

Minutes of Policy & Finance Committee

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 24 September 2019, starting at 6.30pm
Present: Councillor S Atkinson (Chairman)

Councillors:

S Bibby	S Hore
A Brown	S Fletcher
J Clark	A Knox
M French	D Peat
J Hill	R Thompson
S Hirst	

In attendance: Chief Executive, Director of Resources, Director of Community Services, Director of Economic Development and Planning, Principal Policy and Performance Officer and Head of Revenues and Benefits.

Also in attendance: Councillors T Austin and N Walsh.

250 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors S Carefoot, M Hindle and J Rogerson.

251 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Reference was made to Minute 90 – Appointment of Workings Groups 2019/20 and it was requested that the membership on the Voluntary Organisation Grants Working Group be altered to replace Councillor S Hore with Councillor J Clark.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve this amendment to the Membership of the Voluntary Organisation Grants Working Group.

252 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY AND NON-PECUNIARY INTEREST

Councillors A Knox and S Fletcher declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda item 9 – Voluntary Organisation Grants and Councillor S Atkinson declared an interest in Agenda item 28(b) – Estate Matters: Land at Highmoor Park.

253 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

254 CORPORATE STRATEGY 2019/2023

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking Members to approve the Council's Corporate Strategy 2019 to 2023.

The Corporate Strategy sets out the strategic direction of the Council for the period 2019 to 2023 providing a focus to ensure that the services we deliver meet the needs of our communities. The Strategy had been reviewed following the Local Elections in May 2019 by a Member Working Group, supported by the Corporate Management Team and the Principal Policy and Performance Officer.

A copy of the Strategy was included in the report for Members to consider. It had been based on local and national priorities, the Sustainable Community Strategy, our Customer Perception Survey and feedback from staff. The Strategy contained:

- five corporate ambitions to address issues that matter most to the borough;
- each ambition has a number of objectives – things that we wish to achieve for the borough;
- objectives are supported by a number of short and medium term priority actions – the things we will do to achieve our objectives; and
- key measures of success are also outlined, which will allow progress towards the achievement of the priority and objective to be monitored.

Members discussed various aspects included in the Corporate Strategy and requested several amendments/additions. These related to ambition 3 and the inclusion of the words physical activity around our key measures of success regarding percentage of people participating in sport and ambition 4 with regard to the short-term priority action to eliminate wherever possible single use plastics within the Council with a proposed addition to include sharing good practice and raising awareness around single use plastic usage and avoidance.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the Corporate Strategy 2019-2023 with the suggested amendments.

255 BUDGET FORECAST 2020/21 TO 2022/23

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking Committee to consider the Council's latest budget forecast and the actions that needed to be taken to meet the financial challenges that lie ahead.

The budget forecast was an important tool which gives an early indication of any potential budgetary problems and also informs the medium term financial strategy. It is based on many assumptions that are difficult to predict going forward, particularly in regard to business rate retention, new homes bonus and Government grants.

The Director of Resources outlined the numerous assumptions which had been made in updating the budget forecast. These included:

- a 3% pay award in 2020/21 with a 2% increase each year thereafter;

- inflation and interest rates assumption for price increases to 2%. Investment interests had been assumed at similar levels to those we are currently receiving of around £75,000 per annum;
- 2019 spending round – the key elements included the fair funding review and business rates reset that had been deferred by 12 months to 2021/22; a £2.9bn increase in core spending power overall; the Council Tax referendum limit proposed at 2% subject to consultation; baseline funding uprated by CPI; funding to remove negative RSG continued for 2021;
- new homes bonus legacy payments would be honoured by the scheme for 2020/21 though the scheme was still under discussion with Ministers;
- 75% business rate pilots would come to an end;
- Council Tax – an assumption of a £5 annual increase which may or may not be permissible and would be a decision for Members;
- refuse collection – because of experienced significant overspends on refuse vehicle maintenance an extra £50k had been allowed each year;
- superannuation triannual review – notification of the impact of the valuation on the employers’ superannuation contributions from the actuary were awaited, an increase in contributions of £100k per annum had been allowed for at this stage.

Other assumptions made in the latest forecast included the use of balances of £250,000 each year from 2021/22; interest receipts being £75k each year; a 1% increase in the Council Tax base each year; and an assumption that our share of the collection fund would be a surplus of £25k each year.

Based on all these assumptions the budget shortfall would be as shown:

Reductions in expenditure required in order to achieve a balanced budget		£000
2020/21		0
2021/22		182
2022/23		221

The Director of Resources reported that the accountants and budget holders would commence their preparation of the detailed estimates shortly. The Budget Working Group would have a key role to play in the budget process in order to be in a position next February to agree a balanced budget.

