

## Minutes of Policy & Finance Committee

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 20 November 2018, starting at 6.30pm  
Present: Councillor K Hind (Chairman)

Councillors:

S Atkinson	G Mirfin
S Bibby	I Sayers
M French	D T Smith
T Hill	R Swarbrick
A Knox	

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

Not in attendance: Councillor R Bennett

### 462 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors A Brown, P Elms, S Hirst and J Rogerson.

### 463 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2018 and the minutes of the Emergency Committee held on the same day were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### 464 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY AND NON-PECUNIARY INTEREST

There were no declarations of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interest.

### 465 REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT 2000 ('RIPA')

The Chief Executive submitted a report seeking Committee's approval of the updated RIPA Policy and the appointment of a replacement Senior Responsible Officer and to report to Committee upon the Council's use of its powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000.

The Council has a policy which sets out how it will deal with RIPA which was last reviewed and approved by Committee in November 2017. In August 2018 the Home Office revised its Codes of Practice for Covert Surveillance and Property Interference. The Council therefore needed to amend its RIPA Policy to take account of these amendments.

The amendments had been shown as tracked changes for ease of reference. The Council's new Director of Economic Development and Planning had also been added as an Authorising Officer and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services had also been replaced as Senior Responsible Officer as there was currently a vacancy for the Solicitor's position.

The Council had not used RIPA over the last several years and this trend had continued with there being no use of it in the last 6 months.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. note the usage of RIPA during the period June 2018 to November 2018;
2. approve the appointment of the Director of Economic Development and Planning as an Authorising Officer for RIPA;
3. approve the appointment of the Council's Head of Legal and Democratic Services as the Senior Responsible Officer for RIPA; and
4. recommend to Full Council the revised RIPA Policy.

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#### 466 ONLINE PAYMENT GATEWAY

The Director of Resources submitted a report seeking Committee's approval to expand the online payments facility.

The ICT Strategy for 2018/19 to 2021/22 was approved by Policy and Finance Committee on 19 June 2018. An Action Plan was developed for each service and the Revenues and Benefits Action Plan included the development of on-line forms. The Council was facing an increasing demand from residents to be able to pay for other goods and services online as well as those currently available to take on-line payments.

To enable this to be implemented two licences need to be purchased that will allow the payments system to communicate with the online forms system. The Paylink Licence from Civica Icon would initially cost £2,950 and have an annual hosting fee of £590 and the payment connector licence and gazetteer functionality required from Firmstep would initially cost of £4,098 and have an annual cost of £1,500.

These licences would enable us to provide a better service to our residents by giving them the ability to request and pay for goods and services provided by the Council 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the purchase of the two licences at an initial cost of £7,048 and annual costs of £2,090 to enable the functionality to be rolled out across Council services where appropriate.

#### 467 LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2019/20

The Director of Resources submitted a report seeking approval for the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2019/20. The Council agreed a Local Tax Support Scheme which came into effect on 1 April 2013. The scheme matched the previous Council Tax benefit scheme but was set to cap the maximum reduction in support of working age claimants to 12% each year. Late in the day the Government announced a one-off transition grant for those authorities who agreed to set the maximum reduction at 8.5%. The Council agreed to accept the grant and hence limits the reduction to 8.5% for 2013/14. As the transition grant

was for one year only however, the reduction in support to working age claimants reverted back to the agreed percentage set at 12%.

The Local Government Finance Bill imposes a duty on billing authorities to consider whether to revise or replace its scheme by 11 March each year and to consult with major precepting authorities and other persons likely to have an interest in the scheme if any significant changes are proposed.

The scheme has been updated by minor amendments each year to maintain the link with housing benefit and previous Council Tax benefit scheme. No significant changes are proposed other than maintaining an uprating income disregards non-dependant reductions applicable amounts and premiums in line with housing benefit as is done each year.

\*\*\* RESOLVED: That Committee recommend to Full Council the approval of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2019/20 as set out in the report. \*\*\*

#### 468 COUNCIL TAX BASE 2019/20

The Director of Resources submitted a report informing Committee of the Council Tax Base for 2019/20.

