergone a review in order to reflect new structures and approach to economic development as a result of new policy developments.

Members agreed to establish a working group to address economic development issues and to further support and monitor delivery of the economic objectives and activities detailing within the Strategy to address the issues in relation to the Ribble Valley economy.

The Economic Development Working Group had held its inaugural meeting on 7 November 2012, during which the group had reviewed its Terms of Reference. During the meeting the group were also provided with information on a number of current topics such as potential regeneration opportunities at existing employment sites and the need for further employment land and premises highlighting the strategy importance of the Barrow Brook site on the A59 to support future employment and growth needs of the area.

The group then considered key actions identified in the Council's Corporate Plan as follows:

- To embrace the Localism Agenda and increase Parish Council's and local communities to take more responsibility for local delivery.
- To develop an appropriate scheme for the future of the Clitheroe Market development area.
- To develop with relevant partners measures to support the visitor economy.
- To identify options to deliver employment land.
- Work with the County Council and other providers to improve the local infrastructure.

It was recognised there was a need for review of the Economic Strategy but the group considered that the merits of revisiting the review document should be more focussed on delivering key actions and endorse the document as a contextual reference point.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. confirm the Terms of Reference for the Economic Working Group;
2. endorse the draft Strategy Review and Action Plans; and
3. agree the proposed project priorities for economic development.

448

LOCALISATION OF COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT

The Director of Resources referred to her update report on the outcome of the recent consultation on our proposed scheme for Council Tax support. The

consultation exercise had been launched on the 1 September 2012 and had closed on the 31 October 2012. The Council must approve its scheme by the 31 January 2013 and implement it by the 1 April 2013 in time for the new Council Tax year. The Council had utilised the services of the joint consultancy team CRACS who had assisted with launching an online questionnaire. They had also printed and distributed hard copy questionnaires to all existing benefit customers and to a cross-section of Council Tax payers. Drop-in sessions had also been held in the Council Chamber for residents to attend to answer any questions which they may have regarding the changes. A total of 675 responses had been received of which 68% agreed with the Council's proposed draft scheme, 71% agreed that the proposed scheme should be based on the existing CTB scheme and 78% agreed with the existing protection should be retained in the proposed scheme.

The Director of Resources further reported that on 18 October 2012 the Government had announced that Council would be able to apply for a 1-year transition grant where they met the following criteria in setting their Council Tax support schemes:

- Those who would be entitled to 100% support on the current Council Tax Benefit arrangements pay between 0 and no more than 8.5% on their net Council Tax liability.
- The taper rate did not increase above 25%.
- There was no sharp reduction in support for those entering work.

The Director of Resources explained the financial implications for the Council and the major preceptors of adopting a scheme that would be eligible for the transition grant.

Members were reminded that they needed to take a final decision at the Full Council meeting in December 2012 of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme to be adopted. Given the results of the consultation exercise which gave a significant backing to the Council's proposed scheme for a 12% reduction, and the additional funding made available by the Government Members were minded to recommend a scheme with a maximum reduction in support of 12% but agreed this should be reduced to 8½% for the first 12 months to take advantage of additional Government support.

*** RESOLVED: That it be a recommendation to Council that the Council adopt the Council Tax Support Scheme as consulted upon with a maximum reduction in support of 8.5% in 2013/2014 and 12% thereafter. ***

449 WEST BRADFORD PARISH COUNCIL FUNDING REQUEST

Committee were asked to consider a request for an advance/short-term loan for West Bradford Parish Council for £55,000 pending receipt of a grant from the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). West Bradford Parish Council had applied for this grant towards an extension for West Bradford Village Hall. The total cost of the project was estimated at £85,000. The RDPE had stated that they would not sanction grant aid until the Parish Council could

guarantee appropriate funding was in place. They also required the Parish Council to cash flow the project before any grant monies would be paid.

The Director of Resources commented that the Borough Council had made similar grants to Parish Council's and community organisations for similar requests and gave details to Committee. The request for a short-term advance of £55,000 for a period of 3-4 months in order to cash flow the extension project pending the payment of a grant from RDPE. If Committee were to support the request consideration would need to be given to whether the support should be either as a cash advance repayable as soon as practicable or a short-term loan with interest charged over the period of the term.

RESOLVED: That Committee agree an interest-free cash advance of £55,000 for a period of no longer than 4 months.

(Councillor T Hill declared an interest in the next item of business and left the meeting.)

450 REFERENCES FROM COMMITTEE – ADDITIONAL CAPITAL SCHEMES

Committee were asked to consider a request from Community Services Committee to agree to the addition of two new capital schemes in the current financial year's capital programme.

One of these schemes was for improvements to the village green at Calderstones which would be funded through the utilisation of Section 106 Agreement monies that had already been received for this purpose of £81,925. The proposal put before Community Services Committee was to use part of those funds to undertake the capital project with the remainder to be used to fund ongoing revenue upkeep. The capital element of the scheme for approval was £41,930.

