

Minutes of Policy & Finance Committee

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 9 September 2014, starting at 6.30pm
Present: Councillor S Hirst (Chairman)

Councillors:

J Alcock	G Mirfin
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.

241 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors R Elms, J Hill and T Hill.

242 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

243 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors K Hind and A Yearling declared an interest in the request for financial help for Clitheroe Bonfire.

244 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

245 POLLING STATION REVIEW

Committee considered the recommendations arising from the Council's Polling District and Polling Place Review 2014.

Members were reminded that under Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 there were a number of changes to the Representation of the People Act 1983 including a requirement for the Council to review UK parliament polling districts at least every 4 years. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of these compulsory reviews so that the next compulsory review must be started and completed between 1 October 2013 and 31 January 2015.

The guidance recommended that an evidence base was assembled to include information such as electorate figures, proposed area of new development, record of comments or complaints or any other relevant information from polling

station managers, premises managers etc. There were four main points to be considered when looking at such a review:

- Location.
- Size.
- Availability.
- Accessibility.

The consultation period had run from 31 March to 30 June 2014. 9 responses had been received during the consultation period and the recommendations were as follows in respect of 6 polling places:

- Billington – the polling station would revert back to Hodgefield either the Community Centre or a portakabin on the car park.
- Littlemoor – where the polling station was either St James' Church or Ribblesdale School.
- St Mary's – recommended St Mary's Church.
- Dilworth – recommended Longridge Civic Hall.
- Wiswell – in relation to the suitability of a portakabin for disabled access.
- Grindleton – to the continued use of Harrop Fold as separate polling place.

*** RESOLVED: That the Committee considered the various proposals and it was recommended that the polling districts and polling places and polling stations as set out in Appendix 2 to the report be accepted. ***

246 LOCAL TAXATION WRITE-OFFS

Committee were asked to approve a write-off of National Non-Domestic Debts relating to 3 companies; one company had gone into liquidation and two others had been dissolved. Therefore we needed to write-off the associated NNDR debts.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the writing off of £11,157.29 of NNDR debts where it had not been possible to collect the amounts due.

247 COMMUNITY TRIGGER

Committee considered a report explaining some of the provisions of the new Antisocial Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 with particular reference to the Community Trigger. They were also asked to agree to publish details of how the trigger would operate in the Ribble Valley on the Council's website and also to agree the appropriate threshold levels for that trigger.

Members were informed that under the Community Trigger provisions Councils had a legal requirement to provide a mechanism whereby members of the public who felt they had been the victim of antisocial behaviour could trigger a review of how different agencies had dealt with a particular case of antisocial behaviour. All Lancashire Districts had agreed on the relevant trigger mechanisms which were:

- a) behavioural threshold “harassment alarm and distress” rather than nuisance and annoyance; and
- b) proposed trigger thresholds:
 - i. three or more complaints in the past 6 months from one individual about the same problem where that person thinks no action has been taken;
 - ii. five individuals complaining about the same or similar incidents in the 6 months where it was felt no action had been taken; and
 - iii. one incident motivated by hate in the past 6 months where it was felt that no action had been taken.

Other relevant bodies involved in Community Trigger reviews were the Police, registered social landlords and clinical commissioning groups; all of whom had signalled their agreement to these threshold levels.

Members then discussed the report and its possible workload implications including the role of the former Quality of Life position.

RESOLVED: That

- 1. Committee note the contents of the report;
- 2. agree to adopt the Community Trigger as set out in paragraph 3 in line with other Lancashire districts and other relevant agencies;
- 3. delegate the wording of the website and online forms to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of this Committee;
- 4. monitor the progress of the Community Trigger and consider an update report to be submitted in March 2015; and
- 5. consider any staffing implications as part of the budget setting process for 2015/16.

