

Minutes of Policy and Finance

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 21 June 2022, starting at 6.30 pm
Present: Councillor S Atkinson (Chair)

Councillors:

D Berryman	G Hibbert
S Bibby	J Hill
A Brown	M Hindle
L Edge	S Hore
S Fletcher	R Newmark
M French	D Peat

In attendance: Chief Executive, Director of Resources, Director of Community Services, Director of Economic Development and Planning and Head of Revenues and Benefits and Audit Manager

110 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillors K Horkin and R Thompson.

111 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING AND OF EMERGENCY COMMITTEE MEETINGS ON 8 MARCH 2022, 5 MAY 2022 AND 6 JUNE 2022

The minutes of the last meeting held on 29 March 2022 and of the Emergency committee meetings held on 8 March, 5 May and 6 June 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

Councillor S Fletcher declared an other registrable interest in Agenda Item 22 – Citizen’s Advice Bureau – request for financial assistance.

113 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

114 APPOINTMENT TO WORKING GROUPS

The Chief Executive submitted a report to consider the appointment of members to any working groups under the remit of this committee for the municipal year 2022/23.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve the continuance of the following working groups and their membership under the remit of this committee –

Voluntary Organisation Grants – Councillors S Atkinson, R Newmark, A Brown and S Fletcher

Budget Working Group – Councillors S Atkinson, S Hore, R Newmark, D Peat, A Brown, J Rogerson, J Hill and S Fletcher

Longridge Assets – Councillors R Thompson, J Clark, J Rogerson, S Hore, S Rainford and S Fletcher

Climate Change – Councillors D Berryman, J Clark, S Bibby, S Atkinson, J Hill, S Fletcher and R Thompson

115

COVID 19 ADDITIONAL RELIEF (CARF) UPDATE

The Director of Resources submitted a report updating committee on the Covid 19 Additional Relief Fund (CARF) that was announced by the Chancellor on 21 December 2021. A decision on next steps regarding granting relief to eligible applicants was required as well as what to do with the remaining funding.

The Government had issued guidance to local authorities detailing how the scheme should operate and how much each authority had been allocated. The allocation for Ribble Valley Borough Council was £1,239,191.

Members were reminded that they had agreed to open an initial application window for eligible businesses to apply which had closed on 28 February 2022. 33 applications had been received of which 5 had been rejected as they had already received full Small Business Rates Relief or the Expanded Retail Discount. Relief was awarded totalling £161,043.68

A second application window had been opened and all potentially eligible businesses invited to apply. A further 17 applications had been received, three of which had been rejected as they had already received full Small Business Rate Relief or was a duplicate application.

The Director of Resources suggested that each of the applicants should be awarded relief at an initial rate of 50% of the net rates payable for 2021/22 which would result in a total of £42,670.39 of CARF being granted. A third application window could then be opened with the view to bringing a final report to committee on 13 September to determine how to allocate the balance of the funding. Any funding that was not granted by 30 September 2022 would be returned to Central Government.

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 detailed in the report, and
2. Agree to open another application round.

116

CAPITAL OUTTURN 2021/22

The Director of Resources submitted a report on the capital programme outturn for this committee and to seek member approval for the slippage of some budget on one capital programme scheme from the 2021/22 financial year to the 2022/23 financial year.

She reported that four of the five schemes in the revised capital programme had been completed in-year with actual expenditure of £63,822 which was 90% Of the revised estimate budget. One scheme had not been completed and slippage of £7,020 had been requested to fund expenditure on that scheme in 2022/23.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve the slippage of £7,020 budget into the 2022/23 capital programme for the Replacement IT Equipment for Councillors scheme.

117

PROCUREMENT STRATEGY

The Director of Resources submitted a report seeking approval from committee for the new Procurement Strategy covering the period 2022/23 to 2024/25.

She informed committee that the current strategy had been produced many years ago and was outdated. The new strategy was a complete re-write and covered the same themes as the National Procurement Strategy for Local Government, namely Showing Leadership; Behaving Commercially and Achieving Community Benefits.

The strategy included a series of statements regarding the approach to procurement under the themes and how it related to other policies, along with a detailed action plan. This would be reviewed on an annual basis going forward.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve the new Procurement Strategy 2022/23 to 2024/25.

118

LOCAL TAXATION WRITE OFFS

The Director of Resources submitted a report requesting committee's approval to write off council tax and business rates debts where the company had been dissolved.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve writing off £3,463.36 in business rates with £60.00 costs and £2,988.59 of Council Tax Debts and £60.00 costs where it has not been possible to collect the amounts due.

119

REFERENCES FROM COMMITTEES

There were no references from committees.

120

REMODELLING OF RECEPTION AREA IN COUNCIL OFFICES - EXEMPTION TO CONTRACT PROCEDURE RULES

The Director of Community Services submitted a report informing committee of an approval of an exception to contract procedure rules and requesting approval of a new capital scheme in respect of the remodelling of the reception area in the council offices.

