

Minutes of Policy and Finance

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 14 September 2021, starting at 6.30 pm
Present: Councillor S Atkinson (Chair)

Councillors:

D Berryman	J Hill
S Bibby	M Hindle
A Brown	S Hirst
J Clark	K Horkin
S Fletcher	D Peat
M French	R Thompson

In attendance: Chief Executive, Director of Resources, Director of Community Services, Director of Economic Development and Planning, Head of Revenues and Benefits and Principal Policy and Performance Officer

Also in attendance: Councillors G Hibbert and G Mirfin

277 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

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

278 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

279 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF EMERGENCY COMMITTEE DATED 22 JULY 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

280 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY AND NON PECUNIARY INTERESTS

Councillor D Peat declared an interest in Agenda Item 8 – Concurrent Functions Grants;
Councillor S Fletcher declared an interest in Agenda Item 9 – Voluntary Organisation Grants – Citizens Advice Bureau; and
Councillor K Horkin declared an interest in Agenda Item 16 – Haweswater Aqueduct Resilience Programme Update.

281 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

282 PRESENTATION BY CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU - KATY MARSHALL

The Chairman welcomed Katy Marshall, Manager at the Citizens Advice Bureau who gave a presentation on the work of the Bureau. She gave members examples of the kind of queries they receive daily. Their aim is to make a difference and change peoples' lives with the help and advice given and their independence is vital to the work they do. They promote themselves throughout the whole of the Ribble Valley

and without the voluntary organisation grant from the Council they would be unable to operate.

283

REPLACEMENT IT EQUIPMENT FOR COUNCILLORS

The Director of Resources submitted a report for committee to consider options for the replacement of IT equipment provided by the Council to Councillors.

The original Ipads provided were now 6 years old and reaching the end of their working lives, and updates to operating systems meant that they will no longer have the functionality to access systems.

A survey of councillors had taken place to determine preference which had proved inconclusive with 44% of councillors preferring a laptop and 56% a tablet. Committee were informed that from an IT support perspective it would be more efficient for all Councillors to have the same equipment.

Committee discussed the various options.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Delegate to the Director of Resources in consultation with a Task and Finish group comprising of Councillors S Atkinson, S Brunskill, D Berryman, S Fletcher and D Birtwhistle the decision on the type of replacement IT for councillors for use in their council duties.
2. Agree a budget of up to £40,000 be included in the capital programme for 2021/22 to be funded from Business Rate Growth Reserve.

Councillor D Peat declared an interest in the next item of business.

284

CONCURRENT FUNCTIONS GRANTS – 2021/22

The Director of Resources submitted a report for committee to consider the allocation of concurrent functions grants for 2021/22 and to consider whether the scheme might be amended to include installations for stand-alone CCTV systems as being eligible for support.

Concurrent functions are services provided in some parts of the borough by the borough or county council and in others by a parish or town council. The Council supports parish and town councils with net revenue expenditure on these functions with reimbursement of 25% of the expenditure.

Committee were informed that at their meeting in March 2021, Community Services committee had resolved to request Policy and Finance committee to consider amending the concurrent functions grant scheme to include installations for stand-alone CCTV systems as being eligible for support.

Preliminary enquiries had been made of parish councils by inviting them to submit claims for CCTV revenue expenditure within this year's grant applications. One parish council had also submitted a request for the installation of the CCTV equipment.

Committee discussed the inclusion of both revenue and capital expenditure for CCTV and suggested that feedback on how and/or whether CCTV delivers is requested.

Councillor G Mirfin was given permission to speak on this item.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Approve the payment of grants to parish and town councils under the current scheme conditions totalling £19,776 as outlined in the report;
2. Approve the addition of CCTV revenue expenditure as a concurrent function from the current year onwards, and that the associated grant support of £42 be approved for payment; and
3. Approve an amendment to the grant scheme to allow for the inclusion of purchase of CCTV equipment and installation costs (capital) from the current year onwards.

Councillor S Fletcher declared an interest in the next item of business and left the meeting.

285

VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION GRANTS - CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking committee to consider the performance monitoring information for the period April to June 2021, and whether to approve the next quarterly instalment of the voluntary organisation grant for 2021/22 to the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Members considered the information provided.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve the payment of the balance of the grant for 2021/22 totalling £39,375 for the voluntary organisation grant to the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Councillor S Fletcher returned to the meeting.

286

LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

The Director of Resources submitted a report providing committee with the background to the Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) scheme and asking them to consider next steps regarding potential changes to the scheme in time for the 2022/23 financial year.

