

Minutes of Health & Housing Committee

Meeting Date: Thursday, 21 January 2016 starting at 6.30pm
Present: Councillor S Hore (Chairman)

Councillors:

S Bibby	K Hind
S Brunskill	J Holgate
P Dobson	R Newmark
R Elms	M Robinson
M Fenton	R Sherras
L Graves	J White
R Hargreaves	

In attendance: Chief Executive, Director of Resources, Head of Regeneration and Housing, Strategic Housing Officer and Senior Accountant.

531 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillor P Elms.

532 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

533 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY AND NON-PECUNIARY INTEREST

There were no pecuniary and non-pecuniary declarations of interest.

534 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

535 FLOODING IN THE RIBBLE VALLEY 2015

The Chief Executive gave a verbal report to the meeting on the impact of flooding in Whalley, Billington and Ribchester over the Boxing Day to New Year period 2015. A full written report had been prepared for presentation to Policy and Finance committee on 26 January 2016. 220 properties in the Ribble Valley had been affected by flooding, and Ribble Valley Borough Council officers had attended on site throughout the period.

In the initial response, 30 families or individuals have been rehoused in hotels, and subsequently arrangements were made for estate agents to open to assist with more permanent accommodation. In total, 43 households received assistance. The Council had also arranged over 7000 sandbags and 100 skips. The Council had administered over 200 grants for affected households and was

administering the Property Resilience Scheme for flood prevention measures, and the Housing and Regeneration team were working with the Department for Communities and Local Government and DEFRA and advising residents with regard to this scheme.

The Chief Executive praised the work of the Council's officers and the many volunteers who had helped with the response and recovery stages. The Chief Executive reiterated that information is available on the Council's website about eligibility and procedures for seeking assistance for the outcome of Storm Desmond and Storm Eva. Members reported on their own and the public's appreciation for the efforts of Ribble Valley Borough Council and its officers.

536 REGISTRATION AS A REGISTERED PROVIDER FOR SOCIAL HOUSING

The Chief Executive submitted a report requesting Committee's approval to investigate the options of the Council registering as a provider of social housing with the Homes and Communities Agency and also as an investment partner. The issue had arisen as Registered Providers have been facing difficulties in funding acquisitions, giving rise to a risk that Registered Providers will not be in a position to take on new affordable units as development schemes deliver them. If the Council registered as a Registered Provider, it could acquire up to 100 Section 106 homes for onward sale as shared ownership housing. This scheme, utilising commuted sums received from developers, would give flexibility in delivery of affordable housing. The Council would continue to seek discount sale, shared ownership and affordable rents as the best affordable housing mix, but this scheme would extend the options available.

There was discussion about the need to maintain as much flexibility as possible in housing, and the need to ensure that any decision to purchase units would be in parishes where there was clear evidence of a need for affordable housing.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve further investigation into whether registering as a Registered Provider of social housing with the Homes and Communities Agency is an option for the Council.

537 PROPOSED CHANGE TO RIBBLE VALLEY HOMES BOARD

The Chief Executive submitted a report, seeking Committee's response to proposed changes to the Rules of Association of Ribble Valley Homes which would mean that the Council no longer have the right to nominate four Members to sit on the Board of Ribble Valley Homes.

Committee were reminded that the 2008 Housing Stock Transfer Agreement provided for the whole of the Council's housing stock, related assets and undertakings to be transferred to Ribble Valley Homes. Within the Rules of Association of Ribble Valley Homes, it was provided for there to be four Council nominated Members on the Board. There are currently three nominated Members on the Board. Ribble Valley Homes were seeking to alter the rules, including reduction of the number of Members on the Board, and then recruiting on a skills rather than a representational basis. This request was based on their

interpretation of the Homes and Communities Agency consultation on changes in the Regulatory Framework dated May 2014 and the revised Code of Governance published by the National Housing Federation in 2015. This provided for prospective Board Members to have their candidacy assessed against objective criteria, irrespective of the routes to Board membership. The recruitment standards for Symphony Housing (the parent company for Ribble Valley Homes) also provided for local authorities to be advised of the need to meet skills requirements when appointing their nominees.

There was discussion in which Members emphasised the importance of local representation, and the knowledge that both local authority representatives and tenant representatives could bring to the Board. Whilst Members were prepared to consider a reduction to nominate three Members of the Board, they did not consider it appropriate to relinquish all nomination rights.

RESOLVED: That

1. the Council does not consent to relinquishment of its rights to nominate Members of the Board of Ribble Valley Homes;
2. the Council's number of nominated Members to the Board be reduced from four to three; and
3. the Council support the retention on the Board of tenant representatives.

538 REVISED CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2015/2016

The Director of Resources submitted a report requesting Committee's approval of the revised Capital Programme for the current financial year for this Committee. The original Capital Programme for 2015/2016 had been approved by Policy and Finance Committee in February 2015, and since then regular updates had been presented to this Committee on progress with the Capital Programme. The original Capital Programme had included schemes at a total cost of £236,000. Slippage from the previous year totalling £30,150 had been added to the programme.

There had been an additional approval of £2,730 from the Policy and Finance Committee in June 2015, to complete the Cemetery Extension Installation of Infrastructure Scheme in 2015/2016.

These adjustments resulted in a total approved capital programme of £268,880.

