

Minutes of Policy & Finance Committee

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 22 November 2011, starting at 6.30pm
Present: Councillor E M H Ranson (Chairman)

Councillors:

R Bennett	J Rogerson
J Hill	R E Sherras
T Hill	D T Smith
K Hind	R J Thompson
S Hirst	N C Walsh
K Horkin	A Yearling
A Knox	

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

503 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

504 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Policy and Finance Committee held on 27 September 2011 and of the Emergency Committee dated 6 October 2011, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

505 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

506 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

507 REFERENCES FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no references from Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

508 PERFORMANCE REWARD GRANTS

The Head of Regeneration and Housing referred to Minute 372 of Committee dated 27 September and now provided an update report on existing performance reward grant projects.

He reminded Members that the endorsement of the 2011/12 projects was deferred at the previous meeting of the Committee whilst further information on the existing agreed projects was brought before this Committee. One of the projects was agreed relating to the Clitheroe Castle Grounds Activities Project,

which is currently being implemented; the remaining projects will be brought to a future meeting of Committee.

Members then considered the report and raised questions on individual projects such as the community food growing, hydropower generation survey, Gisburn mountain bike trails and STAN the Van.

RESOLVED: That:

1. Committee note the status of projects allocated funding from performance reward grants in 2010/11;
2. a full report be circulated to all Members as soon as possible regarding the community food-growing scheme;
3. a record of all schemes to be provided in the Members' Room detailing the progress with each scheme, outcomes achieved, amount spent so far and any match funding attracted from other sources.
4. in relation to the Gisburn mountain bike trails project; this scheme should only proceed once officers were satisfied with the developments on site; and
5. Committee consider a further report on the performance reward grant recommendations for 2011/12 at the next meeting of this Committee;

509 REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES

Committee were asked to approve proposals to increase this Committee's fees and charges with effect from 1 April 2012. These proposals were the first stage in the review of this Committee's budget for the forthcoming 2012/13 financial year.

The Council's latest budget forecast allows for a 2.5% increase in the level of income raised from fees and charges. The review aimed to increase budgeted income for 2012/12 by this amount as a minimum. Members were reminded of the need to identify overall savings in the region of £600,000.

The largest proportion of income for this Committee from fees and charges is from the issue of Summonses; this had last been increased on the 1 April 2011 and it was not proposed to increase this particular charge for 2012/2013.

In relation to Meals on Wheels, the proposal is to freeze the price at £1.50 per meal. The charge was last increased in April 2005 prior to which the charge was £1.25.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the proposals for increases in fees and charges for implementation with effect from 1 April 2012 for the 2012/13 financial year.

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

The Chief Executive informed Committee that under the Electoral Administration Act 2006 all Council's had a duty to review their UK Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places at least once every four years. The Council's current review would be completed by the 31 December 2011. Once the review was complete it would require the approval of full Council but at this stage the matter was referred to Policy and Finance Committee in order that its recommendations could be so referred.

Details were given of how the review would be undertaken by Returning Officers. The review would look at 3 elements: Polling District, Polling Place and Polling Station.

Details were also given of the process for carrying out the review which was as follows: giving notice of the review, inviting comments from stakeholders and formulating proposals.

Amongst the factors to be considered when reviewing the existing polling places, the following were suggested: location, size, suitability and accessibility.

The Council's Electoral and Licensing Officer had carried out the review and would update details of Polling Stations' arrangements to be posted on the Council's website together with supporting information that had been compiled.

The polling places where problems had been identified were mainly where Portakabins were used due to limited accessibility for disabled users namely at Chaigley, Old Langho, Ramsgreave and Wiswell. Members also discussed the report and commented that the polling station used at the recent Salthill Ward By-Election in Clitheroe ie Brookside School was not ideal. The proposal was to leave polling districts and polling places unchanged but to continue to explore improvements to accessibility generally and in particular the four polling stations referred to above.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. agree to the proposals for polling districts and polling places in the Ribble Valley Parliamentary Constituency
2. ask Members to bring forward any suggestions for alternative Polling Stations, particularly for those where portakabins are used; and
3. recommend the proposals to full Council for approval.

FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

Committee were asked to consider and recommend to full Council the acceptance of the attached Financial Regulations.

The existing Financial Regulations had not been updated for a number of years and had now been reviewed.

Financial Regulations covered all aspects of the Council's financial arrangements and activities they apply to every Members and officer of the Council and anyone acting on the Council's behalf.

Most of the amendments that had been required were minor and reflected updates in regulations and changes within the Council's since they were last approved.