She reminded committee that the LCTS scheme had replaced Council Tax Benefit in 2013/14 and was now paid as a discount against an individual's council tax bill rather than a benefit. The Government had replaced the subsidy with a grant payable to Councils for the cost of LCTS, however they had reduced the amount from 100% to 90% and councils had either to absorb the reduction or meet it from reductions in council tax or elsewhere from within the council tax system.

Councils had been required to design their own LCTS system and consult with their residents and major preceptors regarding their proposals. Our scheme had funded the shortfall by reducing the discount on second homes and applying a 12% reduction to working age claimants.

The Director of Resources informed committee that across Lancashire there were many varying levels of reductions with two local authorities currently having no reduction in support at all.

The Government had introduced a Covid Local Council Tax Hardship fund during the 2020/21 financial year as further support for recipients of working age local Council

Tax Support by way of a further reduction to their annual council tax bill of up to £150. Ribble Valley was awarded £222k.

For 2021/22 the Government had announced £670m of Local Council Tax Support Grants that was unringfenced funding in recognition of the increased cost of providing local council tax support following the pandemic the impact of which is reductions in the tax base. The Ribble Valley share was £40,042 which was not enough to continue with the £150 relief.

The Budget working group had considered the removal of the 12% reduction in support to working age claimants going forward and recommended to committee that the Council proceed with consultation to remove the 12% reduction.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Agree to consult on the removal of the 12% reduction in support to working age claimants in this Council's Local Council Tax Support Scheme.

287

ADDITIONAL RESTRICTIONS GRANTS - FURTHER FUNDING

The Director of Resources submitted a report informing committee of the latest position with the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) Scheme and the amounts paid out to date. She also notified members that a second top-up of £567k had been received and consideration should be given as to how it should be distributed.

She informed committee that we had successfully allocated all the original funding prior to the deadline and had therefore received a second top-up. A sum of £17,478 would need to be funded from this which left approximately £550k to be distributed which must be spent by March 2022.

Member discussed the types of businesses that had already received funding under the various categories and how they would like to see this further allocation distributed more strategically.

Councillor Mirfin was given permission to speak on this item.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Set up a Task and Finish group comprising Councillors S Atkinson, S Hirst, S Bibby, S Fletcher and R Thompson to determine options for Budget Working group and then Policy & Finance committee to consider on how the second top-up of ARG funding should be allocated taking into account the views of committee.

288

BUDGET FORECAST 2022/23 TO 2024/25

The Director of Resources submitted a report for committee to consider the Council's latest budget forecast and decide what action should be taken to meet the financial challenges that lie ahead.

The budget forecast was an important tool that gives an early indication of any potential budgetary problems and informs the medium-term financial strategy. It is based on many assumptions that are difficult to predict going forward, particularly regarding reforms via the Fair Funding Review, business rate retention, new homes bonus and Government grants.

The Director of Resources outlined the numerous assumptions that had been made in updating the budget forecast. These included:

- A 2% overall increase in pay;
- A general inflation increase and interest rate assumption of 3%;
- The date for the Spending review was 27 October 2021;
- New homes bonus legacy payment of £400k and the possible cessation of the scheme;
- The unknown outcome of the Business Rate Pool;
- Council Tax – an assumption of £5 annual increase which may or may not be permissible and would be a decision for members;
- Superannuation triennial review – allowed increase in contributions of £100k from March 2022.

Other assumptions made in the latest forecast included the use of balances of £250,000 each year, a 1.5% increase in the council tax base each year, and an assumption that our share of the collection fund would be a surplus each year of £25k.

Based on all these assumptions the budget shortfall would be as shown:

Reductions in expenditure required in order to achieve a balanced budget	
	£000
2022/23	82
2023/24	139
2024/25	230

The Director of Resources reported that the accountants and budget holders would commence their preparation of the detailed estimates shortly. The Budget working group would have a key role to play in the budget process in order to be in a position next February to agree a balanced budget for recommendation to Council on 1 March 2022.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Approve the Council's budget forecast;
2. Ask Budget working group to give direction to committees in preparing their budgets for 2022/23;
3. Ask the Budget Working Group to keep reforms to Business Rate Retention and the New Homes Bonus scheme under review and the impact of any changes on the budget forecast; and
4. Confirm our membership of the Business Rate Pool for 2022/23;
5. Ask the Director of Resources to expand the Capital Programme a further two years to make it a 5 year programme again.

