

Minutes of Policy & Finance Committee

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 25 March 2014, starting at 6.30pm
Present: Councillor S Hirst (Chairman)

Councillors:

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

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

672 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor T Hill.

673 MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 28 January and 11 February 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

674 MATTERS ARISING

Minute 573 – Proposed Capital Programme 2014-17 and Minute 574 – Revised Revenue Budget 2013/14

A Member raised the question of the effectiveness of the sound loop system in the Council Chamber. The Director of Community Services gave details of work which would be undertaken over the next few weeks to improve the system.

675 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following Councillors declared an interest in the agenda items as listed below:

Councillor R Thompson – Item 6 – Division of Wiswell Parish Council;
Councillors K Horkin, K Hind, S Hore, A Knox, J Rogerson and A Yearling – Item 12 – Allocation for Voluntary Sector Grants 2014/15;
Councillors A Knox and G Mirfin – Item 18 – VAT Shelter and Item 24 – Disposal of Garage Sites.

676 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr A Schofield, a resident of Wiswell, spoke in relation to Item 6 – Division of Wiswell Parish Council.

677 TIMETABLE OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS 2014/15

Committee considered the proposed meeting cycle for Committees for the municipal Year 2014/15. The Chief Executive commented that the date of Community Committee as indicated in the draft cycle had been scheduled for 20 May and in view of the fact that this meeting would be 2 days before scheduled European Elections, it was felt that this meeting needed to be changed to either 27 May or 3 June.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the draft meeting cycle as now amended with Community Committee being rescheduled in the first cycle of meetings.

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

678 DIVISION OF WISWELL PARISH COUNCIL

The Solicitor referred to her report which sought Member approval for the Council to make an order splitting the Parish and also seeking Member authorisation for the Council's Solicitor, in consultation with the Chief Executive and Leader, to continue to progress this matter.

She reminded Members that at its meeting on 20 November 2012 the Committee had resolved to accept recommendations concerning the division of the Parish for the reasons proposed and authorise the Council's Solicitor to draft a Reorganisation Order and liaise with others to implement those recommendations.

In March 2013, the Council's Solicitor had brought a further report to Committee seeking determination of various matters. Committee agreed that the split would take effect from April 2015 with Elections taking place as scheduled in May 2015.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. recommend to Full Council that the Council should make an Order similar to that included at Appendix 1 to the report to split the Parish of Wiswell; and
2. authorise the Council's Solicitor, in consultation with the Chief Executive and Leader, to continue to progress this matter.

(Councillor Thompson returned to the meeting.)

679 AMENDMENTS TO STANDING ORDERS (PART 4 OF THE COUNCIL'S CONSTITUTION)

The Solicitor presented her report which sought to amend the Council's Standing Orders (Part 4 of the Council's Constitution) to reflect recent changes in legislation, the consequential changes adopted to the Council's procedure and to ensure that they remain up to date.

She commented that since the Council's Standing Orders had last been amended, various changes to procedures had been introduced pursuant to the Localism Act 2011. The included changes to the requirements for Members to

disclose pecuniary and other interests, the introduction of a new standards regime and the removal of the requirement for an Overview and Scrutiny Committee. More recently the Local Government (Standing Orders) England (Amendment) Regulation 2014 had come into force and introduced the requirement for a recorded vote to all budget decision meetings as defined in the Regulations.

The main changes as indicated above were to:

1. separate the Standing Orders relating the Council from those relating to Committees;
2. update the Standing Orders headed "Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters" and complaints about Member conduct;
3. amend the Standing Order for the call-in procedure to reflect the fact that the Council resolved that Overview and Scrutiny Committee would cease to operate and any Member wishing to call-in should refer it to the Emergency Committee; and
4. to reflect the requirement for a recorded vote to be taken on any decision made at a Budget Decision Meeting.

Members then discussed the report in some detail and suggested a number of changes to the revised Standing Orders including a lesser number (3) of Members required to support a proposal for a recorded vote in a committee and a number of tidying up amendments.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. approve the changes outlined in the report as now amended; and
2. Refer the suggested changes to Full Council with a recommendation for their approval.

680 WORLD WAR I COMMEMORATION

The Chief Executive asked Committee to agree how the Council would commemorate the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War. He reported that the Corporate Management Team had considered how the Council should mark this anniversary and had made the following suggestions:

- A Civic Service on Sunday, 3 August 2014 at St Mary's Church, Clitheroe.
- The planting of an oak tree in every Parish within the borough.
- Giving poppy seeds to schools and children within the Ribble Valley.

He commented that if Committee agreed with this approach they would develop a more detailed programme which would be further reported to Committee. The estimated cost of the above programme was approximately £5,000 but grant aid was being sought from the Heritage Lottery Fund. If grant aid was not forthcoming the funding could be found from underspent performance reward grant.

RESOLVED: That Committee agree with the suggested approach in commemorating the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War.

