

Minutes of Policy and Finance

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 23 January 2024, starting at 6.30 pm
Present: Councillor S Atkinson (Chair)

Councillors:

S Bibby	S Hore
D Birtwhistle	K Horkin
L Edge	L Jameson
S Fletcher	R Newmark
M Graveston	S O'Rourke
J Hill	J Rogerson
S Hirst	A Wilkins-Odudu

In attendance: Chief Executive, Director of Resources & Deputy Chief Executive, Director of Community Services and Director of Economic Development and Planning

Also in attendance: Cllrs K Barnsley and K Spencer.

608 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

609 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

610 DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY, OTHER REGISTRABLE AND NON REGISTRABLE INTERESTS

Councillors M Graveston and S O'Rourke each declared an interest in Agenda Item 12 – UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), as Board Members of Roefield Leisure Trust.

Councillor D Birtwhistle declared an interest in Agenda Item 12 – UK Shared Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), in respect of the application for Barrow Community Space.

Councillor S Hirst declared an interest in Agenda Item 26 – Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF), as a Trustee of Salesbury Memorial Hall.

Councillor S Hore declared an interest in Agenda Item 26 – Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF), as a Trustee of Chipping Village Hall.

611 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Chairman welcomed Mr Darrin Robinson, speaking on behalf of Ribchester Parish Council, in respect of Agenda Item 26 – Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF).

612 REVISED REVENUE BUDGET 2023/24

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report seeking approval of a revised revenue budget for 2023/24.

Members were reminded that the original estimate for the current financial year was set in March 2023. At this time of year, the Council revised the estimates for the current financial year to predict the likely outcome.

The report noted that the:

- Council had forecast earlier in the year that it was facing record levels of inflation at 10.1% in the 12 months to September 2022. In the 12 months to October 2023, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) had fallen to 4.6%, therefore, the revised estimates took into account the changes in inflation so far and made assumptions up to the end of March 2024.
- The Council had been facing significantly higher utility costs for gas, electricity, and fuel, however, a decrease to the estimated costs of gas (-£75k) and electricity (-£26k), mainly due to a reduction in unit rates, had resulted in the movement from the original estimate totalling -£100k.
- The Pay Award for 2023/24 had now been settled and, overall, the cost of the pay award was 6.5% which was around £170k above the 5% which had been allowed for.
- The overall difference between the Revised and Original Estimate was a decrease in net expenditure of £166,810 or a decrease in net expenditure of £92,410 after allowing for transfers to and from earmarked reserves.

The report included detailed information on the variances.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Agree the revenue revised estimate for 2023/24.

613

ORIGINAL REVENUE BUDGET 2024/25

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report outlining the draft revenue budget for 2024/25, for approval by committee and then consideration at Special Policy and Finance committee.

Members were reminded that the budget forecast was presented to this Committee in September 2023, when it predicted that there would be the following budget gaps: £877k in 2024/25, £2.261m in 2025/26, and £2.740m in 2026/27, after allowing for use of general fund balances.

The report set out:

- The changes since the September forecast.
- The provisional grant settlement.
- The budget process and how the estimates were prepared.
- The draft revenue budget for 2024/25 and the main variations.

The difference between the Proposed Original Estimate 2024/25 and Original Estimate 2023/24 was a reduction in net expenditure of £67,530 but an increase in

net expenditure of £112,110 after allowing for transfers to and from earmarked reserves.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve the revenue original estimate for 2024/25 and agree to submit this to a Special Policy and Finance Committee.

614

REVISED CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2023/24

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report asking committee to approve the 2023/24 revised estimate for this Committee's capital programme.

Nine schemes totalling £522k had been approved by Special Policy and Finance committee and full Council in February and March 2023 respectively. During the year, additional budget of £72k had been approved for three new schemes bringing the total approved budget for twelve schemes to £594k.

Progress on each of the capital schemes had been discussed with budget holders, and the capital programme had been revised to reflect progress and the estimated full year expenditure for 2023/24. This resulted in a proposed revised estimate of £346k for ten schemes, a reduction of £248k from the total approved budget, the reasons for which were noted in the report.

