

Minutes of Policy and Finance

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 24 January 2023, starting at 6.30 pm
Present: Councillor S Atkinson (Chair)

Councillors:

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

In attendance: Chief Executive, Director of Resources, Director of Economic Development and Planning, Head of Revenues and Benefits and Senior Accountant

625 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillors: R. Thompson, D. Berryman, K. Horkin and R. Newmark.

626 DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY, OTHER REGISTRABLE AND NON-REGISTRABLE INTERESTS.

Councillor K Horkin declared ownership of businesses in Clitheroe.

627 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

628 NEW CORPORATE STRATEGY 2023-2027 & PERFORMANCE REPORTING

The Director of Resources submitted a report updating members on the proposals for developing a new Corporate Strategy for 2023-2027 and the reporting of related key performance indicators (KPIs).

Members were reminded that the Corporate Strategy sets out the strategic direction of the Council for any given period, providing a focus to ensure that the services the Council deliver meet the needs of the communities. The 2019-2023 Strategy had a four-year scope but was reviewed annually to ensure that it continued to reflect the changes to priorities that occur over time.

The report noted that following the local elections taking place in May 2023 the Council will develop a new Strategy, which will have a four-year life span, covering 2023-2027.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Agreed to develop a new Corporate Strategy for 2023-2027 after the local elections, taking into account:
 - a. Findings from the 2023 Peoples' Survey, and
 - b. 2021/22 year-end performance data.
2. Agreed to the performance reporting as set out in the report.

REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES 2023/24

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 2023.

Members were reminded that:

- The annual review of the Council's fees and charges had been undertaken as part of the budget setting process for the forthcoming 2023/24 financial year.
- The Budget Working Group met in August 2022 to consider in detail the council's three-year budget forecast for the financial years 2023/24 – 2025/26.
- In light of a considerable forecasted budget gap a number of recommendations were approved by this Committee at the September 2022 meeting, including that fees and charges for the 2023/24 financial year should be increased by the rate of the September CPI.
- For this committee, a minimum 10.1% increase in fees and charges would generate additional income of £19,820 when compared to the current year base budget for those income streams included within the review.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approved the proposed fees and charges as set out in Annex 1 to the Report.

REVISED REVENUE BUDGET 2022/23

The Director of Resources submitted a report seeking approval of a revised revenue budget for 2022/23

Members were reminded that:

- The original estimate for this current financial year was set in March 2022 and that there can be numerous variations to the budget that come to attention of the Council as the year progresses, particularly through the budget monitoring process.
- At this time of year, the Council revise the estimates for the current financial year to predict the likely outturn. In essence the Revised Estimate becomes the Council's latest forecast for the outturn on the current financial year's budget. This also assists the Council in preparing the original estimate for the coming financial year.

The report noted that the:

- Council had recognised earlier in the year that it was facing significant increases in costs due to inflation and pay increases. For this committee this extra cost was then estimated at £240,330. The Original Estimate was therefore restated from £2,431,330 to £2,671,660.
- The difference between the Revised and Adjusted Original Estimate is a decrease in net expenditure of £46,750 after allowing for transfers to and from earmarked reserves. This means that the total movement from the true Original Estimate to the Revised Estimate is an increase of £450, or an increase of £193,580 after movements in earmarked reserves.

The Director of Resources highlighted the main budget variations.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Agreed the revenue revised estimate for 2022/23.

631

ORIGINAL REVENUE BUDGET 2023/24

The Director of Resources submitted a report seeking approval of the draft revenue budget for 2023/24, for consideration at a Special Policy and Finance Committee.

Members were reminded that:

- The budget forecast was presented to this Committee in September 2022.
- The forecast considered the Council's knowledge at that time as it related to Covid19, changes to key funding streams, the cost-of-living crisis and the fast-moving rate of inflation.
- In September 2022 the forecast predicted an overall budget gap of; £1,040,966 in 2023/24, £1,394,296 in 2024/25 and £2,412,914 in 2025/26

The report set out:

- The provisional grant settlement.
- The budget process and how the estimates were prepared.
- The draft revenue budget for 2023/24 and the main variations.

