

Minutes of Policy and Finance

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 19 January 2021, starting at 6.30pm
Present: Councillor S Atkinson (Chair)

Councillors:

S Bibby	M Hindle
A Brown	S Hore
S Carefoot	A Knox
J Clark	D Peat
S Fletcher	J Rogerson
M French	R Thompson
J Hill	

In attendance: Chief Executive, Director of Resources, Director of Community Services, Director of Economic Development and Planning, Head of Revenues and Benefits, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Head of Regeneration and Housing and Senior Accountant

Also in attendance: Councillor D Berryman

Not in attendance: Councillor S Carefoot

924 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillor S Hirst.

925 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

926 MINUTES OF EMERGENCY COMMITTEES DATED 25 NOVEMBER 2020 AND 8 DECEMBER 2020

The minutes of the meetings held on 25 November 2020 and 8 December 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

927 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY AND NON PECUNIARY INTERESTS

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

928 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

929 REVISED REVENUE BUDGET 2020/21

The Director of Resources submitted a report outlining the revised revenue budget for 2020/21 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 budget this year had been particularly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, and any impacts on fees and charges had been included within the estimates, along with the estimated part funding towards these losses from the Government.

The original budget for 2020/21 included provision for pay increase at 3% and price increase at 2%. As well as using data on past performance there had been detailed discussions with budget holders and heads of service on past service provision and on future plans which played an integral part in the budget setting process.

She informed committee that the revised budget for 2020/21 showed a decrease in net expenditure of £144,460 after allowing for transfers to and from earmarked reserves.

A comparison between the original and revised budgets for each cost centre was included for committee's information and the key movements were highlighted.

The report also included information on Covid-19 emergency response costs that were being considered as part of the budget setting for this committee. The report outlined the grant support received from the Government to date and other funding likely to be received totalling £2,072,026 to date. Much of this would be matched against costs incurred. This did not include grants received paid out to businesses as financial aid as these were accounted for separately under agency arrangements with the government.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE

Approved the revenue revised estimate for 2020/21.

930

FEES AND CHARGES

The Director of Resources submitted a report seeking member approval on proposals to increase this committee's fees and charges with effect from 1 April 2021.

These proposals were the first stage in the review of this committee's budget for the forthcoming 2021/22 financial year.

The council's latest budget forecast allows for the 2% inflationary increase in the level of income raised from fees and charges and the review aims to increase the budgeted income for 2021/22 by this amount when compared to last year's original budget estimate.

After applying this percentage increase, proposed charges had generally been rounded up or down to minimise any problems with small change. This inevitably impacts on the individual percentage rise for each separate charge, particularly when the current charge is low.

There were extremely high levels of uncertainty around income levels from the council's fees and charges in light of Covid-19 and the impact this was having on use of the council's services and facilities. In the current financial year the government was partly compensating the council for lost income at 75% of lost sales, fees and charges income – after first adjusting for 5% of total budgeted income. It was on the continuation of this, or alternatively the recovery of income levels, that the fees and charges had been set.

Following discussions with financial services, heads of service and budget holders a proposed set of fees and charges for implementation from 1 April 2021 had been produced for this committee for members to consider. This included some proposed

new charges for variations to section 106 agreements and an administration fee for new garage licences

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE

Approved the proposed fees and charges for this committee as set out in Annex 1 to the report.

931

ORIGINAL REVENUE BUDGET 2021/22

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking committee to agree the draft revenue budget for 2021/22 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 February the 3-year budget forecast had predicted the following budget gaps: £281k in 2021/22, £206k in 2022/23, £337k in 2023/24, after allowing for the general fund balances.

At the time of producing the February forecast, the outcome of the Fair Funding Review, the potential changes to the New Homes Bonus Scheme and the implications of Business Rate Retention Reforms were unknown. The forecast was also made before the extent of the impact of Covid-19 in the current financial year was known.

In the light of Covid-19 the government had scrapped its plans for a multi-year spending review, and instead conducted a one-year review for 2021/22. The key messages were highlighted to committee.

At the Policy & Finance committee in November 2020, members had agreed with the conclusion of the Budget Working Group that the Council should prepare its budget on the base budget plus inflation and on the expectation that any variance due to Covid would be made good by the government.

The Budget Working Group would consider the overall position once all committees had approved their detailed estimates and would then make recommendations to Special Policy and Finance committee on 2 February 2021 in order to achieve a balanced budget.