The Council Tax Base is set each year between 1 December and 31 January and is an important calculation which sets out the number of dwellings to which Council Tax is chargeable in an area or part of an area. The tax base is used for the purposes of calculating the Band D Council Tax for the billing authority and also major precepting authorities and Parish Councils.

The Local Government Finance Act 2012 allowed changes to the discounts on Council Tax for second homes and empty properties. In the first year of the new changes in 2013/14 the Council agreed to leave the rates of current discounts/exemptions unchanged, however from 2014/15 the Council had implemented the change that for long-term empty properties (empty from 6 months up to 2 years) the current 50% discount be removed which made owners liable for the full 100% Council Tax.

Legislation has recently received Royal Assent on 1 November 2018 that would allow billing authorities greater freedoms in the charges that are levied on long-term empty properties. However this did not apply to second homes or properties that are exempt from Council Tax.

Having considered the new powers the Budget Working Group had recommended that the Council do not introduce any changes for the forthcoming year but perhaps reconsider in the future depending on the experience of other local authorities introducing the new premiums.

The calculation for the Council Tax Base had now been carried out across all of the parishes and had resulted in an overall tax base of 23,209 for 2019/20 which is an increase of 1.3% on the tax base for 2018/19 of 22,902.

The Council Tax Base had increased steadily over the period 2007/08 to 2013/14 however since then increases have averaged 1.5% to 2% each year.

RESOLVED: That

1. the new Council Tax premiums are not introduced on long-term empty homes as allowed for in recent changes in legislation; and
2. Committee approve the Council Tax Base 2019/20.

469 REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES

The Director of Resources submitted a report seeking Committee's approval on proposals to increase this Committee's fees and charges with effect from 1 April 2019. These proposals were the first stage in the review of the Committee's budget for the forthcoming 2019/20 financial year.

The Budget Working Group had considered the overall 3 year budget forecast which showed a potential budget deficit for 2019/20 of £101k after taking £250k from general fund balances.

The Council's latest budget forecast allows for a 2% increase in the level of income raised from fees and charges and this review aims to increase budgeted income for 2019/20 by this amount as a minimum.

The review of fees and charges had been co-ordinated by Financial Services working together with Heads of Service and budget holders to enable the budget holder to propose a set of fees and charges for their services. The proposed set of fees and charges were set out for Committee's information.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the proposed fees and charges for this Committee for 2019/20 as set out in the report at Annex 1.

470 LOCAL TAXATION WRITE-OFFS

Committee were asked to approve the write-off of business rate debts relating to one case where a company had been dissolved. Reasonable steps by various means had been taken to collect this debt.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the writing-off of £12,601.64 business rates and £60 costs where it had not been possible to collect the amount due.

471 CAPITAL PROGRAMME REVIEW AND NEW BIDS 2019/24

The Director of Resources submitted a report recommending the future five year Capital Programme for the financial year 2019/20 to 2023/24 for this Committee.

For this Committee there were originally five schemes approved for financial years 2019/20 to 2022/23 totalling £403,500. No proposed amendments to the previously approved Capital Programme had been put forward by the Heads of Service.

Heads of Service had been asked to put forward new bids for 2023/24 and 7 had been submitted totalling £222,000. Heads of Service had also requested that the following new scheme bids be approved in the Capital Programme for 2019/20 rather than 2023/24:

- Bid 5 – Committee administration IT system;
- Bid 6 – replacement PC's;
- Bid 7 – e-recruitment system.

It was pointed out that other Committees would be receiving similar reports for new scheme bids and that all these bids would be finally considered alongside each other by the Budget Working Group and Policy and Finance Committee.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. approve the proposed five year Capital Programme for 2019/20 to 2023/24; and
2. recommend to Policy and Finance Committee a future five year Capital Programme for this Committee's services.

#### 472 OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REVIEW LETTER 2017/18

The Chief Executive submitted a report informing Committee about referrals to the Local Government Ombudsman for the period 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018.

Whilst 7 complaints were received only 6 were determined during this period and the decisions made by the Ombudsman were as follows:

- 1 complaint was dismissed as incomplete or invalid;
- 2 complaints were referred back to the Council for local resolution;
- 2 complaints were closed off after initial enquiries by the Ombudsman;
- 1 complaint was upheld.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

#### 473 COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report for Committee's information of relevant Community Safety Partnership activities.

