

Minutes of Policy and Finance

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 12 November 2024, starting at 6.30 pm
Present: Councillor S Atkinson (Chair)

Councillors:

K Barnsley	S Hore
S Bibby	K Horkin
D Birtwhistle	L Jameson
M Graveston	R Newmark
J Hill	S O'Rourke
M Hindle	M Peplow
S Hirst	J Rogerson

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

412 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence

413 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

Councillor K Barnsley declared an interest in Agenda Item 6 – Fees and Charges 2025/26.

Councillor K Horkin declared an interest in Agenda Item 9 – UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund.

415 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

416 COUNCIL TAX BASE 2025/26

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report informing members of the Council's Taxbase for 2024/25 and to consider recent changes to legislation with regard to council tax on second homes and empty properties.

Members were reminded that:

- The council tax base was set each year between 1 December and 31 January and was an important calculation which set out the number of dwellings to which council tax was chargeable in an area or part of an area.

- To calculate the tax base for an area, the number of dwellings in each Council tax band was adjusted to take account of any discounts, premiums or exemptions.
- The resulting figure for each band was then multiplied by its proportion relative to Band D (from 6/9 for Band A to 18/9 for Band H) and the total across all eight bands was calculated. These were then multiplied by the authority's estimated collection rate for the year.
- The tax base was used for the purposes of calculating the band d council tax for the billing authority and also major precepting authorities and parish councils.

The Budget Working Group had recommended that the Council did not bring in the new powers regarding council tax on second homes or other premiums at this time.

The tax base had increased steadily over the years. The Council Tax Base for 2025/26 was 25,649, which was a 1.3% increase on that for 2024/25.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Note the Council Tax Base for 2025/26 is 25,649.
2. Agree with the Budget Working Group's recommendation not to change the current exemptions and premiums as allowed under recent changes to legislation but to keep the new powers under review.

Councillor K Barnsley left the room in respect of the next agenda item.

417

FEES AND CHARGES 2025/26

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report seeking member approval on proposals to increase this Committee's fees and charges with effect from 1 April 2025. The proposals were the first stage in the review of this Committee's budget for the forthcoming 2025/26 financial year.

Service Committees were asked to review their fees and charges in order to achieve an overall increase in budgeted income of 2.5% as assumed in the Council's Budget Forecast.

Following discussions, the proposed set of fees and charges for implementation from 1 April 2025 had been produced for this Committee for members to consider and were set out in Annex 1 to the report. The proposed fees and charges for this Committee would produce on average a 3.65% increase, based on budgeted demand levels.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve the level of fees and charges for this committee for 2025/26 as outlined in the report.

Councillor K Barnsley returned to the meeting.

JUBILEE GRANT FUND SCHEME

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report for Committee to agree the next steps with regard to the Jubilee Fund.

Members were reminded that a £1m Jubilee Fund had been agreed following one-off windfall savings from the financial year 2023/24, which would fund one-off items to be considered by the Budget Working Group and approved by this Committee. The report explained that the Council continued to work hard to ensure that the UKSPF and REPF funds were spent before the deadline of 31 March 2025. As the funds were overallocated, it had been suggested that a contingency fund be set aside to fund any overspend, which would ensure that the available money was fully utilised. In addition, the Voluntary Organisation grants scheme and Recreation and Culture grants scheme were about to be launched.

It was therefore recommended to defer the Jubilee Fund until a later date to avoid confusion and until it became apparent if part of the fund would be needed in order to fund any UKSPF or REPF overspend.

Committee were verbally updated at the meeting that the Budget Working Group had met on 4 November 2024 and recommended that the Jubilee Fund should not be used to fund any overspend from the UKSPF and REPF schemes and that other funding options should be explored.

Councillor S Bibby left the meeting during the debate.

Members supported the Budget Working Group recommendation however it was suggested that the Jubilee Fund be discussed again at the next Budget Working Group meeting.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Agree with the suggested approach for the Jubilee Fund and fund the potential overspend on UKSPF and REPF schemes not from the Jubilee Fund but from General Fund Balances or reserves.

Councillor S Bibby returned to the meeting.

CONSULTATION ON REMOTE MEETINGS AND PROXY VOTING

The Chief Executive submitted a report informing Committee about the Government's consultation on remote meetings and proxy voting and to seek approval on the consultation response.