The proposed fees and charges for 2021/22 had been considered by committee earlier in the agenda and had already been incorporated into the service budgets on the assumption that they would be approved without material change.

Estimates had been prepared on current levels of service allowing for pay increase at 2% and price increases at 2%. The budget for each cost centre within the report was presented individually showing the original estimate, inflation, movements in expenditure, income, support services and capital which then culminated in the draft original estimate for 2021/22.

The report detailed individual budget areas under this committee and comments were provided on the key variations.

The net expenditure for this committee had increased by £15,180 from £2,266,100 to £2,281,280 after allowing for associated movements on earmarked reserves. The main reasons for the net increase were summarised for committee's information.

It was acknowledged by members that it was difficult at this time to determine the budget for the next year due to the pandemic.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE

Approved the revenue original estimate for 2021/22 and submit it to Special Policy and Finance committee.

932

REVISED CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2020/21

The Director of Resources submitted a report seeking committee's approval of the revised estimate for this committee's capital programme for the current financial year. The original estimate for 2020/21 had been approved by Policy and Finance committee in March 2020.

In March 2020, four capital schemes with a total approved budget of £204,530 had been approved. This included two new schemes for 2020/21 and budget for two 2019/20 schemes that had been moved from the 2019/20 capital programme to the 2020/21 capital programme.

Since then the following changes had been made:

Four capital schemes were not completed by 31 March 2020 and had unspent budget available at that date. The total unspent budget of £33,480 on these schemes known as slippage had been moved into the 2020/21 capital budget, after slippage requests from the budget holders were approved by the Director of Resources;

In August 2020 the Emergency committee approved a new scheme budget of £25,000 for the purchase of land behind Old Row, Barrow and this was added to this committee's capital programme.

As a result of the above, the total approved budget for this committee's capital programme of eight schemes was £263,010.

Following discussions on each of the schemes in the capital programme with budget holders, the proposed revised estimate was £158,310 for seven schemes, a reduction of £104,700 from the total approved budget. The reasons for this reduction were outlined to committee.

The Director of Resources reported that the expenditure and commitments to the end of December 2020 represented 90% of the revised capital programme for this committee. Of the seven schemes in the revised capital programme, two schemes had been completed. The report outlined the current progress on the schemes with the largest remaining budgets.

Councillor Berryman was given permission to speak on this item and asked specifically about the Dewhurst Road, Langho scheme. He also queried whether the planning page would be improved as part of the re-design of the corporate website capital programme.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE

1. Approve the 2020/21 revised estimate of £158,310 for this committee's capital programme as set out in Annex 1,
2. Approve the move of the following capital budgets from 2020/21 to 2021/22
Dewhurst Road, Langho – resurfacing works - £65,800

Network infrastructure - £30,000
Lift replacement at Council offices - £2,110
Committee Administration IT System - £7,600

3. Recommend Special Policy and Finance committee approve the additional budget of £10,000 on the Dewhurst Road, Langho – resurfacing works scheme.

933

CAPITAL PROGRAMME REVIEW 2021/22 - 2024/25

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking members to consider the proposed future four-year capital programme (2021/22 to 2024/25) for this committee for recommendation to Special Policy and Finance committee.

The future capital programme was reviewed and updated each year. In recent years, the council has been setting a proposed and fully funded five-year capital programme each year. However, given the additional burdens caused by and priority focus on Covid-19 issues throughout 2020, Budget Working Group had streamlined the capital programme budget update process for this year. This involved moving to a four-year capital programme only, covering 2021/22 to 2024/25, and there being no new capital bids for 2025/26 (year five).

A review and update of the four-year capital programme had therefore taken place and had resulted in a proposed four-year programme of £538,390 that was set out in the report for members to consider and approve.

Councillor Berryman was given permission to speak on this item and asked where Brookfoot Footbridge was in Ribchester and why the council was responsible for it.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE

1. Approve the proposed four-year capital programme (2021/22 to 2024/25) of £538,390 for this committee as set out in Annex 1 to the report, and
2. Recommend to Special Policy and Finance committee the proposed four-year capital programme (2021/22 to 2024/25) of £538,390 for this committee.

934

LOCAL TAXATION WRITE OFFS

Committee were asked to approve the writing off of council tax and business rate debts relating to three cases where the company had gone into administration and five cases where the companies had gone into liquidation. Reasonable steps by various means had been taken to collect the debts.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE

Approved the writing off of £81.75 in council tax, £89,470.99 in business rates and £360.00 costs where it has not been possible to collect the amounts due.