RESOLVED: That Committee keep under review economic and political developments and their impact on the Council’s budget forecast.

SUPPORTING THE GREATER LANCASHIRE PLAN

The Chief Executive submitted a report asking Committee to consider supporting the commissioning of a Greater Lancashire Plan. He informed Members that presentations had been made to the Lancashire Leaders' Group by Lancashire County Council staff setting out the need to produce a Greater Lancashire Plan that would provide the foundations of a transformational step change in the future of Lancashire.

The report included the briefing note produced for Chief Executives and Leaders and the slides presented to Lancashire Leaders setting out the case for a Greater Lancashire Plan.

Initial funding for the production of the plan would cost £400k and Lancashire Leaders had been asked to support this from the Strategic Economic Growth and Financial Sustainability Fund that would be created at the end of the financial year from a share of the extra growth in business rates generated by the Lancashire Business Rates Pilot Pool. The briefing note also set out costs for further phases of work that would be significant but had not yet been agreed by Lancashire Leaders.

Members discussed the production of the Greater Lancashire Plan and felt that at this stage it was imperative that Ribble Valley Borough Council be part of it in order to have some influence in its outcomes.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. Support the production of the Greater Lancashire Plan subject to:
 - the Plan being signed off by each authority;
 - the Plan being based upon the current local government structure in Lancashire; and
 - that this Council only agrees to contribute to a share of the £400k initial work.
2. Agree to this Council contributing £21,776 to the cost of producing the Plan from the early release of Business Rate Growth subject to this unanimously being agreed by the Lancashire Business Rate Pilot Pool governing body.

REFERENCE FROM HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE – ASHES BEAM AT CLITHEROE CEMETERY

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking Committee to consider a request from Health and Housing Committee to agree to the approval of additional revenue budget of £4,410 in 2019/20 for the installation of additional ashes beams for cremated remains at Clitheroe Cemetery. The cost of this scheme would be met from the equipment earmarked reserve.

At its meeting the Health and Housing Committee had approved the request and the resolution of the meeting was outlined for Committee's information.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. approve the request for the additional revenue budget of £4,410; and
2. approve the use of the equipment earmarked reserve to fund the additional revenue budget approval.

258 CONCURRENT FUNCTION GRANTS

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking Committee to consider the allocation of concurrent function grants for 2019/20. She reminded Committee that in November 2017 they had considered a Revised Concurrent Function Grant Scheme which combined the previous Parish Lengthsman Scheme with the Concurrent Function Grant Scheme.

The combined scheme continues to give assistance for those Parishes/Town Councils who provide services in their areas which elsewhere are provided by the Borough Council. This includes the following concurrent functions:

- Burial Grounds
- Bus Shelters
- Footpaths
- Footway Lighting
- Litter Collection
- Dog waste bins
- Parks and play areas
- Parish Lengthsman

She reported that under the revised scheme Concurrent Function Grants continue to be paid to Parishes at 25% of an eligible concurrent function expenditure. For those Parishes previously in respect of a separate Parish Lengthsman Grant transitional protection of 75% applied for 2019/20.

An annual revenue budget allocation for the combined scheme in 2019/20 had been approved at £31,910.

In June 2019 all Parish Councils had been sent a Concurrent Function Grant application form for 2019/20 with applications to be returned to the Borough Council by 29 July 2019. 25 applications had been received with revenue expenditure to be supported totalling £88,163.

Final allocations proposed for Committee's approval at 25% of net eligible expenditure and including transitional arrangements for those Councils previously in receipt of a separate Parish Lengthsman Grant totalled £23,812. The grants to the individual Parishes were outlined for Committee's consideration.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the payment of concurrent function grants to Parish Councils as detailed in the report totalling £23,812.

(Councillors A Knox and S Fletcher left the meeting.)

VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION GRANTS – CITIZENS’ ADVICE BUREAU PERFORMANCE MONITORING INFORMATION

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking Committee to receive and consider the performance monitoring information provided by Ribble Valley Citizens’ Advice Bureau for the quarter ending June 2019 and to consider whether to approve payment for the next quarterly instalment of the Voluntary Organisation Grant to the Citizens’ Advice Bureau.

The Director of Resources reminded Committee that at their meeting in April 2019 grants had been approved supporting 20 voluntary organisations across the borough totalling £105,500 but that concern was expressed by Members that the proposed allocation for the Citizens’ Advice Bureau dominated the grants to be awarded representing approximately 50% of the total budget available and therefore regular updates on their work with measureable targets was requested.

At the meeting in June 2019 monitoring information to the quarter ending March 2019 was provided and Committee approved the release of the second instalment of the agreed grant.