Committee discussed various aspects of anti-social behaviour and requested that the Police be informed of their concerns via the Community Safety Partnership.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

#### 474 VOTER ID PILOT

The Chief Executive submitted a report informing Committee of the Council being selected to be a Voter ID Pilot for the Local Elections next May 2019. An approach had been made by the Cabinet Office to ask if we could assist them and the Minister for the Constitution with their aim to eventually implement Voter ID nationally in the most successful manner. Any additional costs incurred by the Council through being a pilot would be fully reimbursed.

He informed Committee that Voter ID Pilot for Ribble Valley would be a mixture of photo and non-photo ID and that there would be some flexibility to design a pilot that was as voter friendly as it could be for Ribble Valley voters.

Communication and publicity would be critical to the success of the pilot and detailed plans were already been drawn up to ensure this happens.

Members discussed the various forms of ID that would be desirable for voters to use when attending a polling station to vote.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

475 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MONITORING 2018/19

The Director of Resources submitted a report for Committee's information on the Treasury Management activities for the period 1 April to 31 September 2018. The report outlined the following topics:

- Public Works Loan Board;
- borrowing requirements;
- temporary investments;
- Prudential indicators;
- Local Government Bonds Agency;
- approved organisations;
- recent events; and
- exposure to risk.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

476 REVENUES AND BENEFITS GENERAL REPORT

Committee considered a report which covered the following:

- National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR);
- Council Tax;
- Sundry Debtors;
- Housing Benefit and Council Tax support performance;
- Housing Benefit overpayments.

Committee were also informed that Universal Credit Full Service would start the following day.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

477 REVENUE MONITORING 2018/19

The Director of Resources submitted a report for Committee's information on the position for the period April to September 2018 of this year's revenue budget as far as this Committee was concerned.

The report outlined by cost centre a comparison between actual expenditure and the original estimate for the period to the end of September and highlighted the variations along with the budget holder's comments and agreed action plans.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

478 OVERALL REVENUE MONITORING 2018/19

The Director of Resources submitted a report for Committee's information on the overall revenue position for the current financial year up to the end of September 2018.

The report showed the overall budget broken down subjectively and monitored against the profiled budget, with any variances highlighted and reasons given.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

479 CAPITAL MONITORING 2018/19

The Director of Resources submitted a report providing Members with information on the progress of the approved Policy and Finance Committee 2018/19 Capital Programme for the period to the end of September 2018.

The report gave a summary of the Policy and Finance Committee Capital Programme budget expenditure to date and variances and included the full Capital Programme by scheme with details, financial information and the budget holder's comments.

At the end of September 2018 39.9% of the annual Capital Programme for this Committee had been spent or committed. Out of the 6 capital schemes for this Committee 1 had been completed and 3 were on track to be completed in year, however the new Council telephone system scheme and the lift replacement at the Council Offices scheme would not be completed in year.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

480 OVERALL CAPITAL MONITORING 2018/19

The Director of Resources submitted a report for Committee's information relating to the progress of the Council's approved Capital Programme for the period to the end of September 2018.

At the end of September 2018 £1,074,638 had been spent or committed which equated to 50.5% of the overall Capital Programme budget for 2018/19.

Six scheme had already been completed and on a review of progress on each of the remaining 26 schemes, 14 were currently on track to be completed in year; 6 schemes were in progress but may not be fully completed in year; 1 scheme would not be completed in year; 2 schemes were on hold and 3 schemes were ongoing housing grant schemes.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

481 MINUTES OF BUDGET WORKING GROUP – 5 SEPTEMBER AND  
20 SEPTEMBER 2018

Committee received the minutes of the Budget Working Group meetings held on 5 September 2018 and 20 September 2018.

482 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports from Representatives on Outside Bodies.

483 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That by virtue of the fact that the following item of business be Exempt Information under Category 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be now excluded from the meeting.

484 LOCAL TAXATION WRITE-OFFS

Committee considered a report asking them to approve the writing-off of a Council Tax debt relating to an individual where it had not been possible to collect the amount due.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the writing-off of £1,918.55 of Council Tax debts plus £60 costs where it had not been possible to collect the amount due.

The meeting closed at 7.35pm.

If you have any queries on these minutes please contact Jane Pearson (425111).