

Minutes of Policy & Finance Committee

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 27 January 2015 starting at 6.30pm
Present: Councillor S Hirst (Chairman)

Councillors:

J Alcock	S Hore
R Elms	K Horkin
J Hill	A Knox
T Hill	G Mirfin
K Hind	R J Thompson
B Hilton	A Yearling

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

542 APOLOGIES

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

543 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 October 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

544 MATTERS ARISING

Minute 402 – Cycling Events – The Chief Executive reported on the progress of discussions with Pendle Borough Council in relation to this matter and suggested that a Member Working Group should be created to progress our involvement in the event.

RESOLVED: That a working group consisting of the Chairman, Vice Chairman and shadow Leader be formed to oversee the Council's participation in the event.

545 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor K Horkin declared an interest in various properties which he owned in Clitheroe.

546 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

547 REVISED CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2014/2015

The Director of Resources sought Committee's approval for the revised capital programme for the current financial year for this Committee.

She reported that two schemes for this Committee were included within the original capital programme for this year. However, it seemed likely that the scheme for economic development initiatives of £100,000 would slip into the financial year 2015/2016. The scheme for public sector network compliance totalling £16,430 was expected to be spent this financial year.

Members raised concerns about underspends and government pronouncements about how these would be dealt with in the future and the Director of Resources gave her comments on this matter.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the revised capital programme for 2014/2015 as now set out in the report.

548 PROPOSED CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2015/2018

Committee were asked to approve the proposed future three year capital programme from 2015/2016 to 2017/2018 for this Committee.

It was noted at this stage that these were only potential bids that would require further consideration by the Budget Working Group and by this Committee, who would want to make sure that they were both affordable in capital and revenue terms. Members then considered the forward programme which listed the following four schemes.

- Council Office window and roof light replacement - £88,900
- Council Chamber seating renewal - £11,250
- Replacement server for Revenues and Benefits - £25,000
- ICT infrastructure refresh - £160,000

She commented that the level of the Council's capital resources available to fund the future capital programme would be insufficient to finance all bids being put forward by other service Committees. It should also be noted that the bids represent only those that had been submitted with regard to this Committee's services. Other Committee bids would be considered at Special Policy and Finance Committee in two weeks' time.

RESOLVED: That Committee recommends to Special Policy and Finance Committee a future three year capital programme for this Committee's services.

549 LUNCHEON CLUBS

Committee received a report updating them on the position of the Meals on Wheels service and other luncheon clubs in the Ribble Valley. Committee were also being asked to approve the suggested approach being taken by officers.

The current position on Meals on Wheels was that the service had now ended and alternative arrangements made for recipients via Social Services to provide meals through families Pendle Catering and I-care. Committee were informed that it was clear from research that the main requirement for luncheon clubs and

village halls was to provide a meeting place for those in the community that could not readily leave the village and consequently suffer from the effects from isolation and loneliness.

The Council receive a grant from Lancashire County Council 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 as a per capita multiplier.

Lancashire County Council have now written informing this Council that they would only be able to continue funding luncheon clubs until March 2016 when their financial support would cease.

Since the last report to this Committee, a number of luncheon clubs in various villages had been supported and further work was planned to develop new clubs and initiatives in locations where there was currently limited provision. The agreement between this Council and Lancashire County Council allows for existing luncheon clubs to be supported and new ones introduced. Costs would be match funded by LCC up until March 2016.

It was proposed that the funding previously paid to the RVS would remain within the Committee's budget and be invested in new luncheon club provisions and the development of existing clubs but with the objective of them becoming self-sustainable by 2016/2017. To ensure fair allocation of money, it was proposed that there be an application process in which organisations may apply for money to start a new group or support an existing one.

RESOLVED: That Committee note the progress being made and agree to the proposed use of the draft 2015/2016 budget to support existing and new luncheon clubs throughout the borough.

550 OPEN AND ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNMENT

The Chief Executive informed Committee of new regulations 'Open and Accountable Local Government' and their impact upon the Council and asked Members to approve documents relating to public participation and the recording of meetings.

He informed Members that a guide had been received from the Department of Communities and Local Government on Open and Accountable Local Government that included

- Part 1 – Your rights to attend and report meetings
- Part 2 – Access to meetings and documents of council executives
- Part 3 – Access to non-executive meetings and documents of a local government body, other than parish and town councils
- Part 4 – Access to meetings and documents of parish and town councils
- Part 5 – Other rights

He pointed out that the rules had changed to make Councils more transparent and accountable to their local communities and the guide gave practical

information about what the new rules meant for members of the public attending meetings and how they could access information on decisions taken. A detailed explanation was given about how this would and was already affecting the Council at its public meetings.

