

Minutes of Policy & Finance Committee

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 24 January 2012, starting at 6.30pm
Present: Councillor E M H Ranson (Chairman)

Councillors:

R Bennett	J Rogerson
J B Hill (6.45pm)	R E Sherras
T Hill	D T Smith
K Hind	R J Thompson
S Hirst	N Walsh
K Horkin (7.20pm)	A Yearling
A Knox	

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

666 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

667 MINUTES

Councillor Walsh referred to Minute 527 Enterprise Zone at British Aerospace and in particular to his comments around the potential development at Samlesbury, particularly due to the relaxation of planning rules. He felt that the Minute should also have reflected further comments which he made at the meeting.

Both the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive pointed out that a recorded vote had not been called for in relation to this item and it was unusual for the minutes to reflect the contribution of an individual Member.

RESOLVED: The minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

668 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

669 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

670 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

671 REFERENCES FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no references from Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

672 REVISED REVENUE BUDGET 2011/12 AND ORIGINAL ESTIMATE 2012/13

The Director of Resources reminded Committee of the need to agree a revised revenue budget for 2011/12 together with the revenue budget for 2012/13.

She reminded Members of the backdrop against which the 2011/12 original budget had been prepared:

- The Government had announced severe cuts in public sector funding.
- The Council had tasked officers with carrying out a review of all its services to take place in Autumn 2011.
- A decision had been taken early in the year to freeze vacant posts where necessary in order to reduce potential redundancies.

She commented that as a result of this there were some large savings on employee costs when comparing the revised estimate.

She explained that the revised budget was £48,590 lower than the original estimate. This was increased to £242,240 lower than the original estimate after allowing for transfers to and from earmarked reserves.

There were many reasons for the variations however the Director of Resources stated the main ones were:

- savings on vacant posts;
- concessionary travel (where some outstanding issues had been resolved).

The three-year forecast to Policy and Finance Committee in September had highlighted the need for savings in the region of £600,000 and following the grant settlement in December an updated budget forecast estimated the amount of savings needed in 2012/13 as £635,000. The second phase of the Council restructuring agreed in November 2011 resulted in a package of measures which will meet this target.

The Director of Resources reported that net costs for 2012/13 for this Committee had decreased by £233,500 and gave the principal reasons for this reduction. These were:

- removal of concessionary travel costs £51k
- savings from new customer relationship management system £45k
- reduction of staffing posts/restructuring £151k

Fees and charges for this Committee had been agreed in November 2011 and had been increased by around 2½% where possible. Members then discussed the report in some detail.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. approve the revised budget 2011/12; and
2. agree the revenue budget for 2012/13 and submit this to the Special Policy and Finance Committee subject to any further consideration by the Budget Working Group.

673 REVISED CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2011/12 AND PROPOSED PROGRAMME 2012/15

The Director of Resources sought Committee approval to the revised programme for the current year and also the future three-year capital programme for this Committee.

The original capital programme for £55,000 included an approved scheme relating to Clitheroe Market redevelopment. This was to have been a joint scheme with Lancashire County Council at an estimated cost of £30,000. However the project had now been abandoned. She reported that approximately 75% of the revised programme for the Committee had been spent to date.

In relation to the draft programme 2012/13 to 2014/15, four new bids had been submitted for this Committee:

- Non-specific measures to reduce energy consumption in Council buildings - £20,000.
- Introduction of photovoltaic schemes main offices, pool and depot - £147,000.
- Server and network infrastructure - £25,000.
- Economic development initiatives - £100,000.

This gave a total of £292,000 for this Committee's three-year capital programme.

The Director of Resources explained that this is a potential programme at this stage that would require further consideration by the Budget Working Group and by Special Policy and Finance Committee, who would want to ensure that it was affordable and achievable in both capital and revenue terms.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. approve the revised capital programme for 2011/12; and
2. approve the future three-year programme for 2012/13 to 2014/15 subject to further consideration by the Budget Working Group and Special Policy and Finance Committee.

674 PERFORMANCE REWARD GRANTS 2012/13

The Chief Executive referred to Minute 372 of Committee dated 27 September 2011 and again sought Committee approval of the Ribble Valley Strategic Partnership Board's recommendations on the allocation of funds derived from

this borough's Lancashire Local Area Agreement Performance Reward Grant 2011/12 allocation and a discounted second home Council Tax for 2011/12.