The report noted that throughout the Covid period the Council had been permitted to conduct remote meetings under temporary coronavirus regulations, which had ended on 6 May 2021. The Government had announced plans at the recent LGA conference to consult a number of issues including:

- Allowing councillors to attend meetings remotely and/or allow proxy voting
- Changing the standards regime to allow Councils to suspend Members
- Allowing Councillors to keep their home address private

A copy of the consultation in respect of remote meetings and proxy voting was included with the report along with suggested responses, following consideration by CMT. The report noted that there was no detail yet on how remote attendance at

meetings would be administered in practice. Were it to be implemented, the Council's current AV equipment would not facilitate this therefore an upgrade or replacement would be required.

Members discussed the consultation, and different opinions were put forward as part of the discussion. Some Members felt strongly that elected Members should attend meetings in person and concerns were raised about potential abuse if the provision of remote attendance was enabled. However, other Members felt that enabling remote attendance would increase accessibility and equality. The Committee agreed that if this was introduced, that Councils should be given the powers to devise their own scheme, and that Members should only be able to attend remotely by exception under certain conditions. The suggested responses to questions 3 and 8 in the consultation would be amended to reflect this. The consultation would also be sent to all Members and Parish Councils, who were able to respond individually to the consultation should they wish.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve a response being submitted to the consultation as proposed in the report with amendments to include (b) in response to question 3 and removal of all responses to question 8.

420

UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND AND RURAL ENGLAND PROSPERITY FUND

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report updating Members in respect of the Council's UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and seeking Committee agreement for progression in respect of specific schemes.

The report noted that if all the approved UKSPF schemes were completed by the end of March 2025 this would result in a total overspend of £117,513. The report also provided updates on the REPF schemes which had been completed to date. If all the approved REPF schemes were completed by the end of March 2025 this would result in a total overspend of £233,456.

A number of UKSPF schemes were yet to be completed and were under close review. A contractor had been appointed to the Clitheroe Market Improvements Scheme and the programme of works was included for information. Officers confirmed that the work on the market had commenced.

Discussions were ongoing with LCC in regard to the resurfacing of Market Place in Clitheroe. LCC had indicated that the bus layby may be removed, therefore Members were asked to agree a preferred layout which would be communicated back to LCC, who would make the decision as the Highways Authority. Members discussed the options at length, and different opinions were put forward as part of the discussion. Concerns were raised regarding removing the layby and the effect on the flow of traffic. Other Members supported the removal of the layby following consultation with the Town Council and Chamber of Trade and felt it would improve safety by slowing the traffic in a busy pedestrian area. It was agreed that the third option noted in the report was preferred.

Members were also updated on negotiations for electric vehicle charging points at Edisford car park and Barclay Road Longridge. It was noted that the decision had already been made to support electric charging points with funding from the UKSPF, however the amount of funding was sufficient for only one location at this time. Members were asked to agree if the scheme at Barclay Road should be pursued,

noting that ongoing revenue costs would need to be identified. Members agreed to support the implementation of the available chargers at Barclay Road, Longridge.

Councillor D Birtwhistle left the meeting and took no part in the debate or vote for resolutions 1 and 2.

Consideration was given in respect of the updates on Barrow Car Park and Longridge Pump Track and Committee agreed the recommendations as noted in the report.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Note the removal of the electric vehicle charging points from the Barrow car park resurfacing project.
2. Note the potential for additional costs associated with the Pump Track project (this will be kept under review).
3. Agree to support layout option 3 for Market Place and delegate authority to the Director of Economic Development and Planning to move forward with the scheme once the layout has been confirmed by LCC.
4. Agree that Officers should progress with the provision of charging points at Barclay Road Longridge, noting the revenue implications which will need to be considered at budget setting.
5. Approve the funding of the potential overspend for both UKSPF and REPF from General Fund Balances./ Earmarked reserves

Councillor Birtwhistle returned to the meeting.

421

HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND 6

The Director of Economic Development and Planning provided a report updating Committee on the Household Support Fund Round 6 (HSF6) and seeking approval for utilising the funding which would be passported from LCC.

The HSF6 scheme would extend from 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025, with an allocation of £116,379 passported to RVBC. The DWP had again provided guidance on the use of the fund. Committee approval was sought to run a further round of funding applications based on the previously successful HSF schemes, details of which were provided in the report. Following the decision of the new Government to withdraw the winter fuel allowance for pensioners, it was suggested that part of the promotion of HSF6 should be directed at pensioners including promotion at lunch clubs and warm spaces, to encourage applications.