248 BUDGET FORECAST 2014/15 TO 2017/18

Committee considered the report of the Director of Resources in relation to the 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 considerations:

- Public Sector Pay and Price Inflation – the Director of Resources reported that there had been a 1% national offer which had been rejected by the Unions. Her forecast included 1% for 2014/15 then 2% for each year from 2015/16. She also noted that the rate of Consumer Price Index had slowed to 1.6% in the year from 1.9%. At the same time the Retail Price Index had gone down slightly from 2.6% to 2.5%. The forecast allowed 2% price inflation for each of the years from 2015/16.

- Local Government Grant Funding – exemplification showed that for 2015/16 our grant funding would increase slightly from the original consultation figure as a result of the rolling in of the Council Tax freeze grant. Our funding for 2015/16 was expected to be £2.239m, a reduction of £385,000 on our grant for the current year.

At this stage we had assumed our grant funding would fall by 10% in 2016/17 and by a further 5% in 2017/18.

- New Homes Bonus – the New Homes Bonus scheme had commenced in April 2011 and will match fund the additional Council Tax raised for new homes and properties brought back into use with an additional amount for affordable homes for a 6 year period.

We expect to be notified of our allocation for New Homes Bonus Grant at the time of confirmation of the Local Government Finance Settlement. Based on the movement in our Council Tax Base up to the end of July we will receive at least £836,760 in 2015/16.

Members would be aware following the setting of this year’s budget we had now committed £333,780 of our New Homes Bonus each year to support our revenue budget.

- Council Tax – last year’s spending round announced a continuation of the freeze in Council Tax levels and also a 2% referendum limit for the 2 years 2014/15 and 2015/16. The support to be paid for the freeze in Council Tax is equivalent to a 1% increase forgone. Our Council Tax was currently at £140.69 at Band D which had been frozen since 2010/11. Based on our current tax base a 1% increase in Council Tax raises approximately £30,000 a year.
- Interest Rates – the Director of Resources also made reference to the continuation of the low level of interest earned on investments and the slight increase in receipts she predicted in 2016/17 and 2017/18.
- Business Rate Growth – the Council would retain our share of any growth above our business rates baseline. The growth we originally estimated to retain in 2013/14 was £47,000. At year end this materialised to £189,000. The Business Rates Retention Scheme continues to be very complex and difficult to estimate with any certainty. Further complications include Section 31 Grant reimbursements from the Government to pay for measures introduced to assist ratepayers. The amount relied upon in our budget forecast is £263,000 each year.

RESOLVED: That Committee note the report of the Director of Resources and agree with the report as a basis for preparing the Council’s budget for 2015/16 to 2017/18.

249 UNIVERSAL CREDIT ROLLOUT

Members considered a report on the rollout of universal credit in the north west during 2014/2015. Authorisation was sought to enter into a delivery partnership

agreement with the Department of Work and Pensions to provide services to universal credit claimants. The Department of Work and Pensions had notified us that the go live date for universal credit claimants was 24 November 2014. The DWP would

- Provide reasonable support to the Council in the development and implementation of local service provision
- Provide timely and relevant guidance and products to inform delivery of local service provision
- Provide timely data to support the local council tax support scheme

The DWP required the Council to carry out the following services:

- providing support to UC service centre staff around housing issues
- support for claimants to get on line and stay on line
- manual processing of local council tax support scheme
- support for claimants with complex needs particular personal budgeting support
- work with universal credit programme in preparing landlords

The DWP estimated the cost of carry out these services would be £38,512.86 for the period to 31 March 2015 and have committed to compensating the Council for any additional costs incurred. The Director of Resources informed Members there would be some impact on staffing within the Benefits Section as a result of these requirements but it was anticipated that the grant offered would cover any additional costs. She informed Members that a further report detailing the staffing implications would be submitted to the next Policy and Finance Committee meeting.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. note the rollout of universal credit to commence in the Ribble Valley on 24 November 2014; and
2. agree to enter into the delivery partnership agreement with DWP to provide services to UC claimants.

250 CONCURRENT FUNCTION GRANTS

The Director of Resources sought approval of the allocation of concurrent function grants for 2014/2015.