At the end of December 2023 £135k had been spent or committed, which was 38.9% of the revised capital programme for this Committee.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Approve the 2023/24 revised estimate of £346,420 for this Committee's revised capital programme as set out in the report, and
2. Approve the transfer of the following capital budgets from 2023/24 to 2024/25:
 - Replacement Air Conditioning Units in Server Room - £10,700
 - Replacement of Brookfoot Footbridge, Ribchester £106k
 - Council Offices Mains and LED Lighting Upgrade - £90k
 - Revenues and Benefits Replacement Server - £24k
 - Technology Forge Upgrade - £27,400

615

CAPITAL PROGRAMME REVIEW AND NEW BIDS 2024/25 - 2028/29

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report asking committee to consider the future capital programme for this committee covering the period 2024/25 to 2028/29.

For this committee there had originally been five schemes approved for the financial years 2024/25 to 2027/28, totalling £396,560. Following a review of these schemes there were no proposed amendments identified.

No new capital bids had been put forward for 2028/29 for this Committee by Heads of Service. Members were asked to consider any capital bid suggestions or amendments that they may wish to make.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve the future capital programme for this Committee's services for onward recommendation to Special Policy and Finance Committee for the period 2024/25 to 2028/29, based on the proposals included in the report.

616

LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2024/25

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report for Committee to consider the Council's Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) Scheme for 2024/25 and submit to Full Council for approval by 11 March 2024.

The report noted 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. The scheme was broadly similar to the old Council Tax Benefits scheme but with a 12% reduction in entitlement for claimants of working age.

Following a consultation exercise in 2021, a decision was taken to remove the 12% reduction in support, which had resulted in increased LCTS for approximately 1200 households, 600 of which paid no Council Tax in 2022/23.

As part of the budget setting process, Committee were asked to consider whether to continue with the current LCTS scheme or replace it with another, for determination by the meeting of the Full Council 5 March 2024.

Members were pleased to recommend the continuation of one of the most generous Council Tax Support Schemes in Lancashire, for approval by Full Council.

***RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Recommend the approval of the Council's Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2024/25 to Full Council.

617

REVIEW OF DISCRETIONARY DISCOUNT/RELIEF POLICY

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report seeking Committee approval of the updated Revenues Discretionary Discount/Relief policy.

Members were reminded that Local Authorities had the power to grant discretionary Council Tax and Business Rates discounts/reliefs. This included the additional support provided to recipients of Local Council Tax Support, the Business Rates Expanded Retail and Nursery Relief/Discounts, the Covid-19 Additional Relief Fund for Business Rates, and the extension of the Support Small Business (SSB) and Transitional Relief schemes. The report noted that:

- The Non-Domestic Rating Act 2023 made an amendment to Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 which prevented the backdating of discretionary rate relief to no more than six months after the end of the

financial year, by removing the restriction from the financial year beginning 1 April 2023.

- The Council had made amendments to the policy to cover the extension of 75% Retail Hospitality and Leisure Relief for 2024/25.

The full revised Revenues Discretionary Discount/Relief Policy was included with tracked changes.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Agree to determine each application for backdating Discretionary Rate Relief on a case-by-case merits based on the amended restrictions included in the Non-Domestic Rating Act 2023; and
2. Agree the changes to the Revenues Discretionary Discount/Relief Policy for 2024/25.

618

CORPORATE DEBT POLICY

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report seeking agreement for a revision to the Council's Corporate Debt Policy (CDP).

The Council was required to collect debts across several different departments. These debts could be in relation to a variety of services, ranging from Business Rates, Council Tax and rent for both commercial and residential properties.

No amendments were proposed to the Policy, a full copy of which was included with the report.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approved the Policy attached at Annex 1 to the Report.

619

UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND (UKSPF)

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report updating Members in respect of the Council's UK Shared Prosperity Fund and seeking approval for some of the use of the Council's UKSPF allocation.

The report listed the schemes for which the UKSPF had been spent or earmarked to, and the amounts allocated within each financial year were as follows:

- Year 1 (2022/23) allocation £238,805
- Year 2 (2023/24) allocation £477,610
- Year 3 (2024/25) allocation £1,251,339

Receipt of the full Year 3 allocation was subject to a threshold approach determined by the amount spent from the Year 1 and Year 2 allocations. It was expected that over 80% of the Council's 2022/23 and 2023/24 allocation would be spent before the end of March 2024 which would result in the full allocation for 2024/25 being receipted in the new financial year.

Committee was updated on the outcome of discussions by the UKSPF Working Group to date. Detailed information was provided on the schemes that had been recommended for approval and Committee was asked to consider which schemes

should be approved to be supported from the 2024/25 allocation. The Chairman opened each scheme up for debate in turn and Members voted separately on each scheme.

