

Minutes of Policy and Finance

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 9 November 2021, starting at 6.30 pm
Present: Councillor S Atkinson (Chair)

Councillors:

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

In attendance: Chief Executive, Director of Resources, Director of Community Services, Director of Economic Development and Planning and Senior Economic Development Officer

443 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillor M French.

444 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

Councillors A Brown, S Fletcher, G Hibbert, J Hill, D Peat and R Thompson declared an other registrable interest in Agenda Item 5 – Platinum Jubilee - as members of parish councils

In response to a question regarding membership of the Clitheroe Town Team the Chief Executive informed councillors who were members of the Town Team group that in his view they did not need to declare any interests as the group has no standing.

Councillor K Horkin as a owner of several businesses in Clitheroe did not declare any interest in agenda item 6 – ARG Funding as he would not be making any applications to the fund.

446 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

During the next item Councillors A Brown, S Fletcher, G Hibbert, J Hill, D Peat and R Thompson declared an interest in the parish grant element of the report and left the meeting for that part.

447 CELEBRATING THE PLATINUM JUBILEE

The Chief Executive submitted a report asking members to consider how to celebrate and commemorate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in June 2022.

He informed members that all councils had been requested by Pageant Master, Bruno Peek LVO OBE OPR to light a beacon and he suggested this be done at Clitheroe Castle as had been done on previous occasions.

He also suggested that a grant be awarded to each parish council to encourage them to take part in the celebrations in their area.

Other suggestions had been made by members of staff and councillors that included several ideas. The Chief Executive also informed members that in the week prior to the celebrations the Duke of Lancaster's Regiment would be doing a Freedom March through the streets of Clitheroe, that would be a fitting start to the jubilee celebrations. The Chief Executive said that the project(s) were one off items that could be funded from reserves. However the Council would still need to set a budget for the Jubilee celebrations and the Freedom March.

Members considered the ideas put forward and felt that a permanent living fixture/reminder would be the most appropriate. It was suggested a task and finish group be set up to move forward with plans.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Agree to have a Beacon lighting at Clitheroe Castle;
2. Agree to give a grant of £500 to every parish council who provides a letter of intent to use it to commemorate the Platinum Jubilee;
3. Agree to set up a task and finish group consisting of Councillors S Atkinson, K Horkin, J Clark, S Fletcher and R Thompson to finalise the plans for commemorating the Queen's Platinum Jubilee

Councillors A Brown, S Fletcher, G Hibbert, J Hill, D Peat and R Thompson returned to the meeting.

448

ARG FUNDING - NEXT STEPS

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report asking committee to consider the allocation of the second top-up of Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) funding.

Following the last meeting of this committee, the task and finish group comprising of councillors Atkinson, Peat, Bibby, Fletcher and Thompson had met to discuss potential options and were now making recommendations of how best to allocate the funding to assist businesses with their recovery from the impacts of the pandemic.

Three schemes were proposed –

- Travel Agents - £1000 to those based at home and £5000 to those who have a business premises/shop and are registered for business rates in the Ribble Valley;
- Business Recovery – businesses seeking to invest in their premises or facilities as a direct result of the pandemic who had not received a Restart Grant.
- Business Growth – to support businesses in recovering from the impact of the pandemic and to support businesses in expanding and adapting their businesses to support long-term sustainability and the Council's Climate Change Strategy.

A scale of eligible expenditure was outlined with the minimum expenditure being £5,000. The grant would provide up to 50% of any eligible expenditure with a maximum grant of £25,000. Eligible expenditure would count from 1 July 2021 for those businesses based in Ribble Valley who were trading on 1 April 2021 and registered for business rates.

Members were supportive of the recommendations made by the task and finish group.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Agree to providing an additional one-off fixed grant to Travel Agents in accordance with the report;
2. Agree to the remainder of the additional restrictions grant being used to fund the Business Recovery grant and the Business Growth grant in accordance with the details in the report and the Grants Policy outlined;
3. Delegate to the Director of Economic Development and Planning and the Director of Resources, in consultation with the ARG task and finish group, any minor amendments to the scheme that arise during the administration of the scheme.

449 REFERENCES FROM COMMITTEES

450 COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE - PLAYING PITCHES AT EDISFORD

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking committee to consider a request from Community Services committee in respect of approval to help improve the playing pitches at Edisford.

As a result of the housing development at Low Moor a commuted sum of £18,784 had been given to the council as the developer contribution for the improvement of off-site leisure provision and it was planned to use this funding to improve the drainage at the Edisford playing pitches site.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve the request for additional capital budget of £18,780 in respect of drainage works at Edisford Playing Pitches and that this be funded from the S106 monies from the housing development at Low Moor.

451 LOCAL TAXATION WRITE OFFS

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking for committee's approval to write off three cases of business rates where the companies had been dissolved.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve the writing off £13,001.25 in Business Rates and £300.00 costs where it has not been possible to collect the amounts due.

452 REVIEW OF 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 2022.

These proposals were the first stage in the review of this committee's budget for the forthcoming 2022/23 financial year.

The council's latest budget forecast allows for a 3% inflationary increase in the level of income raised from fees and charges and the review aims to increase budgeted income for 2022/23 by this amount as a minimum.

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.

Following discussions between financial services, heads of service and budget holders a proposed set of fees and charges for implementation from 1 April 2022 had been produced for this committee for members to consider.