Concerns about disruption and possible editing of any records made during the meeting were raised by Members and discussions continued around the possibility of webcasting of meetings and the role of the Chairman in controlling such issues. There were also concerns about providing appropriate signage that meetings were being recorded.

The Chief Executive also reported that the Council had taken the opportunity to produce a revised protocol for public participation at all its public meetings.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. note the action taken in order for the Council to adhere to the new regulations regarding Open and Accountable Local Government;
2. approve the protocol for recording of meetings as set out at Appendix A; and
3. approve the protocol for public participation at meetings as set out at Appendix B.

551 REVISED REVENUE BUDGET 2014/2015

Committee were asked to agree a revised revenue budget for 2014/2015 for consideration by Policy and Finance Committee. The Director of Resources commented that the original estimate had been approved in March 2014 and since then a number of virements between budget heads had taken place. Overall, the net budgets for the Council had not changed but this had the impact of increasing or decreasing the budget levels on a number of service cost centres for which this Committee results in a net increase in the budget. She then commented on the revised budget which was £87,440 higher than the original estimate. This had been reduced to £42,990 after allowing for transfers to and from earmarked reserves. Committee then considered the comparison between the original and revised estimates of each cost centre.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the revised budget for 2014/2015.

552 ORIGINAL REVENUE BUDGET 2015/2016

The Director of Resources asked Committee to agree the draft revenue budget for 2015/2016 for consideration by Special Policy and Finance Committee in February.

She reminded Members that our provisional settlement funding assessment was £2,240,595 for 2015/2016. In comparison our current year's allocation is £2,603,789 which represented a 14% cut in our core government funding.

Committee were then asked to consider various cost centres in relation to the draft revenue budget for this Committee. The report highlighted where variations have occurred and gave reasons for those variations. Fees and charges for this Committee had been agreed in October 2014 and had been increased by 2% or more if the increase could be sustained. Similarly, pay increases had been agreed at 2.2% over a two year period 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 and an allowance made for general inflation of 2%.

The Director of Resources responded to a number of questions raised by Members regarding the draft budget.

RESOLVED: That Committee agree the revenue budget for 2015/2016 and submit this to Special Policy and Finance Committee subject to any further considerations by the Budget Working Group.

553 RIBBLE VALLEY COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP – CURRENT ISSUES

Committee received an update report on recent initiatives which Ribble Valley Community Safety Partnership had been involved with. These included:

- CAN/CANSAFE;
- extra polycarbonate glasses in town centre pubs;
- supporting Early Break outreach projects;
- supporting waste lives campaign;
- white ribbon campaign;
- wider collaboration with neighbouring Councils.

In particular, Committee's attention was drawn to the ongoing discussions about a merger of the Pennine Lancashire Community Safety Steering Group and this had been discussed at a recent meeting of East Lancashire Chief Executives and other key agencies. Ribble Valley continues to be opposed to this idea as we feel that our influence and local voice would be lost in a larger merged community safety partnership. Members were asked to endorse the officer stance on this particular issue.

Members expressed their support for the continuance of the Ribble Valley Community Safety Partnership and asked specific questions in relation to Longridge CCTV and staffing resources.

RESOLVED: That Committee note the contents of the report and endorse the retention of the Ribble Valley Community Safety Partnership as a stand-alone partnership.

554 REVIEW OF 2011 TO 2015 CORPORATE STRATEGY

Committee considered the Council's revised Corporate Strategy 2011/2015. The Strategy contained five corporate priorities to address issues that most affect the borough. Each priority had a number of objectives; those objectives were supported by key actions and key measures of success were also outlined.

Performance against our priorities would be regularly published in accordance with good practice on the Council's website. Performance was also reported to our citizens in the Annual Report and in Ribble Valley News.

Whilst there were a number of unknowns and changes in the external environment which may impact on the Council, it was also clear that there would be decreasing resources available to the Council to deliver those priorities.

RESOLVED: That Committee consider and approve the revised Corporate Strategy 2011/2015.

555 VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS GRANT APPLICATION

Committee considered a revised application for a voluntary organisation grant that had been received from Gisburn Festival Hall. The application had been previously submitted by the Festival Hall Committee as part of the above grant application process for 2014/2015 but had not been recommended for approval by the Council's Working Group. The Council had since received a letter asking for them to reconsider an amended application taking into account further information provided by them. Members were therefore asked to consider the contents of the application and letter and the request for a voluntary organisation grant.

Members then discussed the request in some detail and officers gave their comments on the background behind this matter.

RESOLVED: That Committee confirm their original decision and refuse the request and that the Director of Resources inform the applicant of the outcome.

556 LOCAL TAXATION WRITE-OFFS

The Head of Revenues and Benefits sought Committee's approval to write off National Non Domestic Rate debts. There were several cases where companies had gone into liquidation and therefore the Council needed to write off the NNDR debts.