Councillors M Graveston and S O'Rourke left the meeting.

Members supported and approved the provision of £80k of UKSPF for the new spinning room at Roefield.

Councillors M Graveston and S O'Rourke returned to the meeting.

Councillor D Birtwhistle left the meeting.

Members supported and approved the provision of £25k to resurface Barrow car park, mark out the parking spaces and install electric vehicle charging points. Members then also supported and approved a further two scheme applications in Barrow as a joint scheme with the total provision of £199,150 for the creation of Barrow Village Hall within the former pub/ restaurant the conversion of the existing cottage into office/ community space. It was noted that in accordance with the Council's procurement rules the works would need to go out to tender.

Councillor D Birtwhistle returned to the meeting.

Varying opinions were put forward in regard to the application for the provision of £1,340 for the CCTV at the 3C's café in the castle grounds, which had already been erected by the current tenant. It was considered that the scheme should not be supported using the UKSPF and Committee referred the scheme to the Ribble Valley Community Safety Partnership for consideration under a grant scheme.

Members were updated verbally at the meeting in regard to the progress on the Longridge pump track and events space scheme, that quotes were awaited and a report would be brought to a future Committee.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Agree to the provision of £80,000 of the Council's UKSPF funding for a new spinning room at Roefield leisure centre.
2. Agree to the provision of £25,000 to resurface the Barrow car park, to mark out the parking spaces and install electric vehicle charging points.
3. Agree to the provision of £199,150 for the creation of a Barrow Village Hall within the former pub/ restaurant and the conversion of the existing cottage into office/ community space under one scheme.
4. Refer the provision of CCTV at 3C's café in the castle grounds to the Ribble Valley Community Safety Partnership (RV CSP) for consideration under a grant scheme.
5. Authorise the Director of Economic Development and Planning to progress suitable agreements with the relevant parties in respect of the provision of the approved funding for each of the above approved projects.

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report seeking Committee's endorsement of actions for the Council in respect of the Ribble Valley

Community Safety Partnership Serious Violence Action Plan relating to the new Serious Violence Duty 2023.

The report noted that the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 (PCSC Act) imposed duties on the Council which included the preparation and implementation of a strategy for exercising their functions to prevent and reduce serious violence in the area. The Government had produced statutory guidance to support organisations and authorities in exercising functions in respect of this duty.

The draft Ribble Valley CSP Serious Violence Action Plan was included with the report. The actions identified related to different members of the Ribble Valley Safety Partnership (RV CSP) as well as the Council. The Action Plan had been considered by the RV CSP at their meeting on 19 October 2023 and it was agreed that each partner would consider the Action Plan and endorse the actions relevant to their organisation. It would then be considered by the RV CSP at their meeting of 1 February 2024 and approved for publication.

Committee were asked to endorse the actions relating to RVBC, which were summarised in the report, along with suggested amendments which were shown as tracked changes in the provided Draft Plan.

Members discussed the role and outlook of the CSP and commended the Partnership Officer for her ongoing work.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Endorse the actions highlighted in the RV Serious Violence Action Plan relating to Ribble Valley Borough Council as set out in the report.
2. Delegate authority to the Director of Economic Development and Planning to agree editorial changes to the Action Plan which improve the clarity and accuracy of the document before it is published.

621

LANCASHIRE COMBINED COUNTY AUTHORITY AND DEVOLUTION PROPOSAL

The Chief Executive submitted a report to provide an update for Members on the proposed establishment of a Lancashire Combined County Authority and determine if they wished to respond to the consultation.

The government had announced the opportunity for a devolution deal for Lancashire and proposed the creation of a Combined County Authority (CCA) for the administrative area covered by the three upper tier Councils; Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, Blackpool Council, and Lancashire County Council. The main elements of the Combined County Authority Proposal, potential funding, and how the CCA would work, were included in the report. The proposed deal was subject to a public consultation process in accordance with the statutory requirements. It was anticipated that a further meeting of the three Councils in March 2024 would consider the results on the consultation and agree whether or not to formally submit the final Proposal to government for formal parliamentary approval in summer and autumn 2024.

The CCA model stated that only Upper Tier Local Authorities could be constituent members, and District Councils including RVBC would be invited to nominate two “non-constituent” members to serve as members of the CCA. It was understood that the “non-constituent” members would not have voting rights.