The report also updated Members in regard to the HSF5 scheme under which 413 households were assisted with £100,100 provided in food vouchers and 33 households assisted with form filling / advice services.

The report went on to explain that there would be an additional affordable warmth allocation of £20,324 for Ribble Valley. The affordable warmth aspect of the HSF scheme would need to be spent and committed by the end of March 2025, and Councils would only receive the allocation once 80% of the previously allocated 2023/24 funding had been spent. The report noted that under the existing criteria from LCC it had been very challenging to utilise the funding within the Ribble Valley and it

was expected that the Council would therefore not receive its affordable warmth allocation immediately.

Members were keen to ensure that the HSF6 scheme supported as many new applicants as possible and therefore supported that recipients of HSF5 scheme would not be eligible, and that applications received from recipients of HSF4 would be held for three months enabling new applications to be prioritised.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Approve the creation of an application process for the HSF6 funding as per paragraph 5.3 of the report, with applications remaining open subject to sufficient funding with a deadline date of 31st March 2025.
2. Prioritise new applicants for the first three months with households who received a voucher from HSF4 only becoming eligible to receive a voucher after three months of the application process opening.
3. Confirm that applications from households who received a voucher from HSF5 will not be eligible for this new HSF6 funding round.
4. Confirm that the additional Affordable Warmth Grant, if received, should be utilised for the interventions identified within the existing grant scheme.

422

TWISTON DEFIBRILLATOR

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report updating Committee on an Expression of Interest (EOI) received into the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) grant scheme and seeking approval for funding.

Committee approval was sought to approve £1500 for the provision of a defibrillator on Twiston Lane. The report noted that following the initial EOI in October 2023, the requesting residents' group had previously been directed to apply for a Voluntary Organisations grant, however there was no properly constituted organisation within Twiston to apply into the grant fund. The scheme was thought to be worthwhile with the next nearest facility being around a 5-minute drive away. It was confirmed at the meeting that the community group would be responsible for servicing, replacement pads and replacement batteries as required.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve the grant request of £1,500 to enable the delivery of a defibrillator on Twiston Lane funded from the remaining balance on the current year's Voluntary Organisation Grant Budget.

423

LUNCH CLUB UPDATE

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report providing an update on lunch clubs and seeking approval to continue to provide financial support for an annual Christmas lunch grant.

Lunch clubs were typically run by the voluntary, charity, and faith sectors, who could apply to the Council for up to £800 for the main lunch club by completing an application and returning it to the Partnership Officer for consideration. In addition, the

Council also supported the provision of a 'Christmas Lunch' by lunch clubs in the form of a £250 payment.

There were now twenty-five lunch clubs/warm spaces listed with the Council, twelve of which had accessed the main grant in 2023, and twenty-one clubs had received financial support of £250 towards Christmas lunch. The support was estimated to have benefited over nine hundred residents in 2023-2024. Ten clubs had applied to date for the Christmas lunch grant, details of which were provided in the annex to the report.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Continue to provide financial support for an annual Christmas lunch grant.

424

REFERENCES FROM COMMITTEES

(i) Reference from Community Committee - Ash Dieback Related Tree Works

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report to consider a request from Community Services Committee for a supplementary estimate of £35,000 to address Ash Dieback affecting trees on the Council's land.

Community Services Committee had approved the recommendation at their meeting of 15 October 2024.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve a revenue supplementary estimate of £35,000 in the 2024/25 financial year in order to enable the felling of trees affected by Ash Dieback in Whalley Woodland, Salthill, and Crosshill Nature reserves funded from the Performance Reward Grant Earmarked Reserve.

425

CAPITAL MONITORING 2024/25

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report for information on the progress of this committee's 2024/25 capital programme for the period to the end of September 2024. At the end of September 2024 £76,458 had been spent or committed on the main Policy and Finance Committee schemes, equating to 11.4% of the capital programme. Of the ten schemes in the capital programme at the end of July 2024:

- Two schemes were currently on-track to be completed in-year
- Four schemes had missed some key targets but were anticipated to be completed within the financial year
- Two schemes were underway but unlikely to be completed within the financial year
- Two schemes were unable to be started in year or were no longer needed in this financial year

Progress on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund schemes was also reported. At the end of September 2024 £288,000 had been spent or committed, equating to 16.0% of the capital programme for these schemes. Of the thirty-one schemes at the end of September 2024:

- Four schemes were fully completed

- Twenty-four schemes were currently on-track to be completed in-year
- Three schemes had missed some key targets and but were anticipated to be completed within the financial year

426 OVERALL CAPITAL MONITORING 2024/25

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report for information of progress on the Council's approved 2024/25 capital programme for the period to the end of September 2024.

