

Minutes of Policy & Finance Committee

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 26 March 2013, starting at 6.30pm
Present: Councillor E M H Ranson (Chairman)

Councillors:

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

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

737 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors R Elms and S Hore.

738 MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 29 January and 12 February 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

739 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor R Thompson declared an interest in item 7 – Wiswell and Barrow. Councillors J Rogerson, N Walsh and A Yearling declared an interest in item 8 – Allocation for Voluntary Sector Grants.

740 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr A Schofield, a resident of Wiswell, spoke in relation to the item on Wiswell/Barrow and expressed his frustration at the delays which continue to be experienced in relation to bringing this matter to a conclusion.

(Councillor R Thompson declared an interest in this item and left the meeting.)

741 WISWELL/BARROW

The Solicitor referred to her report on this matter and explained the difficulties she had encountered on a number of issues. She had tried to draft an Order with elections in 2014. However there was a disparity between the guidance and the law which she was finding difficult to reconcile. Despite policy guidance from the Department of Communities and Local Government, the position was still unclear. Officers (Corporate Management Team) had therefore decided that the

Council should maintain the status quo as detailed in the recommendations with elections in 2015.

She went on to highlight some of the progress which had been made in terms of the electoral register, Council Tax records and the shadow split of the two parts of the Parish Council. She was also able to report that the present Clerk of Wiswell had agreed to also act as the shadow Clerk to Barrow Parish Council when formed. There was also a further complication in relation to the Whalley and Wiswell Joint Burial Ground Committee which she was currently looking into.

Members then discussed this matter at great length and sought to understand the implications of the proposals to move the elections back to 2015.

RESOLVED: That

1. Committee approve the decision made to date in particular confirm the Order (with the exception of some issues such as electoral arrangements) come into force on 1 April 2015;
2. and authorise the Council's Solicitor, in consultation with its Chief Executive and Leader, to continue progressing this matter.

(Councillor R Thompson then returned to the meeting.)

742 DRAFT COMMITTEE TIMETABLE

The Chairman referred to two alternative Committee timetables which had been circulated at the meeting. One made slight alterations to that which had been included with the Committee papers, whilst the second actually removed one cycle of meetings entirely leaving five Committee cycles for 2013/14 and therefore giving Members a summer break in August.

Members then discussed this matter and pointed out the long gap between meetings of Planning and Development Committee in the third cycle of meetings.

RESOLVED: That Committee agree to adopt the five Committee cycle option but that an extra Planning and Development Committee be arranged in November 2013. The Committee timetable 2013/14 as now amended is included at Appendix A to these minutes.

743 MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES

Committee were asked to agree the Council's scheme of Members' Allowances for 2013/14 financial year.

Committee were reminded that previously the independent panel had recommended that once agreed the basic allowance and dependent carers allowance should be increased annually in line with the increases in the national minimum wage each October and be introduced the following April. The basic allowance had increased by 1.8% based on the increase in the minimum wage in

October 2012. The new basic allowance was therefore £2,896. The new allowances are as set out below:

Basic Allowance	£2,896
Special Responsibility Allowances	
Leader of the Council	£14,480
Deputy Leader of the Council	£8,688
Leader of the Opposition	£8,688
Committee Chairmen	£5,792
Planning & Development Committee Chairman	£7,240
Service Committee Vice Chairmen	£2,896
Dependent Carers Allowance	£6.19 per hour

RESOLVED: That Committee agree the scheme of Members' allowances for 2013/14 as set out above.

(Councillors J Rogerson, N Walsh and A Yearling all declared an interest in the next item of business and left the meeting.)

744 VOLUNTARY GRANT APPLICATIONS 2013/14

Members were asked to consider the allocation of voluntary sector grants as proposed by a sub-group of this Committee in accordance with the approved scheme. In November 2012 current recipients of voluntary grants had been sent application forms to be returned by the end of 2012. The criteria for such applications was set out for Members' information.