The Director of Resources explained for this committee:

The difference between the Original Estimate 2023/24 and Adjusted Original Estimate 2022/23 is a further increase in net expenditure of £203,240 after allowing for transfers to and from earmarked reserves. This means that the total movement from the true Original Estimate 2022/23 to the Original Estimate 2023/24 is £599,610, or £443,570 after movements in earmarked reserves. The Director of Resources commented on the major budget variations.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approved the revenue original estimate for 2023/24 and agreed to submit this to a special meeting of this Committee.

632

REVISED CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2022/23

The Director of Resources submitted a report seeking approval of the 2022/23 revised estimate for this Committee's Capital Programme.

Members were reminded that:

- Six capital schemes for this Committee's original estimate budget, totalling £335,480, had been approved by the Policy and Finance Committee and Full Council at their meetings in February 2022 and March 2022 respectively.
- The above included two new schemes for 2022/23 and four scheme budgets that had been moved from the 2021/22 capital programme to the 2022/23 capital programme.

Members were also reminded that in addition to the original estimate budget above, the following budget changes had been made so far in 2022/23:

- One capital scheme was not completed by 31 March 2022 and had unspent budget available at that date.
- The total unspent budget of £7,020, known as slippage, was moved into the 2022/23 capital programme budget, after approval by this Committee in June 2022.
- One additional capital scheme with a budget of £13,500 was approved by this Committee in June 2022.
- As a result of the above, the total approved budget for this Committee's capital programme of eight schemes would be £356,000. This was set out in Annex 1 to the report.

The report noted that:

- The proposed revised estimate for this Committee's 2022/23 capital programme was £88,920 for five schemes, which was a reduction of £267,080 from the total approved capital budget.
- It was recommended that budgets on three schemes, totalling £256,600, should be moved to the 2023/24 financial year.
- At the end of December 2022 £81,308 had been spent or committed and that this was 91.4% of the revised estimate capital programme budget for this Committee.
- Of the five schemes in this Committee's proposed revised capital programme, three schemes are complete and two schemes are expected to be completed in-year.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Approved the 2022/23 revised estimate of £88,920 for this Committee's capital programme, as set out in Annex 1 to the Report.
2. Approved the move of the following capital scheme budgets from 2022/23 to 2023/24:
 - Brookfoot Footbridge, Ribchester – Replacement of Bridge, £110,000.
 - ICT Infrastructure Refresh, £116,600.

Network Infrastructure, £30,000.

633

CAPITAL PROGRAMME REVIEW AND NEW BIDS 2023/24 TO 2027/28

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking members to consider the future capital programme for this Committee, covering the period 2023/24 to 2027/28.

Members were reminded that:

- The Council usually operates a five-year capital programme, but only a three-year capital programme for 2022/23 to 2024/25 was approved last year. This was due to the Council awaiting the outcome of the Government's fair funding review before committing to setting a longer-term five-year capital programme.

- Committees had however submitted capital scheme bids for 2025/26 to 2026/27 as part of last year's capital programme review.
- This year, the aim had been to return to a five-year capital programme, covering the period 2023/24 to 2027/28. Therefore, Heads of Service had been asked to review the capital schemes already approved for 2023/24 to 2024/25, review any previously submitted capital scheme bids for 2025/26 to 2026/27; and submit new capital scheme bids for 2027/28.

The report noted that:

- The proposed amendments to the previously approved capital programme would increase the capital programme by £12,720.
- If all reviewed bids from the 2021 bidding round and those from the 2022 bidding round were approved, this would increase the proposed capital programme for this committee by £534,300.
- If all amendments and bids were to be approved, this would result in a proposed capital programme for 2023/24 to 2027/28 for this Committee of fourteen schemes, totalling £753,300.

Members discussed several of the new schemes being proposed.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Considered and proposed a future 5-year capital programme for this Committee's services of £753,300 for onward recommendation to the Special Policy and Finance Committee meeting for the period 2023/24 to 2027/28, based on:

- The proposals included in the report; and
- Any capital bid suggestions and amendments that members wished to make, of which there were none.

