

Minutes of Policy and Finance

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 8 November 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	K Horkin
M French	

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

Also in attendance: Councillor T Austin

461 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillors R Newmark, D Peat and R Thompson.

462 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 September 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Updates were given on the following minutes:

M318 – the DLUHC had confirmed that any balance on the CARF relief could not be retained.

M339 – the CAB had accepted the offer of grant from the Council

M341 – a valuation had been received for the Over 60's club in Longridge of £10,000pa and the premises was now being marketed.

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

Councillor K Horkin declared ownership of businesses in Clitheroe.

464 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

465 COUNCIL TAX ENERGY REBATE UPDATE

The Director of Resources submitted a report updating members regarding progress with the Council Tax Energy Rebate scheme.

Committee were reminded that the Government had announced a package of support in recognition of the growing cost of living pressures.

All eligible council taxpayers had now been paid the £150 payment ie 18,580 taxpayers totalling £2,787,000. 93.4% of which had been paid direct to their bank account with the others being credited to their council tax account.

A discretionary scheme had also been agreed to provide a £150 payment to Local Council Tax Support recipients in bands E to H on 1 April 2022 and to award a top up of £30.00 to Local Council Tax Support recipients in all council tax bands.

It was now suggested that the 1 April 2022 eligibility date be amended to 1 October 2022 to as there had been many changes to the eligible households during this time. Using the revised date meant that support would go to those households who were experiencing the greatest difficulties at this time. It would also allow an increase to the top up payment from £30.00 to £35.00 to all LTCS recipients.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE

1. Note that 100% of eligible households have received payment in relation to the core council tax energy rebate scheme, and
2. Approve the change in the date for eligibility for the discretionary scheme from 1 April 2022 to 1 October 2022 and the increase in top up from £30.00 to £35.00 for eligible households.

466

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

The Chief Executive submitted a report seeking committee's approval of the updated Whistleblowing Policy 2022.

CIPFA recommend that 'leaders in public sector organisations have a responsibility to embed effective standards for countering fraud and corruption in their organisations. This supports good governance and demonstrates effective financial stewardship and strong public financial management'.

The amendments were intended to ensure that the Policy reflects best practice, and that there was clear oversight and recording by the Monitoring Officer. This would also ensure that investigations would be undertaken correctly and in a timely way. The policy would be reviewed and approved annually going forward.

*** RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE

Endorse the Whistleblowing Policy as outlined and recommend its adoption to Council.

467

LOCAL TAXATION WRITE OFFS

The Director of Resources submitted a report seeking committee's approval to write off Business Rate debts.

There was one case where the company had been liquidated.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE

Approve the writing off total £8,182.13 in business rates with £60.00 costs where it has not been possible to collect the amount due.

468

SUNDRY DEBTOR WRITE OFFS

The Director of Resources submitted a report seeking committee's approval to write off a sundry debtor invoice where the debt was considered irrecoverable.

There was one case where the company had been dissolved.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE

Approve the write off of a sundry debt of £785.00 plus costs of £437.02 totalling £1,222.02

469

ELECTIONS ACT UPDATE

The Chief Executive submitted a report for information on the provisions of the Elections Act 2022.

The Act introduced several significant changes which will apply to UK parliamentary elections in Great Britain, local election in England and Police and Crime Commissioner elections in England and Wales.

The provisions were expected to be in place for the May 2023 elections and would make it easier for people with disabilities to vote, have a requirement for voters at polling stations to show photographic identification and change the counting system for mayoral elections from supplementary vote to First Past the Post.

The timescales for implementation were very tight and to guide Returning Offices with some guidance, the Electoral Commission had published a document to enable preparations to start.

A further report would be brought to committee in due course.

The Chief Executive also reported upon the outcome of the Parliamentary Boundary Review in that the proposal was for the Ribble Valley council area to be split in two with part of the borough being included in with Pendle district. A response had been invited by no later than 5 December 2022.

Members discussed this issue and felt that a response should be made but that councillors should have the opportunity to put their views forward in debate first.

Councillor Austin was given permission to speak on this item.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE

Agree to set up a working group comprising of Councillors S Atkinson, S Fletcher, M Hindle and D Peat to meet prior to a Special Policy & Finance committee on Tuesday 29 November 2022.

470

CYBER SUPPORT FUND

The Director of Resources submitted a report for information informing committee of funding that had been secured from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DULHC) in respect of Cyber Security.

Following an application process, the council had been successful in securing funding of £125,000 which would be used to further support our cyber resilience with new projects as the funding cannot be used to support ongoing maintenance, licensing

costs or active projects. This spend would be brought in under the revised estimate and may result in a mix of both additional revenue and capital expenditure.

471 REVENUE MONITORING 2022/23

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

The comparison between actual and budgeted expenditure showed an underspend of £366,348 for the April to September period of the financial year 2022/23. After allowing for transfers to/from earmarked reserves there was an underspend of £321,055.

472 OVERALL REVENUE MONITORING 2022/23

The Director of Resources submitted a report for information on the overall revenue position for the current financial year for the half year position up to the end of September 2022.

There was an overall net underspend to the end of September 2022 of £457,281. However, this was skewed by income and expenditure on covid response cost centres, where the variance would resolve itself as the year progresses as grant funds were either paid out or allocated to specific Covid-19 response activities. The variance for the usual service cost centres was an underspend of £367,174.