289

LOCAL TAXATION WRITE OFFS

The Director of Resources submitted a report seeking committee's approval to write off Business Rate debts relating to six companies that had been dissolved.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve writing off £71,617.53 in Business Rates and £300.00 costs where it has not been possible to collect the amounts due.

290 REFERENCES FROM COMMITTEE

(i) Community Services - Play Areas S106 monies

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking committee to consider a request from Community Services committee in respect of the installation of new play equipment at the Highmoor Park and Highfield Road sites.

Community Services committee has considered the request for an additional capital budget of £17,940 to be fully funded from S106 monies received from Oakmere Homes to be spent on the two play areas identified.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve the request for additional capital budget of £17,940 in respect of the installation of new equipment at the Highmoor Park and Highfield Road sites to be funded from S106 contributions made by Oakmere Homes.

(ii) Community Services - Brungerley Park

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking committee to consider a request from Community Services committee for approval to rectify a significant issue with a main access route through Brungerley Park, Clitheroe.

Community Services committee had considered a report explaining that the steps linking the lower and upper paths in Brungerley Park were in poor state and had been closed for several weeks after a safety assessment. Substantial works were required and estimates had been obtained and the request was therefore for a scheme of £25,200 to be added to the capital programme.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve the request for additional capital budget of £25,200 in respect of the steps rebuilding work at Brungerley Park to be funded from the Business Rates Growth Earmarked Reserve.

291 DRAFT CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY

The Director of Resources submitted a report seeking approval of the Council's Climate Change Strategy 2021–2030 as formulated and agreed by the working group which had met on numerous occasions.

It was considered to be a live document that would be regularly monitored and updated with a suggested action plan on how the Council intends to reach the target of being carbon neutral by 2030.

Members were supportive of the document which was a good basis for a strategy to achieve our goals, however it was highlighted that issues particularly around air quality and flooding were missing.

Councillor Mirfin was given permission to speak on this item.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve the Draft Climate Change Strategy 2021–2030

Councillor Horkin declared an interest in the next item of business as a member of Planning & Development committee.

292

HAWES AQUEDUCT RESILIENCE PROGRAMME (HARP) UPDATE

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report for information giving an update on the Haweswater Aqueduct Resilience Programme (HARP).

She informed committee that the two proposed replacement pipelines within the Ribble Valley were currently subject to planning applications 3/2021/0660 – Bowland section and 3/2021/0661 – Marl Hill section. The standard 21-day notification / consultation period for both applications had expired, however given the significant nature of the applications, comments would be accepted up to the date of consideration at Planning and Development committee.

Officers from the planning section were meeting with United Utilities on a weekly basis to discuss progress and any matters that had arisen. It was expected that amended plans and details would be submitted in due course to seek to address comments received.

The report outlined the statutory consultees who had responded, the responses for which were available to see on the Council's website. Also available on the website were those responses received from interested residents.

Consideration of the planning applications would be planned to coincide with Lancaster city council and Lancashire County Council considering applications for the same project.

The Director of Economic Development and Planning informed committee that post-application should the planning permissions be granted, a liaison group would be formally established to consider, discuss and seek to resolve any issues associated with the construction of the replacement pipelines.

Members felt it would be useful to have a United Utilities liaison officer for the Ribble Valley during the construction period that members of the public could contact.

293

ELECTIONS BILL 2021

The Chief Executive submitted a report for information on the provisions of the Elections Bill 2021. The Bill makes new provision for and amends existing electoral law to ensure that UK elections remain secure, fair, modern, inclusive and transparent.

Members were informed that the Local Government Association had produced a briefing note on the Bill which identified several issues which would impact on the way in which the Council administers electoral registration and elections. The most notable ones were highlighted.

294

CAPITAL MONITORING 2021/22

The Director of Resources submitted a report for information on the progress on this committee's 2021/22 capital programme for the period to end of July 2021.

At the end of July 2021 £11,675 had been spent or committed. This equated to 8.4% of the total approved capital programme budget for this committee. Of the seven schemes in the capital programme, two schemes were currently on-track to be

completed in year, one would not be completed and it was unclear whether four of the schemes would be completed in-year.

295 OVERALL CAPITAL MONITORING 2021/22

The Director of Resources submitted a report for information on the progress on the Council's approved 2021/22 capital programme for the period to end of July 2021.