634

RETURNING OFFICER FEES FOR BOROUGH AND PARISH ELECTIONS 2023

The Chief Executive submitted a report seeking members agreement to the adoption of the Returning Officers' Scale of Fees in connection with the Borough and Parish Council Elections taking place on 4 May 2023 and any other local elections or referenda that might arise in 2023/24.

Members were reminded that:

- The Representation of the People Act 1983 requires each Council to appoint an officer of the authority as Returning Officer to undertake various statutory duties in relation to election procedures.
- The Council must provide the Returning Officer with the necessary resources to enable efficient and lawful delivery of the elections.
- The Returning Officer for Ribble Valley Borough Council is the Chief Executive.

The Report noted that:

- The Council's overall budget for the Borough and Parish Council elections on 4 May 2023 is £180,000. This does not include the additional costs arising from the introduction of Voter ID for which the Council will receive new Burdens Funding.
- The actual cost of the Elections will ultimately depend on the number of contested seats.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Agreed the Returning Officers' Scale of Fees for 2023/24 Borough and Parish Elections as set out in Section 4 of the Report.

635

MEMBERS ALLOWANCES

The Director of Resources submitted a report seeking Committee's approval for the constitution of an Independent Remuneration Panel to review the Members' Allowance Scheme.

Members were reminded that:

- The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 required that the Council make a scheme ("Scheme") for the payment of Members' Allowances (Regulations").
- The Council's current Scheme came into effect on 19 May 2019 for a period of 4 years. The Council must therefore review and agree to make a further scheme prior to that date.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Approved the appointment of the proposed Panel as set out in paragraph 3.3 of the Report.
2. Approved payment of reasonable travel expenses to members of the Panel, arising from their attendance at meetings of the Panel.

636

ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING POLICY

The Director of Resources submitted a report asking Members to consider and approve the recently fully reviewed and revised Anti-Money Laundering Policy.

Members were reminded that:

- The Anti-Money Laundering Policy was originally developed from best practice guidance issued by CIPFA and was first produced in November 2010.
- Since November 2010 there have been several revisions to reflect changing regulations.

The Report noted that latest proposed version of the policy, represented a substantial rewrite of the policy.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approved the Anti-Money Laundering Policy as set out at Annex 1 of the Report.

637

CORPORATE DEBT POLICY

The Director of Resources submitted a Report seeking agreement for a revision to the Council's Corporate Debt Policy (CDP).

Members were reminded that:

- The Council is required to collect debts across several different departments.

- These debts can be in relation to a variety of services, ranging from Business Rates, Council Tax and rent for both commercial and residential properties.

The Report noted that:

The Council had made some changes to the policy to correct minor errors, but the changes did not constitute a material impact on the policy.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approved the Policy attached at Annex 1 to the Report, with minor amendments.

638

LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2023/24

The Director of Resources submitted a Report updating Members on the introduction of the Government's Council Tax Support Fund for 2023/24 and seeking approval of the Council's Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) Scheme for 2023/24.

The Report noted that the Council are required to adopt a Local Council Tax Support Scheme each year as part of the budget setting process.

The report also set out suggestions on how the recently announced Council Tax Support Fund could be used.

The Council are not proposing any significant changes to their scheme for 2023/24 except for those that will keep it in line with the Housing Benefit Scheme and increase applicable amounts and premiums etc.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. The Committee noted the £55,503 allocation from Government for the Council Tax Support Fund 2023/24 and approved the allocation of up to £45 to each household in receipt of Local Council Tax Support where liability is not nil.
2. ****To recommend to Full Council our Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2023/24 with minor changes to keep it in line with the Housing Benefit Scheme and uprate applicable amounts and premiums etc ****

639

REVENUES DISCRETIONARY DISCOUNT/RELIEF POLICY

The Director of Resources submitted a report seeking agreement to an updated Revenues Discretionary Discount/Relief policy.

Members were reminded that:

- Local Authorities had the power to grant discretionary Council Tax and Business Rates discounts/reliefs.
- The Covid-19 pandemic and cost of living crisis had made significant changes in this area, and it was therefore necessary to review the Council's current policy.

