

Minutes of Council

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 25 April 2023, starting at 6.30 pm
Present: Councillor S Hirst (Chair)

Councillors:

T Austin	M Hindle
J Alcock	S Hore
S Atkinson	K Horkin
R Bennett	G Mirfin
D Berryman	R Newmark
D Birtwhistle	D O'Rourke
A Brown	S O'Rourke
I Brown	D Peat
S Brunskill	S Rainford
S Carefoot	M Robinson
J Clark	J Rogerson
L Edge	J Schumann
R Elms	G Scott
S Farmer	R Sherras
S Fletcher	R Thompson
M French	R Walsh
J Hill	

In attendance: Chief Executive, Director of Economic Development and Planning, Director of Resources, Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Principal Communications Officer

Also in attendance: Councillors

929 PRAYERS

The Mayor's Chaplain, Reverend Liz McLean opened the meeting with prayers.

930 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillors S Bibby, B Buller, A Humphries and R Thompson

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

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary, other registrable or non-registrable interests.

932 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SESSION

There was no public participation.

933 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

934

MAYORAL COMMUNICATIONS

The Mayor reported on a wide range of events that he had attended since the last meeting.

As this was his last meeting, he thanked people for their support, goodwill and friendship during his year of office and made particular thanks to the Mayor's Attendants, his Chaplain and to the Council Officers. The Mayor gave his personal thoughts and advice for the next Mayor, to take pride in the community, Town Borough, county and country and in the traditions of democratic tolerance and freedom. His advice was to use the Mayoral office to support and enhance the lives of citizens and residents.

935

LONG SERVICE AWARDS

The Mayor made a presentation to the Arts Development Officer, Katherine Rodgers, who had achieved 25 years' service with the Council. The Mayor highlighted many of Katherine's achievements over the years and thanked her for her commitment to the Council and her dedicated work over the years.

The Mayor presented a retiring gift and plaque to Councillor R Sherras in recognition of his service to the Council of more than 24 years.

It was noted that there would be a presentation in the Council Chamber the following day for Councillor R Thompson upon his retirement, also after more than 24 years service.

936

LEADER'S REPORT

The Leader provided a summary of the Council's term in office. He thanked all Councillors, in particular those who were stepping down and those who had passed away.

The Leader noted that in May 2019 a key priority was to rebuild relationships between Councillors and Council staff, and this has been a success. The Council is strong with mutual respect and a focus on the local communities, and this is an achievement to be proud of.

The Leader reminded Members that in 2019, Council Tax was frozen for a band D Property at £150.69 and the Council's revenue budget was £7.95million. Unfortunately, predominantly because of inflation, the Revenue Budget this year is £9.7million, which is a 22% increase. The good news for Ribble Valley residents is that Council Tax in this term has only increased by 7%. The Council has paid off its debts and none of the Ribble Valley Council tax payers are contributing to interest costs. It was noted that the Council will earn over £570,000 in interest, which will help in supporting the revenue budget.

The Leader outlined that the Council faces real financial challenges, including:

- income from the New Homes Bonus having reduced by over £1 million pounds per year since May 2019
- huge inflationary pressures meaning that over the next 4 years the Council has a projected shortfall of over £9million.

The Leader has raised these with Michael Gove and Nigel Evans MP has invited the Secretary of State to the Ribble Valley to discuss these issues further.

The Leader noted that the Council has avoided a reorganisation of Local Government in Lancashire. He re-iterated that Lancashire 2050 is so important because it delivers devolution whilst respecting the sovereignty of every existing Council in Lancashire. Over 10,000 people signed the petition “stop Blackburn with Darwen Council taking over the Ribble Valley” in 2020.

The Leader spoke of the difficulties experienced during the Covid pandemic, with particular reference and thanks to the bravery of the refuse collectors during this time. It was noted that in October 2020, £50million was secured for Lancashire businesses in what became as the ARG Grant. This was only one aspect of the many grants that the Council delivered for businesses processing over £35million of grants through approximately 7,000 applications. It is important to remember the friends, family, colleagues and neighbours who were lost to Covid and for those who are still feeling the consequences.

The Leader then spoke of the cost of living crisis and the support funds that the Council made available to residents, which totalled £4.1million.