At the end of September 2024 £1,501,929 had been spent or committed. This was 17.3% of this Committees overall capital programme budget of £8,672,520.

A summary of progress on the seventy-three schemes in the capital programme at the end of September 2024 was as follows:

- Ten schemes were completed
- Forty-one schemes were on track and expected to be completed in-year
- Thirteen schemes had missed some key targets but were expected to be completed in-year
- Seven of the schemes were unlikely be completed in-year, and further detail on the operational progress of each of these schemes could be found in the appropriate service committee reports.

427 REVENUE MONITORING 2024/25

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report for information on the position for the period April to September 2024 of this year's revenue budget for this committee.

The comparison between actual and budgeted expenditure showed an underspend of £155,357 for the April to September period of the financial year 2024/25. After allowing for transfers to and from earmarked reserves there was an underspend of £166,177. The main variances were explained in the report.

428 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MONITORING 2024/25

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a monitoring report for information on the treasury management activities for the period 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024. This included temporary investments, interest on investments, prospects on interest rates, local government bonds agency, borrowing, prudential indicators, approved organisations, recent events and exposure to risk.

429 REVENUES AND BENEFITS GENERAL REPORT

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive 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.

It was noted at the meeting that there was a correction to a figure in the report on page 184 at 6.1. In the performance table for the period 1 July 2024 – 30 September 2024, it should read:

The amount of Housing Benefit (HB) overpayments written off during the period as a percentage of the total amount of HB overpayment debt outstanding at the start of the financial year, plus amount of HB overpayments identified during the period.	14.95%
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430

2023/2024 YEAR-END PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

The Chief Executive submitted a report informing Committee about the year-end report for 2023/2024 detailing performance against the Council's local performance indicators.

Analysis showed that of the eighteen key performance indicators (KPIs) that could be compared to target:

- 33% (6) of the KPIs met target (green) and were on track
- 17% (3) of the KPIs were close to target (amber) and delivery was on track and being managed
- 5% (1) of the KPIs had missed target (red) and performance was or was likely to be off track
- 17% (3) of the KPIs provided data only
- 28% (5) of the KPIs were either awaiting data, data was unavailable, or targets had not been set.

Of the eighteen KPIs where performance trend could be compared over the year:

- 28% (5) of the KPIs had improved
- 28% (5) of the KPIs showed delivery had not improved, however it was currently being managed
- 44% (8) of the KPIs were either awaiting data, data was unavailable, or a target had not been set, therefore performance could not be compared.

Further detailed information was provided in the report.

431

MINUTES OF WORKING GROUPS

The minutes of the following working group meetings were submitted for Committee's information:

(i) MINUTES OF THE BUDGET WORKING GROUP 11 JULY 2024

432 MINUTES OF THE UKSPF WORKING GROUP 11 JULY 2024

433 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports from representatives on outside bodies.

434

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: 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 1972 the press and public be now excluded from the meeting.

435

HOUSING BENEFIT WRITE OFF

Committee considered the report of the Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive which requested approval to write off a Housing Benefit (HB) overpayment relating to an individual.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve writing off £5,463.20 in Housing Benefit overpayment which occurred as a result of local authority error.

436

UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND - TOWNELEY GARDENS

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report updating Members in respect of the Council's UK Shared Prosperity Fund and seeking Committee agreement for the progression of the Towneley Gardens project.

A company had been identified to undertake the design of the scheme. Committee were informed of the arrangement put forward by the design company and asked to consider if the Council should proceed with the design based on the agreement as set out in the report.

Members discussed the agreement and concerns were raised.

It was proposed by Councillor L Jameson to adjourn the meeting in order for information to be clarified. This was seconded by Councillor S O'Rourke. A vote was taken and the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 8.23pm.

The meeting resumed at 8.27pm and Committee agreed to proceed with the agreement.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Agreed to the scheme going ahead and delegated authority to the Director of Economic Development and Planning to progress the procurement of the design works for the scheme.

The meeting closed at 8.29 pm

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