

Minutes of Policy and Finance

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 29 March 2022, starting at 6.30 pm
Present: Councillor S Hore

Councillors:

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

In attendance: Chief Executive, Director of Resources, Director of Community Services and Head of Revenues and Benefits

Also in attendance: Councillor G Mirfin

768 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillors S Atkinson and A Brown.

769 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 February 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

Councillors S Bibby, J Clark, S Fletcher, M Hindle, S Hore and D Peat declared an interest in Agenda Item 8 – Voluntary Organisation Grants 2022/23.

As this would render the meeting inquorate for this item, those councillors who had applied in advance for a dispensation were granted one, namely Councillors Bibby, Clark and Peat which would allow them to remain in the meeting.

771 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Chairman welcomed two members of Whalley Chamber of Trade, Mr Nigel Layton – Hill and Ms Marianne Hyde who spoke on the issues facing retail businesses during Covid recovery and ongoing street works in Whalley.

The committee agreed to write a letter to LCC expressing concern regarding the impact that the street works were having on Whalley businesses and asking if the works could be expedited.

772 COUNCIL TAX ENERGY REBATE

The Director of Resources submitted a report updating committee on the Council Tax Energy Rebate that had been announced by the Chancellor on 3 February 2022. Committee were also asked to consider next steps regarding making payments to

council taxpayers in bands A to D and determining how to spend the discretionary funding that had been allocated.

The Government had published guidance to billing authorities on how the rebates would be administered.

For the core scheme funding totalling £2,822,850 had been allocated to Ribble Valley BC. A one-off £150 payment would be made to all council taxpayers for every household that occupies a property which meets the following criteria on 1 April 2022

- It is valued in council tax band A to D. This includes properties in band E that have a disabled band reduction;
- It is someone's sole or main residence;
- It is a chargeable dwelling, or in except classes N,S,V or W, and
- The person liable to pay the council tax (or would be were the property not except) is not a local authority, a corporate body or other body such as a housing association, the government or governmental body.

The Director of Resources informed members that as at 13 March 2022 there were 28,485 properties in Ribble Valley, 19,664 of which are in bands A to D, and 41 properties in band E that have disabled band reduction.

The discretionary scheme recognised that billing authorities might also wish to provide support to other energy bill payers who were not eligible under the core scheme or to provide targeted 'top up' payments to the most vulnerable households.

For this, funding of £88,500 had been allocated to Ribble Valley BC, which equates to 590 payments of £150. At present there were 109 council taxpayers in receipt of Local Council Tax Support in band E to H and paying them £150 each would total £16,350.

There are 2,108 council taxpayers in receipt of Local Council Tax Support and giving each one of them a top up of £30 would total £63,240.

Councillor Mirfin was given permission to speak on this item.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Note the additional core funding provided by the Government and approve the process proposed to distribute it;
2. Agree that the discretionary funding should be provide a £150.00 payment to Local Council Tax Support recipients on 1 April 2022 in bands E to H and to provide a £30 'top up' to Local Council Tax Support recipients in all bands on 1 April 2022, and
3. Agree to delegate the decision to award further payments, with the balance of any funding remaining to the Director of Resources in conjunction with the Head of Revenues and Benefits to cover other council taxpayers who have been severely impacted by the increase in energy prices.

The Director of Resources submitted a report updating committee on the Covid 19 Additional Relief Fund (CARF) and requesting a decision on the next steps regarding granting relief to eligible applicants and determining what to do with the remaining funding.

Members were reminded that liability for business rates was based upon the rateable value of a property that were set by the Valuation Office Agency (VOA). Between valuations rateable values can only be changed to reflect 'material changes of circumstances' which the Government believed did not include the impact of coronavirus. In recognition of this they introduced the Rating (Coronavirus) and Directors Disqualification (Dissolved Companies) Bill and announced a new Covid 19 Additional Relief Fund of £1.5 billion to support businesses affected by the pandemic that were ineligible for the existing support linked to business rates.

Guidance had been received from the Government and an allocation of £1,239,191 had been made to Ribble Valley BC.

The guidance outlined that the billing authority was responsible for designing a discretionary relief scheme in their area but must not award relief to ratepayers who had received Expanded Retail Discount or Nursery Discount and must support those directly adversely affected by the pandemic.

Members were advised that an application window had been opened for eligible businesses to apply which closed on 28 February 2022. 33 applications had been received, of which 28 were eligible. These had been paid an initial relief of 50% of their net rates payable for 2021/22 totalling £161,353.21

It was suggested that a second application window be opened after the start of the new financial year, where eligible businesses would be contacted again to encourage them to apply for the funding.

The additional funded was welcomed by committee.

Councillor Mirfin was given permission to speak on this item.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Agree to award CARF at the initial rate of 50% of the net rates payable for 2021/22 to the eligible applicants as detailed in the report, and
2. Agree to open another application round after the start of the new financial year.