The Director of Resources reported that when considering the fees and charges the Head of Legal and Democratic Services had recommended the introduction of new fees to cover extensive administrative processes, complex legal agreements and a charge for providing a proof of life service. It was also proposed to increase charges for S106 agreement review and completion work by 20.6%.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve the proposed fees and charges as set out in the report for implementation from 1 April 2022.

453 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.

454 COUNCIL TAX BASE 2022/23

The Director of Resources submitted a report for information on the council tax base for 2022/23. The council tax base is set each year between 1 December and 31 January and is an important calculation which sets out the number of dwellings to which council tax is chargeable in an area or part of an area. The tax base is used for the purposes of calculating the band D council tax for the billing authority and also major precepting authorities and parish councils.

The council tax base has increased steadily over the period 2007/08 to 2013/14, however since then it has averaged overall increases of 1.5% to 2.5% each year. The Council Tax Base for 2022/23 is 24,553.

455 REVENUE MONITORING 2021/22

The Director of Resources submitted a report for information on the position for the period April to September 2021 of this year's revenue budget as far as this committee was concerned.

The main variations were highlighted. The comparison between actual and budgeted expenditure within service cost centres shows an underspend of £188,176 for the April to September period of the financial year 2021/22. After allowing for transfers to/from earmarked reserves there was an underspend of £203,496.

The balance of grant funds accounted for within coronavirus specific cost centres of £920k have increased the underspend within this committee to £1.16m. Whilst for the period to September coronavirus funding had had a significant impact that had created a large underspend on the net cost of 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.

456 OVERALL REVENUE MONITORING 2021/22

The Director of Resources submitted a report for information on the overall position for the current financial year for the half year position up to the end of September 2021.

There is an overall net underspend to the end of September 2021 of £1,148,776. However, this is skewed by income and expenditure on covid response cost centres, where the variance will resolve itself as the year progresses. When the variances for the usual service cost centres are examined, there is a net underspend of £188,131.

It was pleasing to report that the refuse collection vehicle repair and maintenance costs have returned to be closer to budgeted costs.

457 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 the end of September 2021.

At the end of September 2021 £19,623 had been spent or committed. This was 10.9% of the total approved capital programme budget for this committee.

Of the eight schemes in the capital programme at the end of September 2021, one scheme was complete, two schemes were currently on-track to be completed in-year, two schemes would not be completed in-year and it was unclear whether three of the schemes would be completed in-year.

458 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 the end of September 2021.

At the end of September 2021 £669,102 had been spent or committed. This was 19.5% of the overall capital programme budget for 2021/22. Of the 30 schemes in the capital programme it was reported that two schemes were complete, ten schemes were currently expected to be completed in-year, it was unclear whether six schemes would be completed in-year, four schemes were unlikely to be completed in-year and six schemes would not be completed in-year. Two further schemes were on-going housing related grant schemes.

459 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 30 September 2021. This included temporary investments, interest on investments, local government bonds agency, borrowing, borrowing requirements, prudential indicators, approved organisations, recent events and exposure to risk.

460 ANNUAL OMBUDSMAN REPORT

The Chief Executive submitted a report for information on the referrals to the Local Government Ombudsman for the period to 31 March 2021. The Ombudsman had not carried out any detailed investigations during this period or upheld any complaints during the period.

461 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports from representatives on outside bodies.

462 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That by virtue of the next items 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.

463 LOCAL TAXATION WRITE OFFS

The Director of Resources submitted a report requesting committee's approval to write off a council tax debt where the debtor had passed away.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve writing off £984.45 of Council Tax debts plus £110.00 costs where it has not been possible to collect the amount due.

464 REFERENCES FROM COMMITTEES

(i) Personnel Committee - Review of Pay and Conditions

The Director of Resources submitted a report for members to consider a request from Personnel committee to improve the pay and conditions of staff.

Personnel committee had agreed to the recommendations made subject to budgetary approval and acceptance from the union.

The Director of Resources outlined the options available to committee to fund the recommendations bearing in mind that the outcome of the Draft Local Government Finance Settlement had not yet been received.

She reminded members that as the Section 151 officer, she was required to give the council formal advice on the robustness of the estimates and adequacy of reserves.

She explained that whilst the Council was currently benefitting from significant levels of earmarked reserves it would be possible to fund the costs arising from the pay review from these, however this was not recommended in the long term. She reminded members that the best use of earmarked reserves was to fund one off items eg the capital programme or non-recurring revenue items.

She suggested that cost of the pay review covering the next three years be transferred from the Business Rate Growth reserve and as a matter of priority recurring funding be identified when the outcome of the Draft Local Government Finance Settlement was known.

The Director of Resources also referred to other budget growth items which would

need to be considered by members in the budget cycle and also assessed as to whether the Council could afford them.

Members discussed this in some detail.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Agree to fund the extra cost by transferring funding of £1,078,000 from the Business Rate Growth reserve to finance the cost over the years 2022/23 to 2024/25 and fund the part year cost from the underspends on salaries due to vacant posts delegating the maximum flexibility on financial planning to the Director of Resources;
2. Identify ongoing sustainable funding for this item once the outcome of the Draft Local Government Finance Settlement is known, and
3. Approve the two decisions above subject to the Union accepting the proposals.

The meeting closed at 7.47 pm

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