

## Minutes of Policy & Finance Committee

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 10 September 2013, starting at 6.30pm  
Present: Councillor S Hirst (Chairman)

Councillors:

R Elms	A Knox
J Hill	G Mirfin
T Hill	E M H Ranson
B Hilton	J Rogerson
K Hind	D T Smith
S Hore	R J Thompson
K Horkin	

In attendance: Chief Executive, Director of Resources, Director of Community Services.

### 270 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor A Yearling.

### 271 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### 272 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Knox declared an interest in item 26 Reference from Health and Housing Committee – Riddings Lane, Whalley.

### 273 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

### 274 POLITICAL BALANCE ARRANGEMENTS FOR COMMITTEES

Committee received a report on Political Balance Arrangements for Committees following the Littlemoor By-Election on 1 August 2013.

Members were reminded that the Council must determine the number of seats for each Committee. The allocation of these seats will then be in accordance with the political balance provisions of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. An appendix to the report showed the Committee seats that apply under the present Committee structure. The calculations had been carried out following the results of the Littlemoor By-Election which the Liberal Democrat Party had won. The Council must determine the allocation of Committee seats to

Councillor Rogerson as the Independent member who did not belong to a political group.

\*\*\* RESOLVED: That

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1. number of seats on each Committee and the allocation of these seats as set out in Appendix A be approved; and
2. the allocation of Committee seats to Councillor Rogerson be as set out in Appendix B to this report be also approved.

## 275 BUDGET FORECAST 2013/14 - 2016/17

Committee considered the report of the Director of Resources on the Council's latest budget forecast and were asked to decide what action needed to be considered to meet the financial challenges that lay ahead.

The report went through a number of key headings:

- Public Sector Pay and Price Inflation – The Director of Resources reported that she had included a pay award of 1% for both the years 2014/15 and 2015/16 and 2% for 2016/17. Price inflation was included at 2.75% for 2014/15, 2.51% for 2015/16 and 2.0% for 2016/17.
- Local Government Grant Funding – She reported that the Government proposed to take a further 1% off local authority funding in 2014/15 and also increase the amount held back to pay for business rates retention safety net. This would mean a reduction in Government funding from £2.585m to £2.558m ie a reduction of £27,000 for 2014/15 and a further reduction to £2.163m in 2015/16.
- New Homes Bonus – The New Homes Bonus Scheme had commenced in April 2011 and the Council had committed £60,000 in relation to this allocation each year to support our revenue budget. The Director of Resources highlighted that the Council could expect to receive £500,000pa for the next 6 years in line with the current scheme arrangements. The Government had recently announced a consultation paper proposing to top slice around 35% of this amount. A draft response to this consultation paper was circulated to Committee Members.
- Council Tax – The spending round had announced a continuation of the Council Tax freeze grant scheme and also a 2% referendum limit for the next two years. The support to be paid for the freeze in Council Tax would be equivalent to a 1% increase. Our Band D Council Tax at £140.69 had been frozen since 2010/11 ie a period of 4 years.
- Interests Rates – The Director of Resources also made reference to the continuation of low interest rates resulting in the low level of interest earned on investments.

- Business Rate Growth – The Director of Resources commented that whilst we would retain our share of any growth, it was difficult to estimate our outturn position for the first year of the new scheme with any certainty.
- It was recognised that with all these differing pressures on the budget the budget for 2014/15 would be particularly difficult to balance. The Budget Working Group had met recently and had highlighted four areas for consideration in order to produce a balanced budget:
  - Increase our Council Tax for 2014/15.
  - Examine in detail our underspend/savings in 2012/13 to ensure our base budget was accurate.
  - Increase the amount of New Homes Bonus we use to finance our revenue budget.
  - Calculate how much Business Rate growth we could realistically expect to rely on.

Members then discussed this matter in some detail and asked a number of questions of the Director of Resources.

RESOLVED: That Committee agree the Council's response to the consultation paper on the technical changes to the New Homes Bonus scheme subject to any observations from Members of the Council and note the situation in regard to the Council's budget forecast.

276 LANCASHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE – EMERGENCY COVER REVIEW

The Chief Executive informed Members of the content of the Lancashire Fire and Rescue Emergency Cover Review and its possible impact on the residents of the Ribble Valley. He commented that Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service had reviewed its emergency cover service in an attempt to reduce its expenditure and was therefore proposing a four year emergency cover review covering the years 2014/15 to 2017/18. A consultation letter had been circulated to all local authorities with a response date of 20 September 2013.