The public consultation would run for eight weeks in December 2023 and January 2024, and Committee were asked to consider whether to respond.

Members felt it was the Council's duty to respond to the consultation and concerns were raised that Districts may not have a vote as non-constituent Members. The potential positives and negatives of a CCA were discussed. Members felt that although the CCA would receive any future UKSPF, that it should be split as an equal percentage between areas to ensure it was fairly distributed. Committee agreed to respond in support of the CCA in principle, subject to the inclusion of these suggested terms.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Agree to respond to the public consultation as follows:

Ribble Valley Borough Council broadly supports the creation of the County Combined Authority as set out in the Consultation document. However, we would like to see the two district representatives being given full voting rights on the CCA Board. We would also ask that a share of any UK Shared Prosperity Fund received by the CCA is allocated to District Councils in the same proportions as currently received by those authorities.

622

MEMBERSHIP OF WORKING GROUPS

The Chief Executive submitted a report for Committee to consider the membership of the Working Groups under the remit of this Committee for the remainder of the municipal year 2023/24.

Committee had approved the appointment of Members to the working groups for 2023/24 on 20 June 2023 comprising; Voluntary Organisation Grants, Budget Working Group, UKSPF Working Group, and Corporate Strategy Working Group. Following political group changes, the revised membership of the Policy and Finance Committee based on the new political balance had been confirmed at the meeting of the Full Council 12 December 2023.

Members were asked to appoint replacement Members to the Budget Working Group and Corporate Strategy Working Group, as Councillor G McCrum was no longer a member of the parent Committee.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Agree the revised membership of the Working Groups for the remainder of the municipal year 2023/24 as follows:

Voluntary Organisation Grants – Councillors R Newmark, L Edge, S O'Rourke, A Wilkins-Odudu, D Birtwhistle

Budget – Councillors S Atkinson, S Hore, S Hirst, S Fletcher, L Jameson, J Rogerson, S O'Rourke

UKSPF - Councillors S Atkinson, S Hore, S O'Rourke, L Jameson, J Rogerson

Corporate Strategy Working Group - S Atkinson, S Hore, K Horkin, S Fletcher, A Wilkins-Odudu, D Birtwhistle, S O'Rourke.

623

REFERENCES FROM COMMITTEES

There were no references from Committees.

624 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MONITORING 2023/24

The Director of Resources submitted a monitoring report for information on the treasury management activities for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 December 2023. This included temporary investments, interest on investments, local government bonds agency, borrowing, borrowing requirements, prudential indicators, approved organisations, recent events and exposure to risk.

625 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 members on benefits performance, including benefits processing times and overpayment recovery.

626 HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND ROUND 4

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report for information updating Committee on the Household Support Fund Round 4 (HSF4).

The application process for the second round of applications had closed on 17 November 2023. 331 applications had been received, of which 269 applications were eligible. Vouchers had been issued to eligible applicants in date order of receipt, therefore 43 vouchers had been issued equating to the remaining fund amount of £10,900. The remaining eligible applicants would be prioritised for assistance in the event of more funding becoming available.

To date 748 vouchers had been issued to households in the Borough which equated to £211,100.

627 RIPA UPDATE

The Chief Executive submitted a report informing Committee of the Council's usage of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) and the result of the position in respect of the 2023 inspection.

RIPA allowed the Council to carry out directed surveillance and/or use covert human intelligence sources (CHIS) lawfully if it is authorised in accordance with the provisions of RIPA. Committee was informed that the Council had not used its RIPA powers within the last 12 months to date.

In July 2023, the Investigatory Powers Commissioners Office had requested information in order for them to consider the Council's RIPA arrangements. The Council had submitted the information and received confirmation on 3 November 2023 that the Council had provided assurance and as such no further inspection was required at that time.

628 CORPORATE PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORTING

The Chief Executive submitted a report informing Committee about year-end reports for 2021/22 and 2022/23 that detail performance against the Council's local performance indicators.

The report provided an overview of the Council's performance up to 31 March 2023. Analysis showed that of the 18 key performance indicators (KPIs) that could be compared to target:

- 50% (9) of the KPIs met target (green) or were on track.
- 16.7% (3) of the KPIs close to target (amber) where delivery was on track and was being managed.
- 0% (0) of the KPIs missed target (red) where performance was or was likely to be off track.
- 16.7% (3) of the KPIs provided data only.
- 16.7% (3) of the KPIs were either awaiting data, data was unavailable, or a target had not been set.