935

REVIEW OF STANDING ORDERS

The Chief Executive submitted a report asking committee to review the Council's Standing Orders to ensure clarity.

Members were reminded that every Local Authority was required to prepare and keep up to date a constitution containing amongst other things a copy of its Standing Orders – the rules which govern the conduct and proceedings of the council's meetings. The Council had last approved changes in May 2020 when a temporary addendum had been added to include provisions for remote meetings.

Members were informed that a number of amendments had been made to pick up minor typographical errors and also to more clearly link the provisions with regard to notice provisions for summons to the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972. These were shown as tracked changes for consideration.

*** RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE

1. Approved the changes to Standing Orders as outlined in the report, and
2. Refer the changes to Council with a recommendation for their approval.

936 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MONITORING 2020/21

The Director of Resources submitted a report for committee's information on the treasury management activities for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 December 2020. The report outlined the following topics: temporary investments; local government bonds agency; borrowing; borrowing requirements; Prudential indicators; approved organisations, recent events and exposure to risk.

937 REVENUES AND BENEFITS GENERAL REPORT

Committee considered a report for information that covered national non-domestic rates (NDR); council tax; sundry debtors; housing benefit and council tax support performance and housing benefit overpayments.

938 INVESTIGATORY POWERS COMMISSIONERS REPORT

The Chief Executive submitted a report on the receipt of the Office of Surveillance Commissioners inspection report, the Council's usage of RIPA and to seek approval of the revised RIPA policy.

The Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office carries out routine inspections of all public bodies to ensure their compliance with the requirements of RIPA. An inspection had taken place in June 2020. A copy of the report was included for committee's information with the Inspector's recommendations of areas for consideration which had subsequently been actioned.

The Council had not used its RIPA power since the last inspection, nor since the matter was last reported in November 2019.

*** RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE

1. Noted the Inspector's recommendations,
2. Noted the usage of RIPA during the period 20 November 2019 to date, and
3. Approved the amended RIPA policy and recommend its adoption to Council.

939 OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REVIEW LETTER 2020

The Chief Executive submitted a report for information on the referrals to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) for the period to 31 March 2020. No detailed investigations had been carried out during this period, therefore none had been upheld.

940 COVID-19 DELEGATED DECISIONS

The Chief Executive submitted a report for member's information outlining a decision taken by himself in consultation with the Leader, Deputy Leader and Shadow Leader

under delegated powers given by the Emergency Committee on 7 May 2020 with regard to the Local Government Act 1972, the Coronavirus Act 2020 and other legislation governing local authority decision making.

The Chief Executive informed committee of two additional decisions that had been taken with regard to Additional Restrictions Support Grants to enable payments up to 15 February 2021.

He also gave a general update on the areas that the Council was involved in with the pandemic.

941 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports from representatives on outside bodies.

942 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

That by virtue of the next items of business being exempt information under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act the press and public be now excluded from the meeting.

943 LONGRIDGE ASSETS

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report for members to consider the future management of key Council assets in Longridge. These included the former public toilets on King Street; the Civic Hall and associated car parking; the Old Fire Station and the Over 60's Club – both at Townley Buildings, Berry Lane. There was currently no clear options and no capital scheme or resource provision.

Members discussed this in some detail.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE

1. Instruct officers to formally consult with relevant stakeholders and to develop a strategic framework for the key Longridge assets identified in the report and report the findings back to committee for further consideration,
2. Ask the Chief Executive to hold discussions with Longridge Social Enterprise Company regarding their ongoing operation of the Civic Hall facility, and
3. Ask the Chief Executive to consider the most appropriate approach to determine the feasibility for the future of the Civic Hall site, including options to create a sustainable community resource facility for cultural and social wellbeing of Longridge residents and report back to committee for further consideration.
4. Set up a working group consisting of officers and councillors R Thompson (chair), A Knox, J Clark, J Rogerson, S Carefoot and S Hore to consider all options.

944 LOCAL TAXATION AND HOUSING BENEFIT WRITE OFFS

Committee considered a report asking them to approve the writing off of council tax debts relating to four cases where a debt relief order was in place and three where the whereabouts of the debtor was unknown and it had not been possible to recover the outstanding debts.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE

Approved the writing off of £12,214.09 of council tax debts and £780.00 in court costs where it has not been possible to collect the amount due.

The meeting closed at 8.02 pm

If you have any queries on these minutes please contact the committee clerk, Olwen Heap 01200 414408 olwen.heap@ribblevalley.gov.uk.