Members were reminded that the endorsement of the 2011/12 PRG projects was deferred from the previous meetings of the Committee whilst further information on the existing agreed projects was brought to Committee. One of the projects was agreed relating to the Castle grounds activities project which was currently being implemented.

The Strategic Partnership Board had previously determined that these PRG funds and the funds derived from the discounted Council Tax on second homes would be combined for the purpose of providing a single source of funding for projects.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. approve the recommendations of the Ribble Valley Strategic Partnership Board for 2011/12, the funds derived from the discounted Council Tax on second homes and performance reward grant and ask the Chief Executive to keep under the review the implementation programme in conjunction with the intended LSP review; and
2. agree that the projects relating Hield Well, Clitheroe, be agreed in principle but remain subject to final approval from this Committee following review by the Appraisal Panel and subject to this review being carried out within 6 months from the date of this resolution.

675 FUTURE OF LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

The Chief Executive asked Committee to consider arrangements to undertake a review of the role and function of the Strategic Partnership. He traced the history of the Local Strategic Partnership which had been formed in 2002. He reminded Members that the Strategic Partnership was responsible for the Sustainable Community Strategy which formed the basis for defining the Council's ambitions. All funding decisions of the Strategic Partnership were subject to agreements and protocols with Lancashire County Council which required that those decisions were progressed through the regular financial allocation and accounting procedures of the Council.

He then went on to highlight the role which the LSP had played in preparing and consequently implementing the Council's Sustainable Community Strategy. Working through a series of theme groups which crossed a wide range of topics including community safety, economy, health, housing, the environment and so on. A principal aim of these theme groups was to draw together relevant public agencies, the voluntary sector and local community groups to work together to the benefit of the borough and its residents.

He commented that it was becoming increasingly clear that the established working arrangements for the Partnership needed to reflect the challenges that the Council and its partners were likely to face going forward and the time was therefore right to undertake a review now.

RESOLVED: That Committee endorse the review of the role, purpose and framework of the Ribble Valley Strategic Partnership proposed by the Chief Executive and to agree to the formation of an Officer Working Group to provide advice to this Committee in support of the review.

676 AMENDMENTS TO PARTS OF THE COUNCIL'S CONSTITUTION AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION PROCEDURE RULES

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services referred to Minute 376 of Committee dated 27 September 2011 and now updated Committee on the conclusions of the Working Group to whom they had delegated the task of reviewing the Solicitors reports on amendments to parts of the Council's Constitution and Access to Information Procedure Rules.

The Working Group consisted of Councillors J Hill, S Hirst, R Sherras and A Yearling. The Working Group generally agreed with amendments proposed in the September report. the group also proposed a number of additional changes in relation to how the Council operates, Access to Information Procedure Rules, Term of Reference of Committees and Standing Orders.

The Council's Solicitor had also presented the Working Group with a suggested protocol for calling the Emergency Committee and discussed issues surrounding the Terms of Reference for such a Committee.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services outlined the proposed changes to the Constitution and Standing Orders, and explained amendments which were to be made to the Emergency Committee protocol prior to submission to Full Council.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. approve the changes outlined in the original report to this Committee (27 September 2011) as modified by the report dated 24 January 2012 and as shown in the draft documents on the Council's website relating to the Constitution, Access to Information Rules and Standing Orders, with the amended version of Terms of Reference and Protocol for the Emergency Committee;
2. refer these suggested changes to Full Council with a recommendation for their approval; and
3. agree that the Working Group consisting of Councillor Sherras, Hill, Yearling and Hirst be established to consider further changes to the Council's Standing Orders and the Constitution.

677 DRAFT CYCLE OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Committee considered a report setting out a suggested draft Committee Cycle for 2012/13. The Chief Executive explained that this report had normally been presented to the March meeting of this Committee but it was felt that Members

should be asked for their views in good time so that any changes could be made before the final version was approved.

A number of potential problems with Committee dates were highlighted.

RESOLVED: That Members consider the draft meeting cycle and suggest any changes before the next meeting of this Committee.

678 CHANGES TO THE STANDARDS REGIME RESULTING FROM THE LOCALISM ACT 2012

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services informed Committee about the changes to the standards regime, namely the system of regulation of standards of conduct for Elected and Co-opted Members resulting from the Localism Act 2011 and the timescale for making the necessary adaptations to Council's arrangements.

She set out a timetable for how the Council proposed to consider changes to the standards regime which involved the Standards Committee considering the changes in detail at their meeting on 1 February 2012 with then a reference to Policy and Finance Committee on 27 March and then finally reference to Full Council who will consider changes and approve all matters in order that implementation can commence. The present arrangements would remain in force until the 1 July 2012.