He informed committee that following an incident and subsequent concerns from members of staff regarding their safety, a decision had been made to adapt and improve the security screens in the reception area. Because of the urgency and importance of the piece of work, a request had been made to and approved by the Director of Resources and Head of Legal and Democratic Services for an exemption from normal contract procedure rules on this occasion and the contract had been awarded for the works.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve the new capital scheme for the remodelling of the reception area in the council offices at a cost of £13,500 to be funded from the repairs and maintenance earmarked reserve.

121 COVID 19 BUSINESS GRANTS PAID

The Director of Resources submitted a report for information on the total of covid 19 business grants paid by the council following the closure of the final grant scheme which amounted to almost £35m.

The report outlined the various grant headings and dates under which the monies had been paid.

122 COUNCIL TAX ENERGY REBATE UPDATE

The Director of Resources submitted a report for information regarding the progress with the Council Tax Energy Rebate. The Government had published guidance to billing authorities on how to administer the scheme. A funding total of £2,911,350 (£2,822,850 core scheme and £88,500 discretionary scheme) had been allocated to Ribble Valley Borough Council.

The report outlined some of the issues encountered in administering the scheme and the amounts that had been paid out so far to the residents of Ribble Valley. This equated to 87% of eligible residents.

123 OVERALL CAPITAL OUTTURN 2021/22

The Director of Resources submitted a report for information providing details of the capital programme outturn for all committees for 2021/22 financial year.

Actual expenditure on the Council's capital programme in 2021/22 was £893,321, which was 50.7% of the revised estimate budget. Of the twenty-three schemes in the programme, fourteen had been completed in-year and nine had not been completed by year-end including one on-going Housing Grant scheme. Budget slippage had been requested of £820,880 on the nine schemes not completed.

124 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.

125 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MONITORING 2022/23

The Director of Resources submitted a monitoring report for information on the treasury management activities for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 May 2022. This included temporary investments, interest in investments, local government bonds agency, borrowing, borrowing requirements, prudential indicators, approved organisations, recent events and exposure to risk.

126 MINUTES OF WORKING GROUPS

(i) Minutes of Budget Working Group 10 February 2022

RESOLVED: The minutes of the Budget working group held on 10 February 2022 were

submitted for committee's information.

127 MINUTES OF LONGRIDGE ASSETS WORKING GROUP - 28 MARCH 2022

The minutes of the Longridge Assets working group held on 28 March 2022 were submitted for committee's information.

128 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports from representatives on outside bodies.

129 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That by virtue of the next items of business being exempt information under Paragraphs 2 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be now excluded from the meeting.

130 HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report asking committee to consider the allocation of the Household Support Fund which had been extended to 30 September 2022 with a further allocation of £120,000 passported to RVBC from LCC.

To provide consistency across districts a fixed amount of £90 would be paid to pensioners in receipt of Council Tax Support as requested by LCC. The remaining allocation would be used to adopt other priorities identified by LCC.

She reminded members that administering these grants on behalf of LCC was very time and resource intensive.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve the distribution of the new Housing Support Fund as follows

- a) A payment of £90 offered to pensioners in receipt of Council Tax Support as of 1 April 2022 following the revised position from LCC, and
- b) £857 be passported to the Ribble Valley Food Bank as match funding to money raised by Stones Young Estate Agents.

131 COUNCIL OWNED ASSETS

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report informing committee of the current position regarding several council owned assets.

She reminded members that at their meeting on 22 February 2022 committee had resolved to market the former Physiotherapy centre for rent. Since then, an enquiry had been received as to whether the Council would consider selling the property.

Members discussed the request and other options available.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Agree that the Council retain full ownership of the former Physiotherapy Centre and continue to market it for rent.

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

132

CITIZEN'S ADVICE BUREAU - REQUEST FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The Chief Executive submitted a report asking committee to consider a request for further financial assistance from the Citizen's Advice Bureau.

The report outlined their financial position and the need for further financial assistance required for them to continue operating beyond December 2022.

Members discussed the request in detail.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Ask the Voluntary Grant working group to consider this funding request in September when the balance of the monies for the grant allocations is reconsidered;
2. Request the Chief Executive to inform the Citizen's Advice Bureau that funding from RVBC already given will continue until March 2023 with no request for claw back of any funds should the bureau close;
3. Ask for further information from the bureau regarding
 - their business plans beyond March 2023 should more grant monies be made available,
 - any fundraising activities/applications they are exploring,
 - their opening hours and face to face appointments

Councillor S Fletcher returned to the meeting.

133

LOCAL TAXATION WRITE OFFS

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking for committee's approval to write off business rate and council tax debts where two owners were deceased and one had a debt relief order.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve writing off £4,707.72 in Council Tax and £300.00 costs and £22,706.52 in business rates and £60.00 costs where it has not been possible to collect the amounts due.

134

TOWN CENTRE HIGHWAY WORKS

A report updating members on suggested highway works within Clitheroe Town Centre was submitted for information.

Members noted that the LCC believe the town centre to be of a serviceable standard and asked for costing details of the scheme recently carried out in Whalley.

The meeting closed at 7.58 pm

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