

Minutes of Policy & Finance Committee

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 23 March 2010 starting at 6.30pm
Present: Councillor E M H Ranson (Chairman)

Councillors:

R Croasdale	J Rogerson (6.45pm)
D Eccleston	R E Sherras
K Hind	D Smith
S Hirst	J S Sutcliffe
J Holgate	R J Thompson
S Hore	N Walsh
A Knox	

In attendance: Chief Executive, Director of Resources, Director of Development Services, Director of Community Services, Financial Services Manager, Legal Services Manager and Computer Services Manager.

902 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillor N Walsh.

903 MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 26 January 2010 and 9 February 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

904 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor S Sutcliffe and Councillor E M H Ranson declared an interest in agenda item 24, Roefield.

905 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

906 REFERENCES FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no references from Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

907 PERFORMANCE REWARD GRANT

The Director of Development Services submitted a report inviting Committee to endorse the recommendations of the Ribble Valley Strategic Partnership Board relating to the delivery of this borough's Lancashire Local Area Agreement Performance Reward Grant allocation. The projects recommended for support related to the whole range of RVBC ambitions and core values. Providing services for all was a key theme, together with improving the environment of the

area and the health of its residents. He informed Committee that Ribble Valley has received a proportion of the countywide £19 million reward grant. This would be received in two tranches of £478,000. He informed Committee that 10 projects had completed formal applications of which two had been rejected at RSVP level and two others had been merged leaving seven projects for support. The RSVP board had also recommended that 7½% of the available total should be utilised by Ribble Valley Borough Council to meet the costs incurred in managing and monitoring the scheme in total and in administrative input into the particular projects. This would amount to £36,000. He also felt it was important to stress that a number of the projects were far from being fully formed yet and discussions remain ongoing with the applicants/delivery bodies. The seven projects were:

• Tourist Information kiosk	£80,000
• Community food growing	£50,000
• Mobile resource centre	£120,000
• Hydro energy	£15,000
• Gisburn mountain bike trail	£35,000
• Domestic violence project	£42,000
• Ribble Valley village amenities	<u>£100,000</u>
	TOTAL £478,000

The Director of Development Services went on to explain that there was a general requirement that the PRG be used on a 50:50 basis between capital and revenue expenditure although this could be subject to inter-district negotiation and of course addressed where necessary by use of the second tranche.

Committee asked questions with regards to the specific schemes and in particular with reference to the community food growing and the obligation to supply land under the Allotments Act. The Leader reported that these projects were very much ‘works in progress’ and that there was still much work to be done on them and that they may ultimately turn out to be a slightly different end product. With regard to the village amenities project, the Director of Development Services informed Committee that there would be an opportunity for Parish Councils to put forward schemes to be included.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. endorse the recommendations of the RVSP regarding the use of the performance reward grant with amendments to the written report as presented to the Committee;
2. authorise the Director of Development Services to maintain an ongoing dialogue with the project delivery organisations with a view to clarifying details and outputs as referred to in the report; and
3. instruct the Director of Development Services to report progress on grant awarded schemes to this Committee on a half yearly basis.

908

POLICIES AND STRATEGIES FOR ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

The Legal Services Manager submitted a report asking Committee to consider three draft plans/strategies on electoral registration. She informed Committee that the Electoral Commission has a legal power to direct electoral registration officers to provide a report on their performance against published performance standards and that these were grouped into four subject areas representing the most important that electoral registration officers should focus on to keep and maintain a complete and accurate electoral register. These were completeness and accuracy of electoral registration records; integrity of the registration process; encouraging participation in the registration process; and planning and organisation. She outlined the 10 performance standards and informed Committee that in order to better meet the performance standards, the current planned processes and strategies of the Council's electoral unit should be documented. She therefore requested approval for the three documents which included a canvas and rolling registration plan, an integrity plan and a public awareness strategy.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the following plans and strategies:

- Ribble Valley Borough Council's Canvas and Rolling Registration Plan
- Ribble Valley Borough Council's Integrity Plan
- Ribble Valley Borough Council's Public Awareness Strategy

909

ALLOCATION OF VOLUNTARY SECTOR GRANTS 2010/11

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking Committee to consider the allocation of voluntary sector grants as proposed by a sub-group of the Committee in accordance with the scheme approved in November 2006. These were the general grants administered mainly by the Policy and Finance Committee. A working group of councillors had met on 4 March to consider the applications and now submitted their recommendations, totalling £91,560.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the allocation of grants as proposed by the Voluntary Grant Sub-Group as set out in Appendix 1.