The report noted that the Council had made amendments to the policy to cover the additional support provided by the Government to recipients of LCTS in 2023/24, the extension and increase to 75% of Retail Hospitality and Leisure Relief for 2023/24 and the extension of SSB relief for 2023/24.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Agreed the changes to the Revenues Discretionary Discount/Relief Policy for 2023/24.

640

ENERGY BILLS SUPPORT SCHEME ALTERNATIVE FUNDING AND ALTERNATIVE FUEL PAYMENTS

The Director of Resources submitted a Report updating Members on the alternative support for household energy bills announced by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) in December 2022 and seeking approval of how the Council would assist BEIS in getting essential support to Ribble Valley residents.

Members were reminded that:

- The Government committed to providing support to consumers with their energy costs during the winter via the Energy Bills Support Scheme (EBSS) and the Energy Price Guarantee (EPG)
- The Government support is primarily delivered directly as a credit to electricity bills and as a reduction to the unit cost of electricity and gas.
- Around one million households across the UK would miss out on EBSS as they do not directly contract with an electricity supplier. They would instead qualify for £400 assistance via the Energy Bills Support Scheme Alternative Funding (EBSSAF).
- In addition, the Government had announced the Alternative Fuel Payments (AFP) for households that use fuels other than gas to heat their homes.
- On 6 December 2022 BEIS provided an update to Local Authorities setting out what the Authorities role would be in getting these payments to eligible households.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Noted the additional work required to administer these payments for BEIS and to delegate to the Director of Resources to instigate payments once further detail is provided by BEIS.
2. Approved the purchase of the NEC Citizens Access Revenues module to help reduce the administrative burden on the Finance and Revenues teams.
3. Noted that we will have a role in delivering AFP but further detail has not yet been forthcoming.

641

UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a Report updating Members on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Members were reminded that:

- On 13th April 2022 the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) was launched by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities.

- The Fund would provide £2.6 billion of new funding for local investment by March 2025, with all areas of the UK receiving an allocation from the Fund via a funding formula rather than a competition. Ribble Valley's conditional allocation was £1,967,754 over a three-year funding period.
- On 5th December 2022 the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) confirmed that the Council's Investment Plan had been accepted.
- The Secretary of State had allocated funding for 2022/23 with indicative allocations for the further two financial years up to and including 2024/25.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Confirmed their agreement to an exemption to our contract procedure rules in terms of the Rail Feasibility Work.
2. Noted the proposed scheme for the Mardale Changing Room refurbishment scheme and estimated cost.
3. Confirmed their agreement to utilising part of this year's UKSPF allocation to resurface and mark out the car park at Mardale.
4. Confirmed their agreement to an exemption to our contract procedure rules in terms of the Business support for net zero transition & decarbonisation project.
5. Confirmed they would like officers to investigate the feasibility of installing electric vehicle charging points within our village car parks.

642

AMENDMENT TO COMMITTEE MEETING SCHEDULE

The Director of Resources submitted a report seeking Members approval and recommendation of a change to the Council's Committee's meeting dates.

The Report noted that the closing date of Councillor nominations is at 4pm on 4 April 2023 and the work checking the nominations is likely to take a considerable amount of time that evening. It was proposed therefore that the date for Policy and Finance Committee be brought forward a week to 28 March 2023 and that Licensing Committee be brought forward a week to 21 March 2023 to accommodate this.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

****Approved and agreed to recommend to Full Council that the date for Policy and Finance Committee be amended from 4 April 2023 to 28 March 2023.****

643

LANCASHIRE 2050

The Chief Executive submitted a Report informing members on progress with the Lancashire 2050 Strategic Plan.

Members were reminded that:

- The report presents progress made since January 2022, when the county council, together with Lancashire's 14 District and Unitary Councils considered and supported the proposal to develop a long-term Strategic Plan for Lancashire.
- The Report set out the general principles and high-level priorities contained in a strategic framework for Lancashire, known as "Lancashire 2050".
- This report also set out the continuing commitment to ensure that there continue to be opportunities for all the partner authorities to contribute to and influence thematic plans, including identifying specific schemes and activities.