Each of the schemes in the Capital Programme had been discussed in detail with the budget holders and a revised programme had been formulated to reflect the likely expenditure this year. The estimate had been reduced by £1,550, mainly due to an underspend of £1,446 on the Cemetery Infrastructure Scheme, giving rise to a revised estimate of £267,330.

It was highlighted that the Landlord Tenant grant budget was fully committed, that the Disabled Facilities grant budget was on track to be fully committed by

year end, and that a waiting list was being used for Disabled Facilities grants as the 2015/2016 budget cannot support all applications received in one year.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the revised Capital Programme for 2015/2016 as set out in the report.

539 REVISED REVENUE BUDGET 2015/2016

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking Committee to agree a revised Revenue Budget for 2015/2016. The original estimate for the current financial year had been set in March 2015. To allow a better comparison of the revised estimate budget to the original estimate, the changes were outlined in table format for Committee's consideration.

In conclusion, the revised estimate is £38,720 lower than the original estimate. After taking into account transfers to and from earmarked reserves, the revised estimate is £9,280 lower than the original estimate. The Director of Resources highlighted and explained the main changes included in the revised estimates.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the revised Revenue Budget for 2015/2016.

540 ORIGINAL REVENUE BUDGET 2016/2017

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking Committee to agree the draft Revenue Budget for 2016/2017 for consideration at Special Policy and Finance Committee. The Director of Resources reminded Committee that the three year forecast to Policy and Finance Committee in September showed that significant reductions to the overall Council budget would be necessary based on our indicative grant allocation from the Government.

The Provisional Settlement Funding Assessment has now been received and this represented a reduction of 17% on our core government funding. Taking other factors into consideration, the Government considers that the Council will see an increase of 2.8% in spending power in 2016/2017.

With regard to the Committee's draft Revenue Budget for 2016/2017, the estimates had been prepared on the current levels of service allowing for pay and price increases of 1.5%.

Individual budget areas for the Committee were shown in detail, including reasons for the main variances between the 2015/2016 original estimate and the 2016/2017 original estimate. The report also showed the draft budget summarised both subjectively and objectively for Committee's information. The Director of Resources also explained some of the main variations and answered Members' questions.

The Director of Resources reminded Committee that they had agreed the increase in fees and charges in October 2015 at an average of 1.5%, which would be applicable from 1 April 2016.

In conclusion, the proposed Revenue Budget estimate for 2016/2017 is £920,430, after allowing for transfers to and from earmarked reserves. Net expenditure has increased by £86,550 between the 2015/2016 original estimate and the 2016/2017 proposed original estimate, for the reasons set out in the report.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the Revenue Budget for 2016/2017 to be submitted to Special Policy and Finance Committee, subject to any further considerations by the Budget Working Group.

541 HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY REPORT

The Chief Executive submitted a progress report from Homewise, the home improvement agency commissioned to deliver the Integrated Home Improvement Service in Ribble Valley from June 2015. The service, which assists in meeting housing needs in the borough, targets property security and safety and general wellbeing, particularly for the elderly, the unwell and people who are vulnerable to exploitation and crime. The report highlighted work in Ribble Valley from June to November 2015, including 21 completed core jobs including fundraising, 20 ongoing cases, and 117 handy person/security jobs. Additionally, there have completed 37 affordable warmth jobs, 160 minor (non-structural) adaptations and 58 minor (structural) adaptations. They had also been able to assist with recycling 12 disability aids in the Ribble Valley and been able to support 27 people living with dementia and their carers.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

542 MONITORING OF HARV CONTRACT

The Chief Executive submitted a monitoring report from HARV who deliver the domestic abuse service in the Ribble Valley. Funding had been made available to provide a part-time worker to support adult victims and a part-time childrens' worker to support children and young people. The agreement provided for quarterly reports, commencing with the 31 December 2015.

In the first three months of the agreement, a total of 61 clients had been referred, 142 clients had been seen or spoken to, and over 7 hours was spent in contact with clients each week. The Head of Regeneration and Housing remarked on the high volume of clients who had attended for advice from the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor. Committee Members were encouraged to maintain their support for the White Ribbon Campaign.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

543 REPORTS FROM OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports from Outside Bodies.

544 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That by virtue of the fact that the following items of business be an 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.

545 RETIREMENT OF THE HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

The Chair reported verbally that, after over 30 years with Ribble Valley Borough Council and over 40 years in Local Government, James Russell had decided to retire from his post as Head of Environmental Health on 29 February 2016. The Committee registered their thanks for his considerable service to the borough, and one of the traders on the market was reported to have commented that he would be missed and was a very hard act to follow. The Chief Executive echoed the comments of the Chair, and added his thanks for his service over the year.

RESOLVED: That Committee record their thanks to James Russell for his service.

546 GENERAL REPORT – GRANTS

The Chief Executive submitted details of four disabled facility grants, four landlord/tenant grants and four boiler replacement grants.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

547 UPDATE ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The Chief Executive submitted a report for Committee's information on the affordable housing schemes in progress and proposed in the borough. The minutes of the Strategic Housing Working Group held on 15 December 2015 were included for Committee's information. There was discussion about properties brought into use for support of the flood victims in Whalley and Billington. It was reported that a property had recently been approved for SERCO for use by asylum seekers, and that it would be intended to assist at a later stage in the refugee support programme.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 8.17pm.

If you have any queries on these minutes please contact Marshal Scott (414400).