*** RESOLVED: That Committee recommend to full Council acceptance of the revised financial regulations. ***

512 SURVEILLANCE COMMISSIONERS INSPECTION REPORT – 23 AUGUST 2011

Committee considered a report from the Council's Solicitor on the receipt of the Office of Surveillance Commissioners Inspection Report dated 23 August 2011, which arose from an inspection carried out by Mr Andrew Mackian (Surveillance Inspector) on the 17 August 2011. The report gave the legal background behind the Inspection Report, particularly in relation to Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA). Members were informed that RIPA came into force on 25 September 2000 and its aim was to strike a balance between protecting individual's rights under the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act and the need for investigatory powers to protect the interests of society as a whole.

Details were given of how the Council had responded to the Inspector's Review in terms of generating policies, keeping control records of authorisations, taking actions by the senior responsible officer.

A Member raised a specific question in relation to photographs being submitted by objectors in relation to planning applications. Members considered the report in some detail.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. note the Inspector's recommendations;
2. approve the appointment of the Council's Solicitor as the Senior Responsible Officer;
3. approve the amended central records authorisations; and
4. approve the amended Policy as now set out.

513 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MONITORING 2011/12

The Director of Resources submitted a report on the Council's treasury management activities for the period 1 April 2011 to 31 October 2011. She

reminded Members that they had previously approved a Treasury Management Policy in accordance with CIPFA's Code of Practice on Treasury Management for Local Authorities. In accordance with that Policy, Councillors should receive a quarterly monitoring report on its treasury management operations. The report was sub-divided into the following sections: information - nationally bank interest rates had remained static at 0.5% in the period; borrowing requirements – the movement on the Council's external loans were summarised; investments – surplus funds were temporarily invested via the money market at the best rate interest available with the minimisation of risk to the capital sum; - Prudential indicators – the Prudential code for capital finance in Local Authorities regulated the Council's ability to undertake new capital investment; approved organisations.

The Director of Resources referred to recent events in particular the turmoil in the word financial markets due to concerns in the Euro zone. As a result the Director of Resources had reviewed the list of approved organisations for investment and recommended that more extensive use is made of the debt management account deposit facility with the United Kingdom Debt Management Office because any investments with them were guaranteed by HM Government during the particularly uncertain times.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. agree to the reinstatement of the measures that had been introduced on investing surplus funds for the foreseeable future;
2. increase the limit with the Debt Management Office to £5m; and
3. keep under review our treasury management arrangements.

514 RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME FOR ENGLAND ACTIVITY REPORT

The Head of Regeneration and Housing submitted a report on the activities of the Rural Development Programme for England in the Pennine Lancashire Programme Area.

The RDPE was jointly funded by the European Union and the Department for the Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). The aims of the programme were to safeguard and enhance the rural environment, improve the competitiveness of the agricultural sector and foster sustainable and thriving rural businesses and rural economies across England.

Programme delivery was at sub-regional level with three areas overseen by Local Action Groups (LAGS); these were Lancashire West, North Lancashire and Pennine Lancashire. Members voiced their concern about the publicity given to the availability of and how to access this funding. The Head of Regeneration and Housing agreed that he would raise this with officers from the RDPE.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

515 CALCULATION OF COUNCIL TAX BASE 2012/13

Committee considered the Council Tax base for the next financial year ie 2012/13. Details were given of how this calculation was worked out. A number of assumptions had been made in relation to the number of exemptions remaining constant, the number of discounts remaining constant, the number of properties on the valuation list remaining constant and the collection rate being 99.25%.

The Council Tax base for 2012/2013 is 22,434.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

516 REGENERATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Committee considered an update from the Regeneration Team on a number of economic development and regeneration initiatives, locally, regionally and nationally. The report was split into the following sections:

- Ribble Valley Economic Strategy 2009-2014.
- Regional Economic Development.
- Local Enterprise Partnerships.
- Regenerate Pennine Lancashire.
- Business Support.
- Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE).
- Town centres and business groups.
- The future economic climate.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

517 REVENUES AND BENEFITS GENERAL REPORT

The Director of Resources reported on a number of areas under the control of the Head of Revenues and Benefits:

- (a) 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.

518 REVENUE MONITORING 2011/12

The Director of Resources gave an update report on the first 7 months of this year's revenue budget in relation to this Committee. She commented that the comparison between actual and budgeted expenditure showed an underspend of

£183,628 after allowing for transfers to and from earmarked reserves. She also commented on the cost of district and parish elections which totalled £117,948 but would be partly met from the election reserve fund and partly reimbursed by the Ministry of Justice.

She also commented that substantial underspends of £90,437 on vacant posts within Chief Executive's, Organisation and Member Development, Computer Section and Revenues Section as result of a recruitment freeze as part of the restructure review and finally a further sizeable variance was on audit fees.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

519 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2011/12 – OVERALL

The Director of Resources asked Committee to consider the position of the overall revenue budget for the current financial year. She concluded that the number of vacant posts currently within the establishment had provided the greatest savings in relation to employee costs. Recommendations arising from the recent restructuring exercise would be considered later on the agenda and if approved would be reflected in the revised estimates.