774

DISCRETIONARY DISCOUNT/RELIEF POLICY

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking committee to approve an updated Revenues Discretionary Discount/Relief policy.

The Covid 19 pandemic had resulted in a number of discounts and reliefs for certain businesses and it had therefore been necessary to re-write the policy document to include all the additional support.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Agree the changes to the Revenues Discretionary Discount/Relief policy for 2022/23.

Councillors Fletcher, Hindle and Hore declared an interest in the next item of business and left the meeting.

Councillor S Hirst was voted in to take the chair for this item of business in the absence of both the Chair and Vice Chair.

VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION GRANTS 2022/23

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking committee to approve the allocation of voluntary organisation grants for 2022/23 as recommended by the working group and consider the amendments to the grant scheme criteria as suggested.

The Director of Resources outlined the scheme to committee and the recommendations the member working group were making having considered the applications made and ways in which to improve the scheme.

This included

- Making clear in the grant criteria that the scheme is available to support Voluntary Organisations only, and that this excludes parish and town councils unless they are acting as an accountable body for a voluntary organisation, and
- That the grant criteria be updated to include a condition that no single organisation would be allocated more than one third of the total grant fund available for that financial year.

With this in mind, the working group had recommended that transitional grant aid be applied to the Citizens Advice Bureau grant for 2022/23, equating to 50% of the difference between next year's grant and the value of the award given in 2021/22. The requirement for them to provide quarterly monitoring information would also be removed.

The Director of Resources also informed members that the working group recommended that they should meet again in September to review the 2022/23 grant allocations in light of the remaining budget available and the current economic pressures facing organisations such as high inflation and rising fuel costs.

Committee discussed the recommended grant allocations and expressed some concern about the cut to the grant for the Citizens Advice Bureau and the long term affect this might have on the essential service they provide.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Approve the allocation of grants as proposed by the voluntary organisation grants working group as set out in the report totalling £93,100.
2. Approve the amendments to the grant scheme criteria as set out in the report, and
3. Ask the working group when they meet again in September to reconsider the balance of monies for grant allocations that they look closely at the needs of the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Councillors Fletcher, Hindle and Hore returned to the meeting. Councillor Hore returned to the Chair.

TREASURY MANAGEMENT POLICIES AND PRACTICES

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking committee to approve and adopt the Treasury Management Policy Statement and Practices for 2022/23 that had been reviewed for approval by Council.

The document is reviewed on an annual basis to comply with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code. The Code identifies twelve areas where statements of treasury management practices should be developed to implement the full requirements of the Code. A number of updates in the document were highlighted accordingly.

*** RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Approve and formally adopt the Treasury Management Policies and Practices as outlined incorporating the
 - a. Treasury Management Key Principles
 - b. Treasury Management Policy Statement
 - c. Treasury Management Clauses
 - d. Treasury Management Practices and Schedules, and
2. Recommend to Council the Treasury Management Policies and Practices 2022/23

777

QUEEN'S JUBILEE

The Chief Executive submitted a report outlining the progress with the selection of projects to commemorate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

He reminded committee that they had already agreed to a Beacon Lighting on the Castle, to giving grants of £500 to each parish and a parade through Clitheroe.

He informed the committee that other schemes suggested included the creation of a walking trail around the Ribble Valley with appropriate way markers, planting 70 trees across the Ribble Valley on Council owned land and a commemorative rock in the Centre of the Kingdom (Dunsop Bridge).

Committee discussed the suggestions as well as highlighting the events some of the individual parishes were planning and asked that the idea of creating a Jubilee garden might continue to be pursued. It was also reported that an impressive avenue of trees had been planted on the Whitewell Estate.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Approve the recommendations of the task and finish group as outlined to commemorate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.
2. Agree to increase the budget to £20,000.

778

CAPITAL AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Director of Resources submitted a report seeking approval for the Council's Capital and Treasury Management Strategy for the 2022/23 financial year.

The Strategy reflected the linkage between asset management, the capital programme and treasury management activities and it was intended to set the framework for all aspects of the Council's capital expenditure including planning, management, prioritisation, funding, monitoring and outcomes.

It also provided the policy framework for the engagement of the council with financial markets in order to fund its capital programme, maintain the security of its cash balances and protect them from credit, liquidity and interest rate risk.

*** RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Recommend to Council the Capital and Treasury Management Strategy as set out in the report.

779 CHANGES TO STANDING ORDERS

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

A review takes place annually to ensure that the document is up to date as it contains the rules which govern the conduct and proceedings of the Council's meetings.

An amendment was proposed to Standing Order 13.9 to make clear that the effect of an amendment cannot be to negate the motion. This would be applied to both Council and committee meetings.

*** RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

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

780 LOCAL TAXATION WRITE OFFS

The Director of Resources submitted a report seeking committee's approval to write off business rates debts relating to seven businesses that had been dissolved.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve writing off £120,030.44 in Business Rates and £1,860.00 costs where it has not been possible to collect the amounts due.