681 TRIBUNALS, COURTS AND ENFORCEMENT ACT 2007

The Director of Resources presented her report which informed Members about the changes introduced by the Tribunals, Courts and Enforcement Act 2007 which had been implemented by the Taking Control of Goods Regulation 2013. The Act provided for several diverse matters relating to the law, some of them being significant changes to the structure of the Courts and fundamental legal procedures. The primary focus of the report was part 3 of the Act and this created a new system of taking control of goods in order to enforcement judgements and abolished certain ancient common law writs and remedies.

The Regulations set out the procedure enforcement agents must follow when taking control of goods and if necessary selling them to recover a debt.

She further commented that the Council had used Rossendales Ltd as our bailiffs to enforce Council Tax and Business Rate collection for the past 20 years. She commented that there had been very few complaints regarding the bailiffs and their collection of our debt had always exceeded industry averages in more than 60% of the debt referred.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. note the changes introduced by the Tribunals, Courts and Enforcement Act 2007 as we collect Council Tax and Business Rate debts; and
2. agree to continue to use Rossendales Ltd to enforce the collection of these debts.

682 VILLAGE AMENITIES GRANTS – QUEEN ELIZABETH II PLAYING FIELDS PROJECT

Committee considered a progress report on the Queen Elizabeth II Playing Fields Project which was granted funding through the Village Amenities Grants Fund. Committee were reminded that a grant of £10,000 had been approved in 2013 and Members had agreed that the QEII Playing Fields Charitable Trust should be given an additional 5 month period until March 2014 in which to claim their grant funding due to the size of the project and its significance for Whalley.

At the time of writing the report the Council were awaiting further details from the Charitable Trust as to their anticipated completion date for the project which would now be beyond the previously agreed March deadline. Members would recall that a feasibility study had been completed by the project and had been funded from other grants however the Committee dealt with the capital elements of the project relating to the provision of a multi-use games area, youth shelter and green gym.

RESOLVED: That Committee agree that due to the size and significance to Whalley of this project that the large capital project of QEII Playing Fields Charitable Trust be given an additional 3 months period beyond March 2014 to complete the project.

683

MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES 2014/15

Committee were asked to consider and agree the Council's scheme of Member Allowances for 2014/15 financial year. She reminded Members that the Council was required to agree and publicise its Members' Allowance Scheme each year and had an independent review at least every 4 years. The independent panel when it last met had agreed the basic allowance and dependant carers allowance to be increased annually in line with the increase in the national minimum wage each October and to be introduced from the following April. The basic allowance had increased by 1.93% based on the increase in the national minimum wage in October 2013; the new basic allowance was therefore £2,952. The allowances were as set out below:

Basic allowance	£2,952.00
Special responsibility allowance:	
Leader of the Council	£14,761.00
Deputy Leader	£8,856.00
Leader of the Opposition	£8,856.00
Committee Chairman	£5,904.00
Planning & Development Committee Chairman	£7,380.00
Service Committee Vice Chairman	£2,952.00
Dependant Carers Allowance	£6.31 per hour

RESOLVED: That Committee agree the scheme of Members' Allowance for 2014/15.

(Councillors K Horkin, K Hind, S Hore, A Knox, J Rogerson and A Yearling all declared an interest in the next item of business and left the meeting.)

684

VOLUNTARY GRANT APPLICATIONS 2014/15

The Voluntary Organisations Grant Scheme was administered by Policy and Finance Committee. A working group comprising Members considering the applications received and to make recommendations to this Committee regarding the allocation funds to voluntary organisations on an annual basis.

The criteria for applications was set out for Members' information.

The Council received 16 applications requesting support of £177,563. The applications as submitted exceeded the funds available by £75,753.

The working group also considered an application received from Clitheroe Chamber of Trade and Commerce which did not fall into the definition of a voluntary organisation grant, however they wished for the request to be supported. The Director of Resources suggested that if Committee were to approve this request the grant could be funded from a small under allocation in 2013/14 grant monies.

Members then discussed these applications and in particular the Clitheroe Chamber of Trade and Commerce application specifically.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. approve the allocation of grants as proposed by the Voluntary Grants Sub-Group as set out in Annex 2 totalling £96,750; and

2. agree to support the Clitheroe Chamber of Trade and Commerce application for £1,000 to be funded from unallocated grant monies for 2013/14.

(Councillors K Horkin, K Hind, S Hore, A Knox, J Rogerson and A Yearing all returned to the meeting.)

685 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Director of Resources sought Members approval for the Council's Treasury Management Strategy for the 2014/15 financial year. She reminded Members that local authorities were required to report on specific elements of their treasury management activities; these were included in the Treasury Management Strategy or in the Treasury Management Policies or Practices and are determined by the Treasury Management Code of Practice and the Prudential Code, 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 Full Council the Treasury Management Strategy as set out in Annex 1 to this report. ***

686 TREASURY MANAGEMENT POLICIES AND PRACTICES 2014/15

The Director of Resources asked Committee to review, approve and adopt the Treasury Management Policy Statement and Practices for 2014/15.