The report outlined the type of functions which were eligible, these included:

- burial grounds
- footpaths
- litter collection
- dog waste bins
- parks and play areas

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

18 applications had been received, revenue expenditure to be supported totalled £47,062 which based on a grant rate of 25% equated to £11,766 which was well within budget.

The report pointed out that with regard to Longridge Town Council there had been no approval of a concurrent grant shown for the current year due to delays which had been experienced because of changeover in staffing at the Town Council.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. approve the allocation of grants as proposed in Annex 1 to the report totalling £11,766 for 18 Parish and town Councils;
2. agree the payment of approved grants in a single instalment rather than two instalments as outlined in the grant scheme; and
3. in future ask all applicants to submit supporting documentation for all claims for grant support.

(Councillor K Hind and A Yearing declared an interest in the next item of business and left the meeting)

251 CLITHEROE BONFIRE – REQUEST FOR FUNDING

The Director of Resources submitted a request from Clitheroe Rotary Club for financial help towards the fire display at Clitheroe Community Bonfire.

RESOLVED: That the request for a donation of £500 towards the cost of fireworks at Clitheroe Community Bonfire be agreed.

(Councillors Hind and Yearing returned to the meeting)

252 REFERENCES FROM COMMITTEE – ROEFIELD CENTRE ACTIVITY ROOM

Committee were asked to consider a request referred to them by Community Services Committee to agree the provision of funding to Roefield Leisure Centre of £15,445 to enable a new activity space to be built within the existing footprint of the centre. Community Committee had considered this report at their last meeting and had resolved:

‘that Committee were minded to support this request and as resources were not available within existing budgets ask that the issue be referred to Policy and Finance Committee for them to consider various options’.

The Director of Resources then highlighted three ways in which such a request could be funded:

- changes to existing loan arrangements
- use of general fund balances
- use of earmarked reserves

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. agree to the provision of funding to Roefield Leisure Centre of £15,445 to enable a new activity space to be built within the existing footprint of the centre with the inclusion of this as a scheme on the Council's capital programme for 2014/2015;
2. agree to the use of earmarked reserves to finance this new capital grant for Roefield Leisure Centre;
3. make it clear to Roefield Leisure Centre that this grant is being considered in exceptional circumstances; and
4. contact Roefield Leisure Centre requesting that the Head of Cultural and Leisure Services be allocated a place on the Board of the Trust.

253 MEALS ON WHEELS/LUNCHEON CLUBS

Committee considered an update report on the provision of meals on wheels service and other luncheon clubs in the Ribble Valley. Members were reminded that there had been an ongoing review of the provision of meals on wheels service and luncheon clubs which had previously been reported in both March and June to this Committee. Five luncheon clubs were currently supported and new luncheon clubs and drop-in events were currently being developed within the villages that had expressed an interest in setting up a scheme in their community. Match funding from the LCC was in place for 2014/2015 but it was unclear about whether this would continue into 2015/2016.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

254 CLITHEROE TOWN CENTRE UPDATE

Committee received a report for information on Clitheroe Town Centre. The report highlighted a number of initiatives which were currently taking place within the Clitheroe Town Centre in consultation with Lancashire County Council aimed at improving the general environment and making Clitheroe more attractive for visitors and local people.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

255 CAPITAL MONITORING 2014/2015

Committee considered a report on the progress of the approved Capital Programme for the period April to July 2014 with regards to schemes which fall under the remit of this Committee.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

256 OVERALL CAPITAL MONITORING 2014/2015

Committee received an update report on the progress of the approved Capital Programme for the period April to July 2014.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

257 2013/2014 YEAR END PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

Committee received a yearend report of 2013/2014 that detailed performance against our local performance indicators. The report included

- outturn figures from all local performance indicators
- performance information for previous years for comparison purposes
- targets for performance for service performance for the year 2013/2014
- targets that had been provided for Members to scrutinise for the following three years

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

258 REVENUE OUTTURN 2013/2014

Members considered a detailed report for the revenue budget year end 31 March 2014 for this Committee.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

259 OVERALL REVENUE OUTTURN 2013/2014

Members received a report on the revenue outturn for the year ending 31 March 2014.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

260 ELECTORAL REVIEW PROGRAMME 2014/2016

The Chief Executive reported that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) had written to the Council recently seeking its views on the work programme for 2014/2016 and raising the possibility of an electoral review being conducted for the Ribble Valley.