The second scheme was for improvements to the Castle Grounds play area for £26,290 which again would be funded from Section 106 Agreement monies already received.

RESOLVED: That Committee agree to the request to the addition of the Castle Grounds play area scheme of £26,290 and the Calderstones Village Green scheme of £41,930 to the current 2012/13 capital programme which will both be funded from Section 106 Agreement monies already received.

(Councillor T Hill returned to the meeting.)

451 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Committee received an update on Economic Development and Regeneration activities and issues. Amongst the issues discussed in the report were the following items:

- Economic Development Overview.

- Ribble Valley Economic Strategy Review 2012.
- Lancashire Enterprise Partnership.
- Lancashire Enterprise Zone.
- Regional Growth Fund.
- Growing Places Fund.
- Business Support.
- Rural Development Programme for England.
- Town Centres and Business Groups.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

452 COUNCIL TAX BASE 2013/14

The Director of Resources informed Members of the latest position regarding the calculation of the Council Tax Base for the next financial year 2013/14. The report dealt with the following main issues:

- Tax Base 2013/14.
- Regulatory proposals.
- Next steps – timetable for amendments.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

453 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MONITORING 2012/13

Committee were provided with a Monitoring Report on our Treasury Management activities for the period 1 April 2012 to 31 October 2012.

The report dealt with the following issues:

- Borrowing requirements.
- Investments.
- Prudential indicators.
- Approved organisations.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

454 REVENUES AND BENEFITS GENERAL REPORT

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 Benefit performance.
- Housing Benefit fraud.
- Housing Benefit overpayments.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

455 REVENUE MONITORING 2012/13

Committee were informed of the position for the first 7 months of this year's revenue budget as far as this Committee was concerned.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

456 OVERALL REVENUE MONITORING 2012/13

Committee considered the position on the revenue budget for the current financial year 2012/13.

Overall the variances to the end of October were favourable with a net saving/additional income of £159,000.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

457 CAPITAL MONITORING 2012/13

Members were given information relating to the progress of the approved capital programme for the period April to October 2012 with regard to schemes which fall under the responsibility of this Committee.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

458 OVERALL CAPITAL MONITORING 2012/13

Members were provided with information relating to the progress of the approved capital programme for the period April to October 2012.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

459 MINUTES OF THE BUDGET WORKING GROUP

Committee received the minutes of the Budget Working Group dated 16 July and 9 August 2012.

460 REPRESENTATION ON OUTSIDE BODIES – RIBBLE VALLEY CITIZENS' ADVICE BUREAU

Committee received a written report from Councillor L Rimmer one of the Council's representatives on Ribble Valley Citizens' Advice Bureau detailing the work of the CAB over the past 12 months.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

461 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That by virtue of the next items of business being exemption information under Category 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1971 the press and public be now excluded from the meeting.

462 WEBSITE UPGRADE AND REDESIGN

The Head of Financial Services sought Committee's approval for the upgrade and redesign of the Council's website and commented that if Members agreed to the proposal the scheme would be added to the Council's Capital Programme.

He gave details of past upgrades in relation to the Council's website and also referred to an annual review which had been undertaken of all Councils' websites by the Society of Information Technology Management. This survey had rated this Council's website as a 1* site.

An internal review had reported on issues surrounding presentation, structure and language currently used in conveying information to users. The volume of information also caused a problem for items being out of date and duplicated. The focus of the current website was seen very much as Council focussed rather than as customer focussed with the need for more flexible and reactive use of the website needed.

Members then discussed the report in some detail.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the proposals for the upgrade and redesign of the Council website and its inclusion in the capital programme as an additional approval in the current financial year.

463 DISPOSAL OF FORMER PUBLIC TOILET SITES

(County Councillor Thompson declared an interest in this item and left the meeting).

Committee considered a reference from Community Committee in relation to the disposal of selected former public convenience sites.

Committee were reminded that an extensive review of all the Council's public conveniences had been undertaken and that Community Committee had agreed to close 8 out of 24 sets of toilet facilities. The Ribble Valley Community Toilet Scheme had replaced some of these toilet facilities and extended toilet provision into commercial retail, licensed and public preemies across the borough.

At its meeting in November, Community Services Committee had considered a review of the operation of the revised service some 8 months since the closure of selected sites; at that meeting Committee had resolved that a report proposing the disposal of 5 of the 8 sites should be presented to this meeting of Policy and Finance Committee.

Members then discussed the report in some detail and the operation of the Ribble Valley Community Toilet Scheme.

RESOLVED: That consideration of this matter be referred back to Community Committee for their further consideration and this Committee reconsider this matter at their January meeting.

The meeting closed at 9.07pm.

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