910

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION PLAN

The Director of Community Services submitted a report asking Committee to consider the adoption of the Environmental Action Plan. He informed Committee that the Ribble Valley Borough Council had recently adopted Lancashire County Council's climate change strategy and as such there was a need to develop our own environmental action plan. He informed Committee that as the Council was coming under increasing pressure to reduce operational costs, adopting energy saving measures, as part of a wider environmental action plan, would also reduce bills and increase the efficiency of the organisation.

Members discussed the action plan as submitted, and felt that although the literal plan of actions was acceptable and a commendable thing to be doing, that the foreword to the plan should be redrafted so that it did not include unproven

statements or contentious points but more of a general wording about climate change.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the action part of the plan but that the Director of Community Services be asked to re-draft the foreword for Committee's approval at a future meeting.

911 SERVICE PLANS 2010/11

- a) Corporate Services – the Chief Executive submitted a report seeking Committee's approval for the annual service plan covering the work of the Corporate Services section in the Chief Executive's department. He highlighted the overall cost of the Corporate Services section and the sort of work that was carried out by this section along with a SWOT analysis and the proposed actions that will be taken to improve the service.

RESOLVED: That the action be approved.

- b) Financial Services – the Director of Resources submitted a report seeking Committee's approval for the annual service plan that covers the work of the Financial Services section of the Director of Resources department. She highlighted the overall cost of the Financial Services section and the sort of work that was carried out by this section along with a SWOT analysis and the proposed actions that will be taken to improve the service.

RESOLVED: That the action be approved.

- c) Computer Services – the Director of Resources submitted a report seeking Committee's approval for the annual service plan that covers the work of the Computer Services section of the Director of Resources department. She highlighted the overall cost of the Computer Services section and the sort of work that was carried out by this section along with a SWOT analysis and the proposed actions that will be taken to improve the service.

RESOLVED: That the action be approved.

- d) Legal Services – The Chief Executive submitted a report seeking Committee's approval for the annual service plan that covers the work of the Legal Services section of the Chief Executive's department. He highlighted the overall cost of the Legal Services section and the sort of work that was carried out by this section along with a SWOT analysis and the proposed actions that will be taken to improve the service.

RESOLVED: That the action be approved.

912 REVENUES AND BENEFITS GENERAL REPORT

The Director of Resources submitted a report detailing the following items:

- National Non Domestic Rates (NNDR)
- Council Tax
- Sundry Debtors
- Housing Benefit – Performance
- Housing Benefit – Benefit and Right Time Indicators
- Housing Benefit Fraud
- Housing Benefit Overpayments

She also reported that there was a need to authorise officers to represent the Council at court proceedings for the recovery of Council Tax and Business Rate arrears.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. note the report; and
2. the following officers be authorised to represent the Council at court proceedings for the recovery of Council Tax and Business Rates arrears:

Mark Edmondson
Annette Nester
Debbie Kelly
Debbie Lyons
Diane Rice
Lesley Haworth
Jane Pearson

913 MEMBERS' ALLOWANCE SCHEME 2010/11

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking Committee to agree the Council's scheme of Members' allowances for the 2010 financial year. She reminded Committee that the Council is required to establish a scheme of Members' allowances in accordance with regulations and that as such the Council had established an independent panel in March 2007 to review the scheme of Members' allowances. This would be reviewed on a four yearly basis and the next comprehensive review is scheduled for 2011 to coincide with the newly elected Council. The report set out the current allowances and the factors to be used to calculate any increases. She informed Committee that there was an amount of money set aside for any increases in allowances should the national minimum wage change in October 2010.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the scheme of Members' allowances for 2010/11.

914 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking Committee to approve the Council's Treasury Management Strategy for 2010/11. She reminded Committee that the Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities had initially come into effect from 1 April 2004 and had recently been revised to take account

of the implication of the implementation of international financial reporting standard. A revised Treasury Management Code of Practice had also recently been issued following the House of Commons Select Committee and Audit Commission's investigations into the collapse of the Icelandic banks. The main changes included a minimum reporting requirement, scrutiny, training for those charged with governance and Full Council approval of the Treasury Management Strategy. She informed Committee that the Treasury Management Strategy covers areas such as 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 and an annual investment strategy.

*** RESOLVED: That Committee make a recommendation to Full Council that the Treasury Management Strategy be approved as set out. ***

915 DRAFT CYCLE OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The Chief Executive submitted a report informing Committee of the proposed meeting cycle for the municipal year 2010/11. He reminded Committee that the timetable would need to accommodate the local elections in May 2011 which would mean the annual meeting was displaced by a week. An option was also presented to include a summer recess (excluding Planning and Development Committee).