At the end of July 2021 £588,812 had been spent or committed. This equated to 17.6% of the overall capital programme budget for 2021/22. Of the twenty-eight schemes in the capital programme, one scheme had been completed, ten schemes were currently on-track to be completed in year, three schemes would not be completed, and it was unclear whether twelve of the schemes would be completed in-year. Two schemes were on-going Housing grant schemes.

296 REVENUE OUTTURN 2020/21

The Director of Resources submitted a report for information on the outturn for the financial year 2020/21 in respect of the revenue budget for this committee.

There had been a number of variations in both income and expenditure during the year, that had given rise to an overall underspend of £439,453 on the net cost of services. After transfers to and from earmarked reserves the overall overspend was £106,159. The main variations were highlighted in the report.

297 OVERALL REVENUE OUTTURN 2020/21

The Director of Resources submitted a report for information on the outturn on the overall revenue outturn for the year ending 31 March 2021.

There had been a final outturn of a surplus of £158,497 rather than a £187,000 deficit forecast at the revised estimate.

There had also been £1,398,000 more (revenue only) added to earmarked reserves than forecast at revised estimate, which was largely due to the accounting treatment required for grants received but not yet spent – notably Covid grants.

The large movements in the earmarked reserves in respect of Covid were expected to be held in the short term, particularly the £2.578m in respect of the Business Rates S31 funding which would offset the collection fund deficit in 2021/22.

298 REVENUE MONITORING 2021/22

The Director of Resources submitted a report for information on the position of the revenue budget for the period April to July 2021 for this committee.

The comparison between actual and budgeted expenditure within service cost centres show an underspend of £116,880 for the April to July period of the financial year 2021/22. After allowing for transfers to and from earmarked reserves there was an underspend of £132,200.

The balance of grant funds accounted for within coronavirus specific cost centres of £1.134m had increased the underspend within this committee to £1.267m.

Whilst for the period to July coronavirus funding had a significant impact that had created a large underspend on the net services within this committee, many of the

variances would resolve as the year progresses and grant funds are either paid out or allocated to specific coronavirus response activities.

299 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2020/21

The Director of Resources submitted a report for information on the 2020/21 treasury management operations and the outturn calculations of the council's capital and treasury management prudential indicators.

The increased risks to treasury management activities that resulted from the coronavirus pandemic were successfully managed throughout the financial year.

The base rate remained at 0.10% throughout the majority of the financial year, resulting in a decrease to the amount of income received from investments when compared to the 2019/20 financial year.

Debt and investment transactions undertaken during the 2020/21 financial year were within authorised prudential limits and approved treasury management policies and practices.

300 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MONITORING 2021/22

The Director of Resources submitted a monitoring report for information on the treasury management activities for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 July 2021. The report outlined the following topics: temporary investments; interest on investments; local government bonds agency; borrowing; borrowing requirements; Prudential indicators; approved organisations; recent events and exposure to risk.

301 REVENUES AND BENEFITS GENERAL REPORT

The Director of Resources submitted a report for information on debts outstanding for business rates, council tax and sundry debtors. It also updated committee on benefits performance, including benefits processing times and overpayment recovery.

302 MINUTES OF BUDGET WORKING GROUP - 14 MAY 2021

The minutes of the Budget working group meeting held on 14 May 2021 were submitted for committee's information.

303 MINUTES OF RV BOUNDARY REVIEW TASK AND FINISH GROUP - 12 AND 26 JULY 2021

The minutes of the Ribble Valley Boundary Review task and finish group dated 12 and 26 July 2021 were submitted for committee's information.

304 MINUTES OF LONGRIDGE ASSETS WORKING GROUP - 9 JUNE 2021, 6 JULY 2021 AND 27 JULY 2021

The minutes of the Longridge Assets working group meetings held on 9 June 2021, 6 July 2021 and 27 July 2021 were submitted for committee's information.

305 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports from representatives on outside bodies.

306 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

307 ROEFIELD LEISURE LOAN REVIEW

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking committee to consider a request made by Roefield Leisure for a review of the terms of the current loan agreement in the light of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the organisation.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve the request for a payment holiday for the three instalments of rent due between the period March 2020 to March 2021 inclusive and the extension of the rent period from September 2035 to March 2037.

308 LOCAL TAXATION WRITE OFFS

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking for committee's approval to write off Council Tax and NNDR debts relating to individuals where the debtors were bankrupt, deceased or gone away.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve writing off £16,587.77 of Council Tax debts plus £600.00 costs and £6,130.22 of NNDR debts plus £120.00 costs where it has not been possible to collect the amount due.

The meeting closed at 9.00 pm

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