Of the 18 KPIs where performance trend could be compared over the years:

- 50% (9) of the KPIs had improved
- 28% (5) of the KPIs had worsened,
- 22% (4) of the KPIs could not be compared to the previous year

The full monitoring report along with narrative on performance and targets was provided in the report.

629 MINUTES OF WORKING GROUPS

(i) Minutes of Budget Working Group 25 September 2023

The minutes of the Budget Working Group held on 25 September 2023 were submitted for Committee's information.

631 MINUTES OF UKSPF WORKING GROUP 31 OCTOBER 2023

The minutes of the UKSPF Working Group held on 31 October 2023 were submitted for Committee's information.

632 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports from representatives on outside bodies.

633 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That by virtue of the next item of business being exempt information under Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be now excluded from the meeting.

Councillor S Hirst left the meeting in respect of the next agenda item.

RURAL ENGLAND PROSPERITY FUND (REPF)

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report for Committee to consider full applications received into the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) grant scheme.

The scheme had opened for expressions of interest forms on 12 September 2023 and would remain open with applications being assessed on an ongoing basis during the funding period. To date fifteen eligible applicants had been invited to complete a full application, and of these the following two full applications had been received for Committee to consider:

- Ribchester Parish Council, Knowle Green Gigabit (1000mbps) Broadband – requesting £50k to cover part of the cost of the initial network installation, with an additional £12k to provide the connection to Ribchester Parish Council.
- Newton-in-Bowland Village Hall – requesting £3478.50 to fund 50% of the total cost (£6,957) of three smaller projects consisting of a projector, water boiler and tablet. As applications were limited to one per project application, Committee were asked to consider which of the three smaller projects to support.

Members felt that the Knowle Green broadband project was worthwhile and essential, however, given the number of homes and businesses within the project area that would be eligible for government funded vouchers, Committee requested that further financial information was required, and deferred the decision to a future Committee once the information was obtained.

It was noted that Village Hall projects would ordinarily fall under existing grant schemes, therefore Members felt that the Newton-in Bowland projects should be considered under grant schemes in the first instance.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Request further financial information in regard to the application for £50k to support the delivery of the network installation requirements for a digital gigabit broadband network to Knowle Green, for consideration at a future Committee.
2. Recommend the three projects totalling £6,957 at Newton-in-Bowland Village Hall for consideration under the existing voluntary organisation grant scheme.

Councillor S Hirst returned to the meeting.

LOCAL TAXATION WRITE OFFS

The Director of Resources & Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report seeking Committee's approval to write off certain Council Tax and Business Rates debts relating to individuals.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve writing off £4,690.62 of Council Tax debts plus £390.00 costs where it had not been possible to collect the amount due.

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive, the Director of Economic Development and Planning, and the Director of Community Services left the meeting.
FLEXIBLE RETIREMENT REQUEST

The Chief Executive submitted a report for Committee to consider an application for flexible retirement from the Chief Executive, which required approval of both Personnel Committee and Policy and Finance Committee.

The report reminded Committee of the eligibility criteria under the Local Government Pension Scheme and detailed the Council's Early Retirement Policy.

The Chief Executive had submitted his notice to retire from his full time position on 5 April 2024. The Chief Executive's request was that he be granted flexible retirement to allow him to continue with a reduced working week of 2.5 days until January 2025. The report also presented Committee with the options which required consideration given that the other half of the post would become vacant, and the potential financial implications of the various options.

The report noted that agreeing to the flexible retirement request would retain the knowledge and expertise of the Chief Executive and permit the Council 12 months to carefully consider the recruitment and replacement. Committee were verbally updated at the meeting that Personnel Committee had approved the request at their meeting of 17 January 2024. The Chief Executive presented the report then left the meeting.

Committee supported the flexible retirement request, and the proposed option for the Deputy Chief Executive to be asked to Act Up.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Approve the flexible retirement request with effect from 6 April 2024, and
2. Approve that the Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive is asked to Act Up and temporarily undertake the extra duties of CEO, 2½ days per week, alongside her existing role.

The meeting closed at 8.40 pm

If you have any queries on these minutes please contact the committee clerk, Rebecca Tait 01200 414408 rebecca.tait@ribblevalley.gov.uk.