644 OMBUDSMAN REPORT

The Chief Executive submitted a report informing Members of Local Government Ombudsman ("LGO") compliance outcome.

Members were informed that:

- Following a report to Committee on 27 September 2023, training had as agreed been provided to CMT and all Heads of Services by an external training provider in two workshops on 18 October 2022 and 8 November 2022.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services provided training to officers in each Directorate on 14,15,17 & 24 November 2022. The completion of this training was reported to the LGO on 24 November 2022. On 5 December 2022 the LGO responded welcoming the action the Council has taken following the report and that the compliance outcome would be recorded as "Remedy complete and satisfied"

645 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MONITORING 2022/23

The Director of Resources submitted a Monitoring Report showing the Council's treasury management activities for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 December 2022.

Members were reminded that:

- The Council's approach to treasury management is set out in its 'Treasury Management Policies and Practices' document which governs the way that investments and cashflows are managed.
- The Policy is reviewed annually to ensure continued compliance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Treasury Management Code of Practice.
- Treasury Management Policies and Practices were reviewed in advance of the 2022/23 financial year and were approved by this committee in March 2022 prior to full council in April 2022

646 REVENUES AND BENEFITS GENERAL REPORT

The Director of Resources submitted a report informing Members of debts outstanding for business rates, council tax and sundry debtors. The report also updated Members on benefits performance, including benefits processing times and overpayment recovery.

647 COUNCIL TAX BASE 2023/24

The Director of Resources submitted a report informing members on the Council's Taxbase for 2023/24.

Members were reminded that the:

- 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.
- To calculate the tax base for an area, the number of dwellings in each Council tax band is adjusted to take account of any discounts, premiums or exemptions.
- The resulting figure for each band is 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 is calculated. These are then multiplied by the authority's estimated collection rate for the year.
- 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.

648 MINUTES OF WORKING GROUPS

Minutes of the following Working Groups were provided to members for information.

- Climate Change Working Group

Budget Working Group

649 CLIMATE CHANGE WORKING GROUP - 5 APRIL 2022, 21 JULY 2022 AND 29 SEPTEMBER 2022

These minutes were provided for information.

(i) Minutes of Budget Working 25 August 2022 and 29 November 2022

RESOLVED: These minutes were provided for information.

650 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports from representatives on outside bodies.

651 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 were excluded from the meeting.

652 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS TWO MEETINGS AND EMERGENCY COMMITTEE DATED 29 NOVEMBER 2022

The minutes of the meetings held on 8 November, 29 November and the Emergency Committee also held on the 29 November were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

653 COUNCIL OWNED ASSETS

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report informing Members of the current position regarding Council owned assets and seeking approval to dispose of the assets. The report included an update on the offers that had been received to lease the former Over 60's club building in Longridge.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Agree that the property at 16/18 Lowergate, Clitheroe be advertised on the open market for sale with an asking price of £200,000 and for the Chief Executive to agree a suitable sale price.
2. Agree that the former Over 60's club be leased to Tails of The Town Pet Shop on a 10-year lease on the terms reported.

654 LOCAL TAXATION WRITE OFFS

The Director of Resources submitted a Report seeking approval to write off Council tax debts.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE

Approved writing off £3,045.65 in Council Tax and £120.00 costs where it has not been possible to collect the amounts due.

655 HR DATA RETENTION POLICY - REFERENCE FROM PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

The Committee agreed to consider the request from Personnel Committee as an urgent item. The Director of Resources submitted a report asking Members to consider a request from that Committee for a supplementary estimate in respect of temporary staffing to undertake a project to ensure that all HR files are compliant with Data Protection, digitised and stored appropriately.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approved a supplementary estimate of £17,000 on the revenue budget for 2022/23 for temporary staffing to undertake a project to ensure that all HR files are compliant with Data Protection, digitised and stored appropriately, over a six-month period, to be funded from the Business Rates Growth Earmarked Reserve.

The meeting closed at 8.07 pm

If you have any queries on these minutes please contact the committee clerk, Jenny Martin 01200 413214 olwen.heap@ribblevalley.gov.uk.