The Council had now received 17 applications requesting support of £164,172. The applications as submitted therefore exceeded the funding available by £65,000. This Council had received an extra grant for 2013/14 in recognition of the particular difficulties we face in providing services in rural areas. The grant known as the Efficiency Support for Services in Sparse Areas (ESSSA) was for £9,901. The Director of Resources has suggested that some of the grant applications could be supported from this extra funding because of the nature of their request.

The sub-group therefore recommended the grant allocations as follows:

Voluntary Organisation grants totalling	£89,250
ESSSA funded grants totalling	£9,500
Total:	<u>£98,750</u>

The working group further recommended that the total amount allocated for 2013/14 should be £100,000 and therefore they agreed to make a further grant of £1,250 to the Citizens Advice Bureau which would then increase their grant to £61,250.

Members agreed that when writing to successful applicants, officers should make clear that the ESSSA grant is likely to be a one-off grant.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the allocation of grants as proposed by the Voluntary Grant sub-group as set out by Committee totalling £100,000.

(Councillors J Rogerson, N Walsh and A Yearling then returned to the meeting.)

745 LONGRIDGE CCTV SYSTEM

The Community Development Officer introduced his reports and qualified the statement in his report relating to contributions made by Longridge Town Council in actual fact the issue of a contribution from Longridge Town Council had not, as yet, been raised with them and he apologised for that omission within the report. He also explained the absence of an appendix to his report which logged the usage of CCTV in Longridge. This had been omitted as the information available would need to be anonymised as the report was in the public domain.

He explained that the report basically dealt with two separate issues:

- The cost of repairing the current standalone system.
- The potential cost of beaming CCTV pictures over from Longridge to Clitheroe.

The report traced the history of Longridge CCTV and its funding and the fact that the system was in need of a radical overhaul. Funding would clearly be a central issue as none was immediately available.

Councillor Rogerson also gave an explanation of his involvement in the siting of two extra cameras on the Shay Lane Industrial Estate in 2011.

The second issue was the consideration and cost of beaming the pictures over to Clitheroe via three potential methods:

- Fibre optic.
- Broadband.
- Wireless.

Prices were provided for two of the three options on this with the broadband option still needing a final price. Here again, costs were considerable and no budgets could be readily identified.

Members then discussed the report in some detail and asked the number of financial and technical questions of officers.

RESOLVED: That

1. the future funding of Longridge CCTV system be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chairman of this Committee, exploring the

funding avenues including writing to Longridge Town Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner for contributions; and

2. a report be made back to a future meeting of this Committee on progress.

746 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Director of Resources sought Member approval for the Council's Treasury Management Strategy for 2013/14 financial year. She reminded Members that Local Authorities were required to report on specific elements of their Treasury Management activities which were included in the Treasury Management Strategy or in its Treasury Management Policy and Practices. These are to be determined by the Treasury Management Code of Practice, the Prudential code which required local authorities to set up and revise Prudential indicators and publish actuals:

- the 2010 DCLG investment guidance for England Wales; and
- the requirements of international financial reporting standards.

The Council's Treasury Management Strategy covered the following areas:

- the current treasury position;
- the 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;
- annual investment strategy.

*** RESOLVED: That Committee recommend to Council the Treasury Management Strategy as set out in Annex 1 of the report. ***

747 MONITORING REPORT ON VILLAGE AMENITY GRANTS

The Committee received a report detailing progress on the projects approved through the village amenity grants to allow further consideration of any underspend that may occur.

The report highlighted that 21 applications had been approved, totalling £116,224. Of that amount offered to projects through the grant scheme, £40,050 had been claimed to date thus leaving a potential slippage of £76,174 beyond April 2013. It was pointed out that in some cases projects had required phased payments to ensure delivery and this had been agreed in all relevant cases.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. confirm that where projects are making progress but are likely to complete beyond April 2013 an additional six month period in which to claim their grant funding will be accepted; and
2. ask the Chief Executive to keep Committee informed of progress on this matter.

748 TREASURY MANAGEMENT POLICIES AND PRACTICES 2013/14

The Director of Resources asked Committee to review, approve and adopt the Treasury Management Policy Statements and Practices for 2013/14.

The Treasury Management Policies and Practices document governed the way the Council arranged its investments. It is reviewed on an annual basis to comply with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code.