The proposals being consulted on did not immediately affect our area as they would mainly affect full-time crews in areas such as Hyndburn, Padiham, Bamber Bridge and Chorley. Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service pointed out that the emergency cover review was not just a finance driven initiative as the service had seen a massive reduction of 60% in the number of emergency incidents over the past 10 years. The views of the local station manager had also been taken into account in relation to the impact these cuts would have on certain parts of our area, particularly affected by those cuts at Lancaster, Hyndburn and Padiham.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. note the contents of this report; and
2. ask the Chief Executive to write to the Head of Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service offering no objections to these proposals.

## 277 CONCURRENT FUNCTION GRANTS

The Director of Resources sought approval to the allocation of concurrent function grants for 2013/14.

She reminded Members that the Council had agreed to support Parish and Town Council net revenue expenditure on the following concurrent functions:

- Burial grounds.
- Bus shelters.
- Footpaths.
- Footway lighting.
- Litter collection.
- Dog waste bins.
- Parks and play areas.

Support was set at a rate of 25% of eligible net revenue expenditure on the previous year subject to the overall cost to the Borough Council not exceeding £20,000 per annum.

She reported that 18 applications had been received from Parish/Town Councils and in accordance with the scheme the grant would normally be paid in two equal instalments in September and March. However due to the level of each individual grant, Members may choose to recommend payment for this grant via a single instalment in order to reduce the level of administration.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. approve the allocation of grants proposed at Annex 1 totalling £16,104.81 for 18 Parish and Town Councils; and
2. agree to the payment of the approved grants in a single instalment rather than 2 instalments as outlined in the original grant scheme.

## 278 PUBLIC SERVICES NETWORK COMPLIANCE

Committee were given an update on the Council's compliance with the Public Services Network. In addition Committee's approval was sought to the implementation of the recommendations from a recent inspection.

Members were made aware that there had been a recent on-site inspection to ensure the Council met certain compliance requirements to be able to continue

our connection to the network. Six areas had been highlighted during that inspection as needing further attention and we had been told that our application to remain connected had been declined. Most of the concerns raised by the Inspector were of a minor nature which we have since resolved. One concern however relates to how Councillors currently access their emails via the Councillor Portal. The Council therefore need to change the way in which Members access their emails in the near future. Corporate Management Team and the ICT Section had considered the various options that were available to the Council. Given the need for an urgent response to the Cabinet Office by the beginning of August the matter had been reported to the Budget Working Group on 10 July and each Councillor had also been consulted on the proposal.

In outline it was proposed that the Council supply each Member with a tablet device which would be controlled by and remain in the ownership of the Council.

Members then discussed this matter in some detail.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the request to add the scheme to provide tablet devices to Members in the Council's Capital Programme for 2013/14 at a cost of £16,430 part funded (£3,000) from existing Revenue Budgets relating to Member allowances and expenses.

#### 279 REVENUES AND BENEFITS GENERAL REPORT

Committee received a report which covered the following areas:

- National Non Domestic Rates (NNDR).
- Council Tax.
- Sundry Debtors.
- Housing Benefit Performance.
- Housing Benefit Fraud.
- Housing Benefit Overpayments.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

#### 280 CAPITAL MONITORING 2013/14

A report on Capital Monitoring for 2013/14 was presented to Committee. There were two schemes included in this Committee's Capital Budget:

- Economic development initiatives - £100,000.
- Network and server infrastructure - £5,570.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

#### 281 OVERALL CAPITAL MONITORING 2013/14

A report on the Overall Capital Monitoring for a number of schemes totalling £1,523,467 was considered by Committee.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

282 REVENUE OUTTURN 2012/13

The Revenue Outturn report for this Committee for 2012/13 was considered by Committee. It showed a net expenditure of £2,002,465 and details of variances were provided for Committee.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

283 OVERALL REVENUE OUTTURN 2012/13

Committee considered the Overall Revenue Outturn report for 2012/13. The Director of Resources pointed out that £83,000 had been added to general fund balances as a result of savings made in the previous financial year. The report also gave details of the Council's earmarked reserves.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

284 REVENUE MONITORING 2013/14

The Director of Resources submitted a report giving details of the Revenue Monitoring for the first four months of the current financial year.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

285 OVERALL REVENUE MONITORING 2013/14

Committee considered a report on the Overall Revenue Monitoring for 2013/14,

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

286 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP UPDATE

Committee considered an update report from the Economic Development Working Group which had met twice on the 17 July and 20 August 2013. Details were given of the four main priorities which had been agreed by the Working Group.