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the proposed meeting cycle for Committees for the municipal year 2010/11 to include a summer recess.

916 LOCAL LAND CHARGES FEES AND CHARGES

The Legal Services Manager submitted a report seeking Committee's approval for a scale of charges for use in the financial year 2010/11 when supplying information as required by the Local Authorities (Charges for Property Searches) Regulations 2008 and for local land charge and personal searches. She informed Committee that there were three ways in which the Council provides information based on its local land charges register, which included personal searches, full searches and required data information and the issues surrounding this which involved an appeal made by the Information Commissioner's Office that had not yet been decided. In the light of final guidance still being awaited, she proposed that the only change to the fees for 2011/11 should be a change in the component parts of the £107 for the full search being LLC1 - £17 and CON29R - £90.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. note the position in relation to local land charges and agree to delegate authority to alter the charges during 2010/11 financial year to the Chief Executive once guidance had been received;
2. agree there would be no increase in fees for the year 2010/11; and

3. authorise the change to the basis on which the full search is charged to apportion costs between the LLC1 and CON29R as set out.

917 REFERENCES FROM COMMITTEES

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking Committee to consider a request from the Community Services Committee to amend the five-year capital programme. This was in order to secure external funding for the Longridge Adventure Play Facility scheme and would mean that £10,000 of the available programme from the financial year 2013/14 be brought forward into the capital programme for 2010/11.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the request from Community Committee for the transfer of capital resources from 2013/14 to 2010/11 of £10,000.

918 SHARED SERVICE CONTACT CENTRE

The Director of Resources submitted a report for Committee's information on the progress made with the 12 month project plan for the Contact Centre which was submitted in June 2009. Committee requested that they receive a quarterly report on the analysis of calls received in the Contact Centre.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

919 CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2010/11 AND FIVE YEAR CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2010/15

The Director of Resources submitted a report for Committee's information on the capital programme for this Committee for the forthcoming financial year and providing details of the full five year capital programme for 2010/15.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

920 LOCAL AUTHORITY BENEFIT OVERPAYMENTS

The Director of Resources submitted a report informing Committee of a data cleanse exercise of local authority overpayments and deceased customer overpayments on the Northgate Benefit System.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

921 PLACE JOINT COMMITTEE

Committee received the minutes of the PLACE Joint Committee held on 21 January 2010.

922 BUDGET WORKING GROUP

Committee received the minutes of the Budget Working Group held on 13 January 2010.

923 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That by virtue of the following items being exempt information under Category 7 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1977 the press and public be now excluded from the meeting.

924 BANKING ARRANGEMENTS 2010/13

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking Committee to accept the proposed bank charges for the period 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2013. She informed Committee that HSBC Bank had been the Council's bankers since 1989 and that arrangements had typically run for three year periods. The current arrangement would come to an end on 31 March 2010 and as such meetings had been held with bank representatives to consider the proposed changes to the banking charges. The discussions with the bank representatives had highlighted the impact of increased charges that would be applied to our banking and although these were not surprising, were of some concern. The Director of Resources felt that there were a number of areas where the increase in charges could be mitigated by the way we carry out our banking arrangements.

RESOLVED: That Committee accept the proposed charges for the period 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2013 along with the proposed changes to our banking arrangements.

925 NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES/COUNCIL TAX WRITE OFFS

The Director of Resources submitted a report seeking Committee's approval to write off certain National Non Domestic Rates (NNDR) and Council Tax debts where the whereabouts of a debtor was unknown or they were in respect of bankrupt persons.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the writing off of £33,180.07 of NNDR debts and £1,187.14 of Council Tax debts where the debtors whereabouts is unknown or been declared bankrupt or ceased trading.

Councillor S Sutcliffe and Councillor E M H Ranson declared an interest in the next item of business and left the meeting.

Councillor Sherras took the Chair.

926 ROEFIELD – APPLICATION FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The Chief Executive submitted a report for Committee to consider a request from Ribble Valley Sports Association (Roefield) for assistance with the proposed extension to their leisure centre. He reminded Committee of the background to the loan request from Roefield and how this had progressed over recent time.

He outlined the details with regard to the proposed extension and highlighted various sections from the business plan that had been submitted.

He informed Committee of the funding that Roefield were relying on for this new scheme along with a timetable for the work to take place.

Committee discussed this request in some detail and felt that as a community based facility providing health and fitness activities, this should be supported but had reservations about the income projections and the security for any loan.

RESOLVED: That Committee defer this request until further information has been received regarding the business plan which should include alternative options for the proposed extension to the leisure centre.

The meeting closed at 9.20pm.

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