No changes had been made to the Treasury Management Practices since March 2012, however it was proposed to remove Northern Rock (Asset Management) PLC from the list of counterparties as the Fitch ratings had been withdrawn for this organisation.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. review, approve and formally adopt the Treasury Management Policies and Practices document as attached to Annex 1;
- *** 2. recommend to Council the Treasury Management Policies and Practices 2013/14; and ***
3. approve the removal of Northern Rock (Asset Management) PLC from the list of investment counterparties.

749 REVIEW OF REVENUES AND BENEFITS DISCRETIONARY POLICIES

Committee were asked to agree updated policies for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and Discretionary Council Tax and Business Rates discounts due to welfare reforms. Committee were reminded that the recent welfare reforms had made significant changes to this area and it was therefore necessary to review our current policies. DHP's could be awarded for both housing payments and Council Tax until 31 March 2013. The replacement of Council Tax benefit with localised Council Tax support schemes from 1 April 2013 meant that DHP's would no longer apply to Council Tax. Housing benefit reforms including social sector size criteria changes, local housing allowance, uprating and the benefit cap would mean that there would be a significant number of claimants facing shortfalls from April 2013.

The Government has recognised that Local Authorities would be faced with significantly increased applications from April 2013 and had therefore increased this Council's funding from £14,088 in this year to £46,969 for the forthcoming

year. However the Council estimated that this shortfall in housing benefit would exceed £200,000 and therefore we would only be able to provide assistance to a quarter of those affected. There would be a significant additional burden relating to the administration of DHP's from April 2013 and no additional funding had been provided for that.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the revised policies detailed at Annex 1 and Annex 2 to the report.

750 NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES WRITE-OFFS

The Head of Revenues and Benefits reported to Committee on write-offs to certain NNDR debts where it had been impossible to collect the amounts owed.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the writing off of £71,488.56 of NNDR debts where it had not been possible to collect the amounts due.

751 COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE REVIEW WORKING GROUP

The Community Development Officer reported on the progress being made by the Complaints Review Working Group which had been formed in September 2012. He also sought Committee approval to a number of proposed changes to the Complaints Procedure recommended by the Working Group. Those changes were as follows:

- All complainants must complete complaints form either on line or via a paper copy. The completed form would trigger the complaints procedure.
- Filtering criteria to be established. Filtering to be carried out by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services or the Community Development Officer and alternative staff to be identified if either the Head of Legal and Democratic Services or the Community Development Officer were conflicted.
- Director or Head of Service to be informed on receipt of complaint. They will be expected to make the necessary staff available to investigate the issues raised by the complainant.
- The need for guidance for staff involved in or the subject of a complaints investigation.
- Recommend the complainants be given one calendar month to move to stage 2 of the procedure from the date of receipt of the result of the investigation at stage 1.
- Amend complaints form to include an item about whether Ward Members should be notified about a complaint.
- Amend complaint form to make it clear that Councillors should not be lobbied.

- Complainants be given the opportunity to submit their own documents as part of a “joint bundle”. This to be ready for distribution to Panel Members at least 5 working days before Panel meets.
- Complainants to be advised that any presentation to a complaints panel should ideally take not more than 30 minutes.
- Decide how or if the Ward Member is to be informed of the outcome of the deliberations of the Panel.
- Consider the extension from 3-5 working days for the sending of the decision notice from the Complaints Panel.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. note this report;
2. agree to the changes to both the complaints procedure and complaints leaflet detailed above; and
3. the revised complaints leaflet and supporting documents be submitted to the Working Group prior to introduction.

752 REVENUES AND BENEFITS GENERAL REPORT

The Head of Revenues and Benefits presented his report to Committee which covered the following areas:

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

He drew Members attention to the substantial increase in NNDR collection to date compared with the same period for 2011/12.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

753 INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

Members received a report about changes which would be made to the electoral registration system when Individual Electoral registration (IER) was introduced in July 2014.