The Manager of the Citizens’ Advice Bureau had now supplied monitoring information for the latest quarter available up to the end of June 2019, along with explanatory notes which was included for Committee’s information.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the payment of the Voluntary Organisation Grant for the third quarter to the Citizens’ Advice Bureau of £13,125.

(Councillors A Knox and S Fletcher returned to the meeting.)

CAPITAL MONITORING 2019/20

The Director of Resources submitted a report providing Members with information on the progress of this Committee’s 2019/20 Capital Programme for the period to the end of July 2019. The report gave a summary of the Policy and Finance Capital Programme budget expenditure to date and the variances and included the full Capital Programme by scheme with detailed financial information and budget holders’ comments.

The total approved budget for this Committee’s Capital Programme of 8 schemes was £257,200.

As at the end of July 2019, £24,256 had been spent or committed which equated to 9.4% of the annual Capital Programme budget for this Committee.

The Director of Resources asked Committee to consider two specific schemes which required an increase to their original budgets:

- Lift replacement at the Council Offices – the main contract work had been out to tender and the contract has been let with a start date expected for early 2020. New Regulations require a top drive lift which has had increased beam and loft costs. An increase of £5,340 was therefore requested which could be funded from the capital earmarked reserve.

- Replacement PC's – the capital scheme for the replacement of PC's is for £47,100 to enable the Council to move to Windows 10 by January 2020. We had now been informed by Civica that our current version of Civica Pay has not been certified for customers using Windows 10, which would mean that after implementing the PC replacement scheme, we would not be supported by Civica and would not meet the PCI DSS requirements. An upgrade was therefore required to enable us to be supported by Civica. An increase to this capital scheme was required from £47,100 to £65,100 to cover the cost of the Civica Pay upgrade to Version 17.5 and the implementation of 3D secure Version 2, which could be funded from the local Council Tax Support New Burdens Funding earmarked reserve.

It was also highlighted that there will be an additional £1,600 annual support costs which will need adding to the Revenue Budget.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the request for additional budget of £5,340 on the lift replacement at Council Offices scheme, to be funded from the Capital earmarked reserve and the additional budget of £18,000 on the PC replacement scheme to be funded from the Local Council Tax Support New Burdens Funding earmarked reserve.

261 LOCAL TAXATION WRITE-OFFS

Committee were asked to approve the writing-off of business rate debts relating to two cases where a company had been dissolved and one had been liquidated. Reasonable steps by various means had been taken to collect the debt.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve writing-off £13,512.03 Business Rates and £60.00 costs where it has not been possible to collect the amounts due.

262 SPENDING ROUND 2019

The Director of Resources submitted a report updating Members regarding the Spending Round 2019 announced on 4 September 2019. The Chancellor had announced a funding package of more than £3.5bn for Council services which provided some degree of certainty over funding for the next year but a decision is still awaited on what will replace business rate pilots.

Also of significant concern was that the NHB scheme for 2020/21 was still being considered by Ministers.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

263 LUNCHEON CLUBS

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report providing Committee with an update on the Luncheon Club support project which was given a budget allocation in 2015 following the cessation of the Meals on Wheels service. Progress to date showed that 25 Luncheon Clubs were registered on our database with several others being helped to become established.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve an allocation of £250 to each Luncheon Club towards a Christmas lunch.

264 OMBUDSMAN REVIEW LETTER 2018

The Chief Executive submitted a report informing Committee about referrals to the Local Government Ombudsman for the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019. Whilst 8 complaints were received, 9 were determined during the period. The decisions made by the Ombudsman were as follows:

- One complaint was dismissed as incomplete or invalid.
- One complaint was closed after initial enquiries by the Ombudsman.
- One complaint was upheld.
- Six complaints were not upheld.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

265 2018/2019 YEAR END PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

The Director of Resources submitted a report for Committee's information on the Year End Report of 2018/19 detailing performance against our local performance indicators.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

266 OVERALL CAPITAL MONITORING 2019/20

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 July 2019. The total approved budget for the 2019/20 overall Capital Programme was £3,751,040 for 32 schemes.

At the end of July 2019 £862,112 had been spent or committed which equated to 23% of the overall Capital Programme budget for 2019/20.