She reported that the Localism Act 2011 made fundamental changes to the system of regulation of Standards of Conduct for Elected and Co-opted Members. The requirement to have a Standards Committee which met the requirements of Section 55 of the Local Government Act 2000 would therefore cease, however the Council would still need to have arrangements in place to deal with standard issues including complaints relating to the conduct of Elected Members. Councillors would need to decide which Committee would take responsibility for Standards issues and in addition the Council would have to decide to what extent it wished to involve representatives from Parish Councils.

Members discussed the way in which the Council currently dealt with complaints against Councillors in particular the question of informing them of the existence and nature of complaint. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services explained how the current procedure worked and pointed out that this was a scheme which the Council had agreed to. However there was now the opportunity to change the scheme if Members so wished.

RESOLVED: That the

1. report be noted; and
2. Head of Legal and Democratic Services undertook to report the concerns of this Committee about the existing standards regime to the Standards Committee at its next meeting.

679 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MONITORING 2011/12

The Director of Resources presented her monitoring report on the Council's Treasury Management activity.

The report included information on the following areas of business:

- Borrowing requirements.
- Investment.
- Prudential indicators.
- Approved organisations.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

680 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:

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

The Head of Revenues and Benefits commented on the collection rate figures, which for Business Rates were showing a decrease on previous years and gave an explanation for this.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

681 MINUTES OF BUDGET WORKING GROUP

The Committee received the minutes of the Budget Working Group held on 17 October and 15 November 2011.

RESOLVED: That the minutes be noted.

682 RIBBLE VALLEY COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP – STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT 2012/13

Committee received a report on the Ribble Valley Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment which identified the top five priorities for the Partnership in 2012/13. These were as follows:

- Road safety.
- Other steelings.
- Domestic abuse.
- Substance misuse.

- Criminal damage.
- Anti-social behaviour.

The report also highlighted potential budget shortfalls.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

683 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

684 COUNCIL OFFICES – RECEPTION REMODELLING SCHEME

The Director of Community Services reported on proposals for the remodelling of the Level B reception area within the Council Offices. He commented that a key element of the proposal was the transfer of the Visitor Information Centre to the Platform Gallery and the re-siting of the Contact Centre and Level C Reception staff. Discussions with relevant staff were ongoing and visits had been made to neighbouring Councils to see how they operated their reception areas.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. approve the proposed layout outlined at Appendix 2 to this report and instruct the project team to develop and tender the scheme based on this layout;
2. approve the project programme as outlined at Appendix 3 and instruct the project team to manage the scheme based on this programme;
3. approve the estimated costs as outlined at Appendix 4 and instruct the project team to proceed with the scheme based on those costs; and
4. note that a separate report will be provided in relation to the relocation of the Visitor Information Centre to the Platform Gallery.

685 NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES AND COUNCIL TAX WRITE-OFFS

The Head of Revenues and Benefits sought Committee approval to write-off certain Council Tax and National Non-Domestic Rate debts.

He answered Members questions on individual cases and gave explanations on how particular debts had accrued.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the writing-off of £4,140.41 Council Tax and £35,901.70 of National Non-Domestic Rate debts where it had not been possible to collect the amounts due.

686 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

The Chief Executive referred to the need to attract local business into the area to help ensure a vibrant economy. He identified the need for deliverable sites which was further highlighted by the growing number of enquiries being received by the Council for sites to enable existing firms to relocate, consolidate or expand within the Ribble Valley.

In accordance with the Council's Corporate Strategy ongoing discussions were being undertaken with potential developers and landowners with a view to establishing constraints to the delivery of employment land. Members then discussed this matter in some detail.

RESOLVED: That Committee authorise the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chairman of this Committee to pursue negotiations on potential sites with a view to acquisition for economic development as appropriate and that the Committee be kept informed of progress on a regular basis.

(Councillor Horkin declared an interest in the next item of business, left the meeting and took no part in the discussion.)

687 REQUEST FOR HARDSHIP RELIEF

The Council had received a request for hardship relief in relation to a business which was no longer trading. The Head of Revenues and Benefits gave a detailed history of this case and reminded Committee that under Section 49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1998 billing authorities has the power to reduce or remit business rates.

RESOLVED: That Committee refuse the application for hardship relief.

The meeting closed at 9.05pm.

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