The Treasury Management Policies and Practices document governed the way in which the Council managed 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 the Treasury Management Policy Statement and the Treasury Management Policies were approved in March 2013. However it was agreed to replace Lloyds TSB Bank plc with Lloyds Bank plc on the list of investment counterparties.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. review, resolve and formally adopt the Treasury Management Policies and Practices document as attached at Annex 1, incorporating the Treasury Management Key Principles:

- Treasury Management Policy Statement;
- Treasury Management Clauses; and
- Treasury Management Practices and Schedules.

2. recommend to Full Council the Treasury Management Policies and Practices 2014/15; and
3. approve the replacement of Lloyds TSB plc with Lloyds Bank plc on the list of investment counterparties.

687 LOCAL TAXATION WRITE-OFFS

The Director of Resources sought Committee approval to write-off a National Non-Domestic Rate debt. There was one case where the company had gone into liquidation and therefore we need to write-off it as an NNDR debt.

RESOLVED: That Committee agree to the writing off of £8,790.26 of NNDR debt where it had not been possible to collect the amounts due.

688 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Committee received an update report which gave details of economic development and regeneration activities and issues and sought to nominate representatives to economic groups established in Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley. The report covered the following areas:

- Economic development overview.
- Economic Development Working Group.
- Lancashire Enterprise Partnership.
- Business support.
- Rural Development Programme for England.
- Service centre and business groups.
- Other activities.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. note the report; and
2. nominate the following representatives of the Ribble Valley Borough Council to the following groups:

Clitheroe Town Team – Councillors K Horkin, A Yearling
 Longridge Town Team – Councillors K Hind, J Rogerson
 Whalley Village Partnership – Councillors T Hill, J Holgate

689 MEALS ON WHEELS/LUNCHEON CLUBS

Committee received a report updating Members on the provision of Meals on Wheels service and other luncheon clubs in Ribble Valley. The report noted that there had been an on-going review for the provision of Meals on Wheels service and Luncheon Clubs in the Ribble Valley. Luncheon Clubs were supported at various venues and the Lancashire County Council and Borough Council would

like the RVS to continue to provide the current Meals on Wheels service with the existing service users until the end of June 2014. The County Council propose to identify the needs of existing service users of the Meals on Wheels service and find an alternative service provision.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

690 REVENUES AND BENEFITS GENERAL REPORT

The Director of Resources informed Committee of the Council's position on the following areas:

1. National Non-Domestic Rates.
2. Council Tax.
3. Sundry Debtors.
4. Housing Benefit performance.
5. Housing Benefit support – fraud.
6. Housing Benefit overpayments.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

691 BUDGET WORKING GROUP

Committee received the minutes of the Budget Working Group dated 16 January 2014.

(Councillors A Knox and G Mirfin declared an interest in the next 2 items of business and left the meeting.)

692 VAT SHELTER

Committee received a report informing Members of the latest position on the VAT shelter negotiated as part of the housing stock transfer. Committee were reminded that when the Council's housing stock was transferred in 2008 part of the agreement was to create a VAT shelter. It was an agreement whereby the Housing Association (Ribble Valley Homes) who could not recover VAT on repairs and improvements, use a VAT shelter agreed with the Council and HMRC to claim back VAT. The VAT recouped was then shared between the Housing Association and the Council on terms which had been agreed.

Committee then discussed this matter and expressed some concern over the reduced amounts which had been paid under the VAT shelter.

The Chief Executive and Director of Resources reminded Members of the amounts which had already been paid to the Council and the amounts which would be payable over the next 5 years.

Members were also informed of how the VAT shelter receipts had been used to date and how much was set aside in the earmarked reserves.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

693 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.

694 DISPOSAL OF GARAGE SITES

The Chief Executive referred to his report and sought Committee's approval to the sale of garage sites at Grindleton. He commented that there were two sites in Grindleton which were in a poor state of repair and had received numerous complaints from tenants. The Council basically had three options:

1. to demolish the garages and replace them with new garages themselves;
2. demolish the garages and clear the site; or
3. sell the site to Ribble Valley Homes or another organisation.

He commented that he had spoken to Ribble Valley Homes who were willing to purchase the two sites from the Council at an agreed price and provide new garages.

RESOLVED: That Committee agree to sell the Grindleton garage sites to Ribble Valley Homes for the amounts set out in the report.

(Councillors A Knox and G Mirfin returned to the meeting.)

695 LOCAL TAXATION WRITE-OFFS

The Director of Resources sought Committee's approval to write off a Council Tax debt. This was one case relating to two properties where a debtor had gone away and it had not been possible to trace them and therefore the Council needed to write off the Council Tax debt.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the writing-off of £1,283.31 Council Tax debt where it had not been possible to collect the amount due.

The meeting closed at 7.57pm.

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