781 DRAFT MEETING CYCLE 2022 - 23

The Chief Executive submitted a report outlining the proposed meeting cycle for the forthcoming municipal year 2022/23.

He informed committee that the date of the annual meeting in 2023 had been put back by two weeks to accommodate borough and parish elections in May 2023.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve the draft meeting cycle as outlined for ratification at the Annual meeting on 10 May 2022.

782 REFERENCE FROM HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE – PROPOSED REVISED LANDLORD TENANT GRANT POLICY AND INTRODUCTION OF A NEW GRANT FOR FIRST TIME BUYERS

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking committee to consider a recommendation from Health and Housing committee in respect of a proposed new First Time Buyers capital grant scheme, utilising resources from the existing Landlord/Tenant grant scheme.

A copy of the report considered by Health and Housing committee was included for members information, that gave details of the proposals to introduce an additional grant scheme available for first time buyers towards improvement of the energy efficiency of the property which includes a wide range of improvements and would be determined by the dwelling's Energy Performance Certificate.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve the request for a new capital scheme budget of £118,370 in respect of a new First Time Buyers capital grant scheme to be enabled by reducing the Landlord/Tenant Grant scheme by this amount.

783

REFERENCE FROM HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE - AFFORDABLE HOUSING COMMUTED SUMS

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking committee to consider a recommendation from Health and Housing committee in respect of an equity share option to enable residents of the borough to get a first step on the housing ladder which was similar to schemes provided by Central Government.

A copy of the report considered by Health and Housing committee was included for members information, that gave details of the options that were available to the Council in developing a scheme on equity share and gave principles of a proposed scheme policy.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve the request for a new capital scheme budget of £2,048,080 in respect of an equity share option to enable residents of the borough to get a first step on the housing ladder, funded from Section 106 monies (commuted sums).

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FINANCIAL REGULATIONS AND CONTRACT PROCEDURE RULES

The Director of Resources submitted a report informing committee that the Financial Regulations and Contract Procedure Rules had been reviewed. On this occasion there had been no changes or updates required

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REVENUE MONITORING 2021/22

The Director of Resources submitted a report informing committee of the position for the period April to February 2022 of this year's revised revenue budget as far as this committee was concerned.

The comparison between the actual and budgeted expenditure shows a total underspend of £588,209 to February 2022 of the financial year 2021/22. After allowing for transfers to/from earmarked reserves there was an underspend of £591,816. The majority of the variance is attributable to coronavirus response budgets which would be largely resolved by the end of the financial year as part of the year-end closedown period.

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CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2022/23

The Director of Resources submitted a report informing members of the schemes approved for inclusion in this committee's 2022/23 capital programme. There were six schemes approved totalling £335,480. Any slippage on the schemes in the 2021/22 capital programme would be reported to this committee.

787 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.

788 LEVELLING UP WHITE PAPER

The Chief Executive submitted a report for information covering the main elements of the recently published Levelling Up White Paper which sets out how the Government plans to devolve powers and funding to improve economic social health and wellbeing of residents across the County.

789 BWG MINS 29 NOVEMBER 2021 AND 24 JANUARY 2022

The minutes of the Budget working group meetings held on 29 November 2021 and 24 January 2022 were submitted for committee's information.

790 MINUTES OF ARG TASK AND FINISH GROUP - 1 FEBRUARY 2022 AND 28 FEBRUARY 2022

The minutes of the ARG task and finish group meetings held on 1 February 2022 and 28 February 2022 were submitted for committee's information.

791 MINUTES OF LONGRIDGE ASSETS WORKING GROUP - 23 AUGUST 2021 AND 3 MARCH 2022

The minutes of the Longridge Assets working group meetings held on 23 August 2021 and 3 March 2022 were submitted for committee's information.

792 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports from representatives on outside bodies.

793 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.

794 LOCAL TAXATION WRITE OFFS

The Director of Resources submitted a report requesting committee's approval to write off two cases of council tax debt one of which had been declared bankrupt and the other had received a debt relief order.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve writing off £3,021.46 of Council Tax debts where it has not been possible to collect the amount due.

The Chief Executive, Directors and committee clerk left the meeting.

REFERENCE FROM PERSONNEL COMMITTEE - PAY STRUCTURE WORKING GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The Director of Resources submitted a request from Personnel committee in respect of changes to the pay structure for the Chief Executive and Chief Officers. The request also asked committee to consider issues regarding outstanding annual leave and outstanding excess flexi that had been accrued by staff.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Approve the request for the additional budget in 2022/23 and 2023/24 in respect of Chief Executive and Chief Officer pay of £10,060 per annum, to be funded from the business rates growth earmarked reserve, in line with the recommendations from the initial pay line review. The costs in 2021/22 (£5,030) to be accommodated within overall staff turnover savings in that year, and
2. Approve the proposed expenditure in respect of leave and flexi-time balances, with this to be funded from Covid monies that the Council has received.

The meeting closed at 8.12 pm

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