On income the largest variances were still income from planning fees which was ahead of its budget forecast, however Building Control income was significantly down compared to the forecast.

She pointed out that there were already substantial savings against the budget and it was anticipated that further savings would be made before the end of the year.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

520 RIBBLE VALLEY COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP – UPDATE

Members considered a report from the Chief Executive on a variety of issues which Ribble Valley Community Safety Partnership had recently been involved with. These included:

- Wasted Lives Project;
- Castle Grounds Project;
- Smartwatch/Farmwatch;
- Longridge Community Alcohol Network;
- National Alcohol Awareness Week; and
- Domestic homicide reviews.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

521 CAPITAL MONITORING 2011/12

The Director of Resources informed Members of progress to the end of October on the Capital Programme for this Committee for the current financial year. The

main item was in relation to the Contact Centre Customer Relationship Management System replacement.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

522 OVERALL CAPITAL MONITORING 2011/12

The Director of Resources update Members with the progress on the overall Capital Programme for the current financial year up to the end of October. She commented that there had been some slippage from 2010/11 which was low in comparison to that experienced in previous years. She also commented that good progress had been made on most schemes whilst actual expenditure to date was low. There were some concerns around the level of spend to date on housing grants but this was influenced by external factors.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

523 MINUTES OF BUDGET WORKING GROUP

Committee received the minutes of the Budget Working Group held on 9 August and the Capital Working Group and Budget Working Group on 19 September 2011.

RESOLVED: That the minutes be noted.

524 REPORT OF REPRESENTATIVE ON OUTSIDE BODY – RIBBLE VALLEY CITIZENS' ADVICE BUREAU

Committee received a report from Councillor Lois Rimmer which was an annual report on the work carried out by the Ribble Valley Citizens' Advice Bureau.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

525 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That by nature of the following items being exempt information under Categories 1 and 4 of Schedule 12(A) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be now excluded from the meeting.

526 COUNCIL RESTRUCTURE

The Chief Executive presented his report on the review of the staffing structure of the Council together with other measures identified to achieve the savings required to produce a balanced budget for 2012/2013 and future years. It would ensure that the Council's services were provided in an efficient and cost effective manner. He set out the background to the review and the criteria the Corporate Management Team and Heads of Service had used.

He stressed that staff had been kept informed at each stage of the process and in particular, explained how they had been formally consulted following

presentation of the proposals to the Budget Working Group in October. He set out the response to the consultation from Unison in his report. He then went through the proposals for each service area and commented that every section had contributed to the review. He stressed that Members should see what was being presented as a complete package of measures that would achieve the savings required and produce more efficient services.

He also explained that the review had actually increased resources in areas of the Council where problems or pressures on services had been experienced, in particular in planning services.

In total the overall savings identified from the review were approximately £645,000 per annum and the report summarised this by service area.

Members then discussed the proposals and asked questions particularly regarding planning enforcement, bulky waste collection and tourism. They were pleased with how the review had been conducted and stressed that Heads of Service and the Corporate Management Team should implement the recommendations as soon as practicable.

RESOLVED: That the proposals set out in the report be approved and implemented as soon as possible.

527 ENTERPRISE ZONE AT BRITISH AEROSPACE

Members considered a report from the Head of Regeneration and Housing regarding the proposed Enterprise Zone for Lancashire. He explained that the Enterprise Zone would be a combined scheme around the British Aerospace sites at Samlesbury and Walton and be based upon the theme of advanced engineering and manufacturing.

The Head of Regeneration and Housing explained in relation to the Samlesbury site, what was proposed and the complications arising from the fact the site was partially in Ribble Valley and partially in South Ribble. He explained the planning process for Enterprise Zones which were different from normal planning procedures, and how a Local Development Order would need to be agreed. He was working along with officers of the County Council and South Ribble Borough Council to establish how this would be resolved.

Members then discussed the Enterprise Zone in some detail and in particular the Council's involvement. The Head of Regeneration and Housing highlighted a map of the site showing how the Enterprise Zone would fit into the existing footprint.

Councillor Walsh raised his concerns of the potential development at Samlesbury particularly due to the relaxation of normal planning rules. He said that local residents were also extremely worried about what might happen on the site and as such, he would not be able to support the proposal.

RESOLVED: That the Enterprise Zone submission be supported and the Head of Regeneration and Housing report to this Committee as further details emerge.

528 NNDR/COUNCIL TAX/HOUSING BENEFIT AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT WRITE-OFFS

The Director of Resources sought Committee's approval to write off certain NNDR, Council Tax and Benefit debts.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the writing off of:

1. £3,355.60 Council Tax and £14,959.05 of NNDR debts; and
2. a Housing Benefit overpayment of £1,500.38

The meeting closed at 8.37pm.

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