RESOLVED: That Committee the writing off of £59,410.05 of NNDR debt where it had not been possible to collect the amount due.

557 PARISH POLLS

The Chief Executive informed Committee of a consultation document on the modernisation of Parish Polls with the aim of bringing the process up to date which would make the process more transparent.

He commented that Parish Polls were a tool which local communities could use to gauge local reaction to a particular issue which had arisen at a Parish meeting and which would have an impact on the local community. In Parishes with a Parish Council, Parish meetings must happen at least annually and given opportunity for all voters to raise and discuss issues of relevance to the Parish

although the votes were non-binding. A Parish wide poll could be called on any question that arose at a Parish meeting. The results of the poll could be useful for the Parish Council to determine local views on local issues. The consultation paper gave examples of discrepancies between the arrangements for such polls and local Parish Council elections, in particular in relation to the number of people who could request a poll, specific voting arrangements around hours of poll and postal and proxy voting and the specific question on which a poll could be agreed.

The government's proposals including increasing the trigger for the number of electors needed to call a poll to limit vexatious unnecessary or otherwise inappropriate use of the trigger.

Updating the voting arrangements to improve access and modernise polling procedures to bring in mechanisms in line with other local government polls including ballot boxes being available from 7am to 10pm and voting being possible by postal and proxy voters and finally more closely define the question on which a Parish poll could be held to enable questions which were appropriate to local issues.

In view of the limited time for response, the Council had included the suggested response which the Council would send to the Department of Communities and Local Government.

RESOLVED: That Committee agree the suggested response to the consultation as set out in Appendix A to this report.

558 UPDATE ON LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT AND COUNCIL TAX TECHNICAL CHANGES

Committee received a report which gave an update on the latest position in relation to local Council Tax support and Council Tax technical changes. Some of the issues discussed were in relation to local Council Tax support and Council Tax technical changes.

RESOLVED: That the matter be noted.

559 RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME FOR ENGLAND 2014/2020

Committee received a report which gave an update regarding the forthcoming Rural Development Programme. Members were reminded that the rural Development Programme for England was jointly funded by the European Union and the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). The aims of the programme were to safeguard and enhance the rural environmental, improve competitiveness in the agriculture sector and foster sustainable and thriving rural businesses and rural economies across England. Ribble Valley was included in Lancashire North and Bowland for the purposes of bids.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

560 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MONITORING 2014/2015

Committee considered a monitoring report on our treasury management activities for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 December 2014. The report discussed the following topics:

- public works loan board
- temporary investments
- prudential indicators
- local government bonds agency
- approved organisations
- recent events

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

561 REVENUES AND BENEFITS GENERAL REPORT

Committee considered a report which covered the following areas:

- a) National Non Domestic Rates (NNDR)
- b) Council Tax
- c) Sundry debtors
- d) Housing benefit performance
- e) Housing benefit fraud
- f) Housing benefit overpayments

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

562 BUDGET WORKING GROUP

Committee received the minutes of budget working groups held on 30 September and 15 December 2014.

563 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

564 LOCAL TAXATION AND BENEFIT WRITE-OFFS

Committee considered a report requesting the approval to write-off certain National Non Domestic Rates and Council Tax/Housing Benefit debts relating to individuals or sole traders. There was one case of an NNDR write-off and also three cases of Council Tax benefit overpayments.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the writing off of £3,994.10 NNDR and £6,467.19 Council Tax benefit debts where it had not been possible to collect the amounts due.

565 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP

Committee received the minutes of the Economic Development Working Group held on 25 September and 10 November 2014.

566 MARKET RE-DEVELOPMENT, CLITHEROE

Committee received an update in relation to the market development site and sought Member endorsement of the appointment of special advisors. Committee were informed that the assessment of the submissions in relation to this particular project had led to four successful parties being chosen and the Council would now move on to the next procurement stage involving detailed discussions on proposals.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. note the provision set out and revised project timetables set out in the report; and instruct the Chief Executive to keep Committee informed of progress; and
2. endorse the appointment of specialist advisors Jones Laing LaSalle to support the delivery at stage 1 as set out in paragraph 3.4 of the report at a cost of £10,400 and agree to make provision for a further £26,100 to provide consultancy support as identified for the remaining stages set out in paragraph 3.4 with a view to such cost being recovered from the development.

567 SALE OF LAND AT TWIN BROOKS, SALTHILL

Committee received a report from the Chief Executive seeking their agreement to the disposal of Council land at Twin Brooks, Salthill.

RESOLVED: That Members agree to the sale of the land as shown on the plan at Appendix 1 to the report on the terms recommended by the District Valuer and set out in paragraph 3.3 of the report and that the Chief Executive be asked to proceed with this sale.

The meeting closed at 7.55pm.

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