

Minutes of Policy & Finance Committee

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 23 January 2018, starting at 6.30pm
Present: Councillor K Hind (Chairman)

Councillors:

S Atkinson	S Hirst
S Bibby	G Mirfin
A Brown	J Rogerson
P Elms	I Sayers
M French	D T Smith
T Hill	R Swarbrick

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

Also in attendance: Councillors M Fenton, R Sherras and N Walsh.

523 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors J Alcock and A Knox.

524 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2017 and the sub-committees held on 10 October 2017 and 14 November 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Chairman made reference to Minute 412 regarding land by Berry Lane Medical Centre, Longridge and informed Committee that a further report would be submitted to Community Services Committee looking at ways to protect this land in the future.

525 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY AND NON-PECUNIARY INTEREST

Councillor Mirfin declared an interest in agenda item 19, Ribble Valley Homes, as the Council's representative on the Ribble Valley Homes Board.

526 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Chairman welcomed Mr David Waters from Gisburn Parish Council to talk on agenda item 9, Concurrent Function Grants requests. Mr Waters expressed concern about the revised scheme following the amalgamation of the Concurrent Function Grants with the Parish Lengthsman Grant schemes. He felt that this would have a major effect on those Parish Councils that had already committed expenditure on a Lengthsman which they had not yet received retrospective grant for.

527

REVISED CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2017/2018

The Director of Resources submitted a report seeking Committee's approval of the Revised Capital Programme for the current financial year for this Committee. The Original Programme for 2017/2018 had been approved by Policy and Finance Committee and Full Council in February 2017 and since then regular reports have been presented to Committee and progress with the Capital Programme. The Capital Programme comprises 9 schemes with a total approved budget of £202,700.

Following discussions of each of the schemes in the Capital Programme with budget holders, the revised estimate is £147,700 for 8 schemes which is a reduction of £55,000 from the previously approved capital budget. This was due to the LCC Clitheroe Townscape Scheme not going ahead and waiting for the final plans for the Clitheroe Market Development Scheme.

The Director of Resources reported that the expenditure and commitments to the end of December 2017 represented only 19.8% of the revised estimate. The report outlined the full Capital Programme by scheme including the budget and expenditure to date for Committee's information. The main reasons for the underspend to date were outlined.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the Revised Capital Programme of £147,700 for this Committee as set out in the report.

528

REVISED REVENUE BUDGET 2017/2018

The Director of Resources submitted a report outlining the Revised Revenue Budget for 2017/2018 for this Committee. She reminded Members that at this time of year the estimates are revised for the current financial year in order to predict the likely outturn; this also assists in preparing the original estimates for the coming financial year.

The 2017/2018 original budget had included provision for pay increases at 1.1% and price increases at 1.5%. As well as using data on past performance there had been detailed discussions with budget holders and Heads of Service on past service provision on future plans which played an integral part in the budget setting process.

She informed Committee that the revised budget for 2017/2018 showed a decrease in net expenditure of £80,970 or £17,990 after allowing for movements on earmarked reserves. A comparison between the original and revised budgets for each cost centre was included for Committee's information and the significant variances were highlighted.

Members asked questions with regard to various cost centre budgets.

RESOLVED: That Committee agree the Revised Revenue estimate for 2017/2018.

ORIGINAL REVENUE BUDGET 2018/2019

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking Committee to agree the draft Revenue Budget for 2018/2019 for this Committee for consideration at Special Policy and Finance Committee.

With regard to the Council's overall financial position, she reminded Members that in September the updated Council's 4-year budget forecast had predicted budget gaps of £774,000 in 2018/2019; £956,000 in 2019/2020; and £1,139,000 in 2020/2021.

She also informed Members that in October 2016 the Council had submitted an efficiency plan to the Government in order to secure a multi-financial settlement and that this had again been successful.

The Government had announced that there would be no changes to the New Homes Bonus Scheme at this time and had also agreed to a new Lancashire Business Rate Pool that would include Burnley Borough Council.

The Budget Working Group would continue to meet over the next week and would ultimately make recommendations to Special Policy and Finance Committee on 6 February 2018 in order to achieve a balanced budget.

The proposed fees and charges for 2018/2019 had been considered by Committee in October and had been incorporated into the service budgets. Following in depth service analysis and meetings between accountants, budget holders, Head of Service and Management Team, the proposed draft budget was now presented to Members.