It was also noted that the staff pay award had yet to be processed with the overall likely impact to be 7% rather than the 2% budget allowed.

473 CAPITAL MONITORING 2022/23

The Director of Resources submitted a report for information on the progress on this committee's 2022/23 capital programme for the period to the end of September 2022.

At the end of September 2022 £19,558 had been spent or committed. This was 5.5% of the total approved capital programme budget for this committee.

Of the eight schemes in the capital programme at the end of September 2022, four schemes were currently on-track to be completed in-year, one scheme would not be completed in-year and three schemes were either uncertain of being completed or were unlikely to be completed in-year.

Members requested that every effort was made to ensure that schemes were completed in this financial year and asked if capacity within the IT section was an issue.

474 OVERALL CAPITAL MONITORING 2022/23

The Director of Resources submitted a report for information on the progress on the Council's approved 2022/23 capital programme for the period to the end of September 2022.

At the end of September 2022 £899,313 had been spent or committed. This was 13.9% of the overall capital programme budget for 2022/23.

Of the 39 schemes in the capital programme at the end of September 2022 five schemes were complete, sixteen schemes were expected to be completed in-year,

seven schemes were uncertain of being completed or unlikely to be completed, six schemes would not be completed, one scheme had been removed from the capital programme, one scheme was on hold and three schemes were on-going housing-related grants schemes.

Members expressed concern regarding progress with the overall capital programme and asked that the Budget Working Group consider this further.

475 INSURANCE RENEWALS 2022/23

The Director of Resources submitted a report informing committee of the insurance renewals for the period 20 June 2022 to 19 June 2023 and providing a summary of the claims made and settled.

The Council's insurances had been renewed under the terms of the five-year contract effective from June 2018. The renewal premiums were highlighted for the various policies which had risen by 16.81% on the previous year's figure. The claims history was also outlined classified by category.

476 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 30 September 2022. This included temporary investments, interest on investments, prospects on interest rates, local government bonds agency, borrowing, borrowing requirements, prudential indicators, approved organisations, recent events and exposure to risk.

477 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 benefit performance, including benefits processing times and overpayment recovery.

478 MINUTES OF WORKING GROUPS

There were no minutes of working groups.

479 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports from representatives on outside bodies.

480 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That by virtue of the next item of business being exempt information under Paragraph 1, 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.

481 RECRUITMENT OF DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

The Chief Executive submitted a report regarding the appointment of a sub-committee to interview candidates and oversee the appointment of a new Director of Community Services.

He outlined the recruitment process and included the job description and person specification for information. He also outlined the timetable for the recruitment.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE

1. Agree the recruitment process for the Director of Community Services, and
2. Appoint a sub-committee comprising of Councillors S Atkinson, S Hore, S Fletcher and S Bibby to oversee the selection of the new Director.

482

RURAL SHARED PROSPERITY FUND

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report updating members on the Rural England Prosperity Fund.

She reminded members that on 3 September 2022 the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) was launched. The fund was complementary to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and was a top up available to eligible local authorities in England.

The Rural Fund was intended to fund capital projects for small businesses and community infrastructure and was integrated into the UKSPF. To access the fund there was a template to complete as an addendum to the UKSPF investment plan.

The Director of Economic Development and Planning referred to the LEADER programme and lessons learned from that process. She also informed members of the partnership group she had convened to discuss suggested interventions that the Council might support.

Members felt it was important to start planning projects in anticipation of receiving the funding as timescales would be tight.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE

1. Confirm the following interventions are supported – paragraph 8.3, 8.4, 8.5, 8.6, 8.7 and 8.8 outlined in the report.
2. Note the participants of the Partnership Group which will be utilised to consider possible suitable options for the funding;
3. Authorise the Director of Economic Development and Planning to submit the addendum to the UKSPF information sheet as outlined based upon members agreed interventions and a suitable spend profile, and
4. Agree to include within the remit of the working group convened to consider our UKSPF allocation this additional funding stream. The Group will make recommendations back to Policy and Finance committee.

483

HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report asking committee to consider the allocation of the Household Support Fund (HSF).

She reminded members of the two previous Household Support Funds in November 2021 and March 2022 where funding had been received via LCC for allocation and award to recipients.

She now informed committee that another extension had been made to the fund running from October 2022 to March 2023. Once again LCC had confirmed that £120,000 would be passported to RVBC for allocation and distribution.

The areas of eligible spend were outlined in respect of this scheme and the suggested ways in which to allocate it using an application process and offer of food vouchers.

Members asked that the scheme be publicised as widely as possible so that those eligible could apply.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE

Agree to the HSF3 being distributed via an application process to low earning households in the Borough in need of assistance as set out within the report.

484

LOCAL TAXATION WRITE OFFS

The Director of Resources submitted a report seeking committee's approval to write off certain Council Tax debts relating to individuals.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE

Approve writing off £4,435.31 of Council Tax debts plus £120.00 costs where it has not been possible to collect the amount due.

485

SUNDRY DEBTOR WRITE OFFS

The Director of Resources submitted a report seeking committee's approval to write off four sundry debtor invoices where the debts were considered irrecoverable.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE

Approve the write off of four sundry debts totalling £13,587.45

The meeting closed at 7.50 pm

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