His report outlined the purpose of such a review and issues which would be considered including:

- council size (number of Councillors)
- electoral variations by ward
- electoral forecasts (population trends)

The Chief Executive commented that he had been contacted by the Boundary Commission who had indicated work would commence on the review in November 2016 and be completed by August 2017. He further commented both he and the Leader of the Council were due to meet with LGBCE to discuss how

the review would operate. The likelihood was that a working group would be formed soon after May 2015 to look at the process and how it would impact on the Ribble Valley for the future.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

261 REVENUE MONITORING 2014/15

Committee received a report showing the position for the first four months April to July 2014 of this year's revenue budget so far as this Committee was concerned.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

262 OVERALL REVENUE MONITORING 2014/15

Committee received a report detailing the position on the revenue budget for the current financial year.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

263 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES 2013/14

Members received a report from the Director of Resources on Treasury Management Activities 2013/14 which highlighted the following areas of activity:

- Borrowing requirements.
- Investments.
- Prudential indicators.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

264 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MONITORING 2014/15

Members considered a report from the Director of Resources on Treasury Management Monitoring for 2014/15 covering such areas as:

- Borrowing requirements.
- Investments.
- Prudential indicators.
- Approved organisations.
- Recent events.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

265 OMBUDSMAN'S ANNUAL REVIEW REPORT 2012/13

Committee received a report from the Head of Legal and Democratic Services on the Local Government Ombudsman's review of 2013/14. The Local Government Ombudsman had confirmed that there were only 4 complaints in 2012/13 about authority as compared with the average of districts/borough councils of 10 per annum.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

266 TIMETABLE FOR BUDGET SETTING

Committee received a report on the timetable for the setting of the budget for 2015/16.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

267 INSURANCE RENEWALS 2014/15

Committee considered a report informing them of the insurance renewals for the period 20 June 2014 to 19 June 2015.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

268 REVENUES AND BENEFITS GENERAL REPORT

Committee considered a report which covered the following areas:

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

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

269 BUDGET WORKING GROUP

Committee received minutes of the Budget Working Group held on 23 January and 17 June 2014.

270 ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT REPORT

Members received a comprehensive report from Councillor White, the Council's Armed Forces Champion in relation to Armed Forces Community Covenant Report 2014.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

271 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

272 MARKET REDEVELOPMENT, CLITHEROE

Members received an update report from the Chief Executive in relation to the market development site and asking that actions be confirmed in relation to next steps including timetable for the whole process.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. note the position set out above and the project timeframe set out in table 1 and endorse the revised approach taken to the preparation of the brief and expression of interest stage; and
2. endorse the appointment as appropriate of specialist advisors to support the delivery of the schemes and that the Chief Executive be asked to keep Committee informed of progress.

273 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP

Committee received the minutes of the Economic Development Group for its meetings dated 12 May and 24 June 2014.

274 LOCAL TAXATION WRITE-OFFS

The Director of Resources sought Committee's approval to write-off Council Tax debts relating to individuals. She commented that there was one case where a debtor had been declared bankrupt and one case where the debtor had been made an individual voluntary agreement and therefore we needed to write-off the Council Tax debt.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the writing-off of £5,730.67 debt where it had not been possible to collect the amount due.

275 SUNDRY DEBTOR WRITE-OFF

The Director of Resources sought Committee's approval to partial write-off of a sundry debtor invoice relating to the overpayment of housing benefit. The Director of Resources gave Members background information regarding the history and this overpayment.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the writing-off of an outstanding balance of £1,958.56 relating to the overpayment of housing benefit.

The meeting closed at 8.12pm.

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