Estimates had been prepared on current levels of service, allowing for pay increases at 2%. The budget for each cost centre within the report was presented individually showing the original estimate, savings, inflation, variations to the standard budgeted inflation, unavailable changes to service costs, support services and capital charges which then culminated in the draft original estimate for 2018/2019.

26 cost centres were presented for this Committee and comments given on any large variances.

The draft budget was also summarised in 2 ways; one over the cost of the service provided by the Committee (objective) and the other over the type of expenditure and income (subjective).

The net expenditure of this Committee is estimated to increase by £9,170 after allowing for associated movements on earmarked reserves. The main reasons for this net increase were outlined in the report.

RESOLVED: That Committee agree the Revenue Original estimate for 2018/2019 and submit this to Special Policy and Finance Committee.

530 LOCAL TAXATION WRITE-OFFS

Committee were asked to approve the write-offs of certain business rate debts relating to a company that had been dissolved and a company that had been liquidated.

Reasonable steps by various means had been taken to collect these debts.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the writing-off of £173.22 Council Tax and £60 costs, £2,537.62 business rates and £60 costs, where it has not been possible to collect the amounts due.

531 CONCURRENT FUNCTION GRANT REQUESTS

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking Committee to consider the allocation of concurrent function grants for 2017/2018. She reminded Committee that in November 2017 they had considered a revised concurrent function grant scheme which combined the previous Parish Lengthsman Scheme with the Concurrent Function Grant Scheme. At that time levels of funding could not be recommended without first considering the funding requests against the total grant pot available.

The combined scheme continues to give assistance for those Parishes/Town Councils who provide services in their areas which elsewhere are provided by the Borough Council. This includes the following concurrent functions:

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

She reported that support of the previous Concurrent Function Grant Scheme was set at a rate of 25% of eligible net revenue expenditure in the previous year, subject to the overall costs to the Borough Council not exceeding £20,000 per annum. The past Parish Lengthsman Scheme had only supported 6 parishes based on an historic Lancashire County Council Lengthsman Scheme.

The combined annual revenue budget allocation of both schemes had been approved at £31,060.

In November all Parish Councils had been sent a revised concurrent function grant application form for 2017/2018 with applications to be received by the Borough Council by 23 December 2017. 24 applications had been received with revenue expenditure to be supported totalling £87,128.

Having received the applications Committee now needed to consider options for allocating the combined grant pot taking into account the parishes that had previously been supported by the Parish Lengthsman Scheme. She informed Committee that the new scheme had been created in order to treat all parishes fairly. She suggested that a transitional scheme would help those parishes previously supported to transfer more smoothly to the new scheme.

Councillor Sherras was given permission to speak on this item and also expressed similar concerns to that of Mr Waters in that he felt the smaller parishes would receive a disproportionate burden under the new scheme. He also felt it was imperative that the retrospective grants for the 6 parishes previously supported by the Parish Lengthsman Scheme should be supported at 100%.

Committee considered the new scheme for the allocation of the concurrent function grants to include the Parish Lengthsman grants and felt that it was important that parishes continued to be supported in carrying out the various activities that fall under this scheme. After much consideration it was resolved that Committee

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. Approve a concurrent function grant be paid to parishes as follows:

25% of eligible concurrent function expenditure (including Parish Lengthsman);

for those parishes previously in receipt of a separate Parish Lengthsman grant the following transitional protection scheme will apply:

Year	Protection of Previous Parish Lengthsman Grant Paid
2017/18	100% (or actual expenditure on Lengthsman if lower)
2018/19	100%
2019/20	75%
2020/21	50%
2021/22 and thereafter	25%

2. ask the Chief Executive to explain the revised scheme to the Parish Council Liaison Committee at their next meeting.

532 CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE REPORT

The Director of Resources submitted a report which included the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge feedback report outlining their key recommendations.

In summary the Peer team felt that Ribble Valley Borough Council had much to be proud about. The Council delivers good core services throughout our committed workforce, achieving high levels of customer satisfaction and value for

money. The Council has a history of prudent financial management and remains in a comfortable position relative to the rest of the sector.