Discussion then centred around a recent survey of empty shops across the country, particularly in the north west of England. Committee also discussed the merits of establishing a Town Team for Clitheroe. This was debated at some length in particular over who should take the lead on this particular initiative.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

287 2012/2013 YEAR END PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

A report on the 2012/2013 Performance Information was submitted for information to Committee.

A number of individual indicators were highlighted and explanations given on performance.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

288 PERCEPTION SURVEY 2013

Committee received a comprehensive Perception Survey report covering many aspects of life in the Ribble Valley including well-being, service satisfaction, perceptions of the Council, value for money and number of quality of life questions were also asked.

Corporately there had been some very good results and the Council had the opportunity to make the most of the data available. There was also a chance to link the findings with our decision-making processes and strategic planning.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

289 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES 2012/13

Members received a report from the Director of Resources on Treasury Management Activities 2012/13 which highlighted the following areas of activity:

- Borrowing requirements.
- Investments.
- Prudential indicators.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

290 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MONITORING 2013/14

Members considered a report from the Director of Resources on Treasury Management Monitoring for 2013/14 covering such areas as:

- borrowing requirements;
- investments;
- Prudential indicators;
- approved organisations; and
- recent events.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

291 TIMETABLE FOR BUDGET SETTING

Committee considered a report on the timetable for budget setting for 2014/15.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

292 CONTRACT FOR INSURANCE SERVICES

Committee considered a report on the recent procurement exercise for the Council's insurance services. Following discussion with the Head of Financial Service and the Director of Resources, the tender submitted by Zurich Municipal for a five year term agreement effective from 20 June 2013 was accepted. Details of the premiums were provided for Committee.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

293 OMBUDSMAN'S ANNUAL REVIEW REPORT 2012/13

Committee received a report from the Local Government Ombudsman's Review of 2012/13. The Local Government Ombudsman had confirmed that there were only 4 complaints in relation to this Council as compared to an average four other districts/borough councils of 10 per annum.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

294 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That by virtue of the next items of information being exempt information under Category 3 and 7 of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be now excluded from the meeting.

295 REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS 2012/13

Committee received a report on the number of complaints which had been dealt with during the period April 2012 to August 2013. During that period 16 formal complaints had been registered with the Council.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

296 DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

The Chief Executive referred to his written report in relation to two matters:

- land at Barrow Brook;
- market redevelopment site.

He gave Members an update on both initiatives.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. authorise the Chief Executive in consultation with the chairman to pursue negotiations on potential sites with a view to acquisition of land for economic development as appropriate and to identify the options for partner working keeping Committee informed of progress on a regular basis;

2. endorse the use of the District Valuer to provide necessary estates and valuation advice and instruct the Chief Executive to prepare a financial appraisal for consideration by the Budget Working Group prior to reporting to this Committee;
3. instruct the Head of Regeneration and Housing to prepare a detailed project proposal and development brief for the development of land at Barrow Enterprise Park for consideration by this Committee including the measures required to pursue compulsory purchase on land as necessary at the appropriate time; and
4. agree the request for an exclusivity agreement in relation to the market redevelopment and keep this Committee informed of progress on the redevelopment options as appropriate subject to the agreement of wording of any legal agreement being referred to the Council's Monitoring Officer.

(Councillor Knox declared an interest in the next item of business and left the meeting.)

297 REFERENCE FROM COMMITTEE – LAND AT RIDDINGS LANE, WHALLEY

Committee were asked to consider a request from Health and Housing Committee to agree to pay compensation to Ribble Valley Homes for the garage site at Riddings Lane, Whalley.

RESOLVED: That Committee agree to pay the compensation about of £20,000 to Ribble Valley Homes and for this payment to be financed from the VAT shelter earmarked reserve.

The meeting closed at 8.03pm.

If you have any queries on these minutes please contact Jane Pearson (01200 425111).