The main changes arising from IER were that

- electors must register individually from 2014;
- the information provided as part of their application must be verified before it is added to the register;
- electors will have to provide more information than at present. In addition to their name and address they will have to provide their National Insurance Number and date of birth. The annual canvass for Autumn 2013 would be delayed and will now take place from October until February 2014. In addition there were transitional arrangements to manage the change to IER commencing July 2014 to enable the first full IER register to be published on the 1 December 2014.

RESOLVED: That Committee note the transition from the current electoral registration system to IER and changes to the annual canvass arrangements for 2013.

754 MEALS ON WHEELS AND LUNCHEON CLUBS UPDATE

Committee received a report on the latest developments on the Meals on Wheels and Luncheon Club provision that this Council and Lancashire County Council currently financially support. Currently the personalised social care team at Lancashire County Council provide people with a choice of Meals on Wheels provision. Referrals to the WRVS service had dropped significantly as historically the criteria for accessing the WRVS service is that citizens must meet the "fair access to care services" criteria which meant that they now only referred individuals with substantial and critical need they no longer refer individuals with moderate need. This Council only provided financial support towards the provision of the Meals on Wheels service within the borough where Meals on Wheels were still provided by WRVS. The WRVS currently provide 5 Meals on Wheels services in the borough providing 5,230 hot meals to 29 individuals.

The County Council had given a clear indication that they are likely to withdraw their grant funding towards the costs borne by this Council for Meals and Wheels and Luncheon Clubs.

A needs analysis would be undertaken by Lancashire County Council in collaboration with Ribble Valley Borough Council.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and that further reports would be brought back to this Committee as the review work by Lancashire County Council and this Council develops.

Also that the matter be referred to the Council's Health and Wellbeing Group.

755 MINUTES OF BUDGET WORKING GROUP

Committee received the minutes of the Budget Working Groups held on 16 and 24 January 2013.

756 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That by virtue of the next items of business being exempt information under Categories 1 and 7 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be now excluded from the meeting.

757 NNDR WRITE-OFFS

The Head of Revenues and Benefits submitted a report detailing individuals who had either gone away or had been made bankrupt and asking the Council to write-off these National Non-Domestic Rate debts where it had been impossible to collect the amount of owing.

RESOLVED: That the Council write-off £39,877.04 of NNDR debts where it had not been possible to collect the amounts due.

758 BANKING ARRANGEMENTS 2013/15

Committee received a report from the Director of Resources on the proposed bank charges for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2015.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 8.05pm.

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

APPENDIX A

Effective from 14 May 2013 – 13 May 2014

MEETINGS	Day	TIME	1ST CYCLE 2013	2ND CYCLE 2013	3RDCYCLE 2013	4TH CYCLE 2014	5TH CYCLE 2014
Community Services	Tues	6.30pm	21 May	3 Sept	22 Oct	14 Jan	11 March
Planning and Development	Thurs	6.30pm	23 May	18 July / 15 Aug	10 Oct / 7 Nov	16 Jan	13 March
Personnel	Wed	6.30pm	5 June	4 Sept	23 Oct	22 Jan	19 March
Health & Housing	Thurs	6.30pm	30 May	29 Aug	31 Oct	23 Jan	20 March
Policy & Finance	Tues	6.30pm	11 June	10 Sept	12 Nov	28Jan/11 Feb	25 March
Parish Liaison	Thurs	6.30pm	20 June	5 Sept	14 Nov	30 Jan	27 March
Licensing	Tues	6.30pm	18 June	17 Sept	29 Oct		18 March
Planning & Development	Thurs	6.30pm	6 + 13 June	12 Sept	12 Dec	13 Feb	10 April
Accounts & Audit	Wed	6.30pm	26 June	28 Aug	20 Nov		2 April
Full Council	Tues	6.30pm	16 July	1 Oct	10 Dec	4 Mar	29 April

2013
Offices Closed

Spring Bank : 27 May 2013
August Bank : 26 August 2013
Christmas : 25 - 31 December 2013

Annual Council : 14 May 2013

2014
Offices Closed

New Year : 1 January 2014
Good Friday : 18 April 2014
Easter Monday : 21 April 2014
May Day : 5 May 2014

Annual Council : 13 May 2014

SUBJECT TO FINAL APPROVAL AT THE ANNUAL MEETING ON 14 MAY 2013