However there were a number of suggestions and observations made within the report that had led to some key recommendations for the Council:

- Strength and engagement with staff and partners to ensure clarity of vision and desired outcomes in relation to the Corporate Strategy priorities and initiatives.
- Review the performance management framework linked to the Corporate Strategy.
- Review the resourcing of Corporate Strategy priorities.
- Develop and Economic Development Strategy.
- Explore opportunity to strengthen early engagement with developers in order to maximise community benefits as well as opportunities to strengthen community engagement/communication in relation to development.
- Strengthen engagement between the Leadership and Corporate Management Team.

Committee were pleased with the report and felt it was a good reflection of Ribble Valley Borough Council.

The Leader informed Committee that the key recommendations would be considered in the near future with progress reports being submitted to this Committee.

RESOLVED: That Committee receive the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge feedback report.

533 VOLUNTARY GRANT APPLICATION 2018/2019

The Director of Resources submitted a report informing Members of the process for approving the allocation of Voluntary Organisation Grants for 2018/2019. She informed Committee that a Member Working Group usually considers the applications received and makes recommendations to this Committee regarding the allocation of funds to voluntary organisations on an annual basis. This Working Group consists of 3 Conservative Members and 1 Liberal Democrat Member of this Committee.

The application process was now open and the closing date is 19 February 2018 in order to make recommendations to the next meeting of this Committee on 20 March 2018.

The budget available for 2018/2019 is £109,130. This is a very popular grant scheme and well received by voluntary organisations.

RESOLVED: That Committee agree to appoint a Working Group to consider the 2018/2019 Voluntary Organisation Grants.

534 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MONITORING 2017/2018

A report of the Director of Resources was submitted for Committee's information on the Treasury Management activities for the period 1 April 2017 to 31 December 2017 covering such areas as the Public Works Loan Board, borrowing requirements, temporary investments, Prudential Indicators, Local Government Bonds Agency and approved organisation and recent events.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

535 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 and Council Tax support performance;
- Housing Benefit overpayments.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

536 BUDGET WORKING GROUP

Committee received the minutes of the Budget Working Group meeting held on 18 October 2017.

537 REFERENCES FROM COMMITTEES

There were no reference from Committees.

538 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

Councillor T Hill informed Committee that both he and Councillor P Elms had attended a budget meeting of the Police and Crime Commission as the representatives of the Council. At this meeting an increase on the Police of £12 share of their Band D Council Tax had been approved.

539 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

540 LOCAL TAXATION AND HOUSING BENEFIT WRITE-OFFS

Committee considered a report asking them to approve the writing-off of Council Tax debts; business rate debts; and housing benefits debts where it has not been possible to collect the amount due.

RESOLVED: That Committee approve the writing-off of £2,434.24 of Council Tax debts plus £60 costs, £2,479.14 Business Rates and £2,611.38 of Housing Benefit debt where it has not been possible to collect the amount due.

541 REFERENCE FROM COMMITTEE – APPOINTMENT OF DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

This report was withdrawn from the agenda as the Personnel Committee had not met. It would now be considered at the Special Policy and Finance meeting on 6 February 2018.

542 RIBBLE VALLEY HOMES – PROPOSED AMALGAMATION AND OTHER ISSUES

The Chief Executive submitted a report informing Committee of the latest position on the proposed amalgamation of Ribble Valley Homes into Onward Homes, the proposed changes to the Ribble Valley Board and a request to vary the transfer agreement regarding pension arrangements for transferred staff.

Following a tenant consultation the Ribble Valley Homes Board had agreed to progress to full amalgamation to Onward Homes. As part of the process of the amalgamation Ribble Valley Homes were proposing to become part of the Common Board for Onward Homes which meant that there would no longer be any representation from this Council on the Board. This would need formally approving at a Special General Meeting to be held on 5 February 2018 for the amended rules to be adopted.

A request had also been made to amend the Transfer Agreement with a Deed of Variation regarding the superannuation scheme of those staff that had moved under the housing stock transfer agreement.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. note the proposed amalgamation of Ribble Valley Homes with Onward Homes;
2. agree to the partial rule changes;
3. agree to the Deed of Variation;
4. agree that Councillor G Mirfin would be the official proxy for Ribble Valley Borough Council at the Special General Meeting on 5 February 2018.

The meeting closed at 8.00pm.

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