The report outlined the main reasons for the underspend on the full year budget to date. 6 schemes had been completed already. 17 schemes were currently on track to be completed in year. 5 schemes were in progress but may be fully completed in year. 2 schemes were on hold and 2 schemes were ongoing housing grant schemes.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

267 REVENUE OUTTURN 2018/19

The Director of Resources submitted a report for Committee's information on the outturn for the 2018/19 financial year in respect of the revenue budget for this Committee. The report showed the overall spend of this Committee by cost centre compared to the revenue estimated and details of variances.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

268 REVENUE MONITORING 2019/20

The Director of Resources submitted a report updating Members on the position for the period April to July 2019 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 July and highlighted the variations along with the budget holders' comments and agreed action plans.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

269 OVERALL REVENUE MONITORING 2019/20

The Director of Resources submitted a report informing Members of the overall revenue position for the current financial year up to the end of July 2019. The report showed the overall spend by cost centre compared to the revenue estimated and details of variances.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

270 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MONITORING 2019/20

The Director of Resources submitted a report providing Committee with a monitoring report on Treasury Management Activities for the period 1 April 2019 to 31 August 2019. The report outlined the following topics:

- Public Works Loan Board.
- Borrowing requirements.
- Temporary investments.
- Local Government Bond Agency.
- Prudential Indicators.
- Approved organisations.
- Recent events.
- Exposure to risk.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

271 TIMETABLE FOR BUDGET SETTING

The Director of Resources submitted a report for Committee's information on the timetable for setting the 2020/21 budget. The timetable was considerably detailed and clearly indicated who was responsible for which actions. This would be monitored as to when each individual task was achieved in order to inform future timetables.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

272 INSURANCE RENEWALS 2019/20

The Director of Resources submitted a report informing Committee of the insurance renewals for the period 20 June 2019 to 19 June 2020. A tendering exercise for the Council's insurance had been carried out in 2018 resulting in Zurich Municipal being appointed as our insurers on a five year long-term agreement, effective from June 2018.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

273 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.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

274 BUDGET WORKING GROUP MINUTES

Committee received the minutes of the Budget Working Group meetings held on 17 January 2019, 11 February 2019 and 18 July 2019.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

275 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports from Representatives on Outside Bodies.

276 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That by virtue of the fact that the following items of business be exempt information under Category 1 and 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be now excluded from the meeting.

277 COMMITTEE ADMINISTRATION IT SYSTEM

The Chief Executive submitted a report informing Committee of the progress in seeking a Committee administration IT system and the timescale for its implementation and to seek Committee's approval for an exemption from contract procedure rules. He informed Committee that a Committee administration IT system had now been identified from Mod.Gov.

He outlined the quotation for the provision of the system and what the system would achieve with a view to start using the system with effect from the May 2020 municipal year.

Contract procedure rule 6.3 required for 4 quotes to be obtained before a contract is awarded if the scheme is more than £20,000 but less than £50,000. In this case there was no compatible provider offering a similar level of functionality and he therefore asked Committee to approve an exemption to the contract procedure rules.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. support the selection of the Mod.Gov Committee administration IT system;

2. note the timescale for the implementation; and
3. authorise the Chief Executive to award the contract on the basis of an exemption from the requirements of contract procedure rules 5 and 6 relating to the number of quotations obtained.

278 LOCAL TAXATION WRITE-OFFS

Committee considered a report asking them to approve the writing-off of Council Tax and Business Rate debts relating to individuals where it had not been possible to collect the amount due.

RESOLVED: That committee agree the writing off £3,090.84 of Council Tax debts, £300.00 costs and £9,295.19 of Business Rates debts where it has not been possible to collect the amount due.

279 (a) ESTATES MATTERS – 16-18 LOWERGATE, CLITHEROE

The Chief Executive submitted a report asking Committee to determine whether to allow the tenancy of 16-18 Lowergate to be terminated early and to consider whether this property was surplus to requirements and should be sold.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. agree to allow the Salvation Army to surrender the Lease; and
2. agree to dispose of 16-18 Lowergate, Clitheroe, providing suitable offers are received.

279 (c) ESTATES MATTERS – LAND AT SHAY LANE, LONGRIDGE

The Chief Executive submitted a report asking Committee to agree the sale of 3 pieces of amenity land at Shay Lane, Longridge to prospective purchasers to use the parcels of land for car parking.

RESOLVED: That Committee agree to selling three pieces of land at the District Valuer's valuation as follows:

- Plot 1 - £1,000
- Plot 2 - £1,200
- Plot 3 - £3,400

(Councillor Stephen Atkinson left the meeting and Councillor Hore took the Chair.)

279 (b) ESTATES MATTERS – LAND AT HIGHMOOR PARK, CLITHEROE

The Chief Executive submitted a report asking Committee to agree the grant of a Lease to provide access across Council owned land at Highmoor Park, Clitheroe.

Members on Planning Committee received confirmation from the Chief Executive that voting on this item was not a predetermination on any planning application that may subsequently be made on this land.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. agree the sale of the Lease granting a right of access over the land at Highmoor Park for the sum of £690,000; and
2. instruct the Chief Executive to complete the necessary agreements as soon as practicable.

The meeting closed at 7.53pm.

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