The Leader outlined there has been an improvement in rural policing, and with the election of the Conservative Police and Crime Commissioner, the Ribble Valley has started to see significant improvements with;

- The reopening of the front desk at Clitheroe Police Station in 2021
- From April 2023 the addition of four community beat managers, meaning that the Ribble Valley will have a dedicated neighbourhood police team
- Clitheroe is also to become a response policing base

The Leader reminded Members that Ribble Valley Borough Council are working with the County Council to deliver up to £600,000 in investment in Castle Street, Clitheroe, and will contribute £300,000 from the UK shared prosperity fund. The UK shared prosperity fund is already being invested in Longridge and in the next few years, the Ribble Valley will see significant capital investment including an additional £433,000 for villages in the form of the Rural England Prosperity Fund. In total this will bring the capital investment to over £12million over the next 5 years.

The Leader confirmed that in 2019, the Office for National Statistics rated the Ribble Valley as the happiest place to live in England, and in 2021 it was the healthiest place to live in England. The Ribble Valley has the lowest Council district tax in the North of England and residents are not charged for green waste. The planning policies have delivered over 480 affordable homes over the last four years and over £1million has been spent on disabled facilities grants and grants to local sporting, voluntary and cultural organisations.

The Leader ended by stating that this Council could be proud of its record, proud of its governance and proud to be Conservative.

937

LEADER'S QUESTION TIME

The Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Fletcher, stated that according to a recent report by the Resolution Foundation, Ribble Valley residents find themselves many thousands of pounds worse off than they might otherwise have been due to ‘almost completely unprecedented’ wage stagnation that highlights the failure of Tory economic policy over the past decade. He quoted Torsten Bell by stating ‘Nobody who’s alive and working in the British economy today has ever seen anything like this. This is not what normal looks like. This is what failure looks like.’ Councillor Fletcher added to this: austerity, Brexit, Partygate, cronyism, the Truss/Kamiquasi debacle and now further incidents of bullying from Ministers who behave as if the rules don’t apply to them. Councillor Fletcher asked whether the Conservative Members were embarrassed by the Conservatives’ record in office.

The Leader thanked Councillor Fletcher for his question as it gave him an opportunity to give the Council some factual information. The Official Census and Labour Market Statistics provided by the Office for National Statistics reveal that:

- In 2010 the median gross salary in Great Britain was £26,088, in the North West it was £24,492 and in the Ribble Valley it was £25,376
- By 2022 these figures had risen and in Great Britain it was £33,384, in the North West it was £31,392 and in the Ribble Valley it was £37,606
- In percentage terms, Great Britain saw an increase in gross salary of 28%, in the North West it was 28% and in the Ribble Valley it was a staggering 48%

The Leader stated that the Ribble Valley had nearly the same median wage as Germany. This showed how the administration had made Ribble Valley a prosperous place to live and he was proud to lead such an effective Council.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Fletcher referenced that three former MP's had neglected to use 'Conservative' on their Twitter profiles. He asked if the Leader felt as though he was in the minority by being a Conservative.

The Leader stated that the questions should relate to the work of the Council, not the wider issue of the Conservative party.

Next Councillor Fletcher noted that there comes a point when there are more potholes than actual road. He stated that when LCC conduct works, they are temporary, ill-conceived, ineffective and are done without consulting either Town or Borough Council. For LCC to pretend that they will uphold their responsibilities and do something meaningful, Ribble Valley Council are forced to front up half of the money. Councillor Fletcher asked what has the Tory County Council got against the Ribble Valley.

The Leader stated that Councillor Fletcher would appreciate that the purpose of Leader's Question Time is for him to answer questions relating to the general work of the Council, not to comment on the work of other Councils. However, he confirmed that LCC have a great many conflicting budgetary pressures and Ribble Valley Council are starting to see a much more collaborative approach when working with the County Council.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Fletcher asked when the Conservative party would take responsibility for their errors. He returned to the issue of King Street, Clitheroe and asked if LCC didn't know or if they didn't tell Ribble Valley Council. The Leader advised that the County Councillor for Clitheroe was in the gallery but she did not have rights of audience and he couldn't answer for her.

Councillor Fletcher stated that as the Opposition, they noted with interest that only two out of ten Tory candidates in Clitheroe can apparently be bothered to stand for the Town Council. The opposition wondered why local Conservatives are so disdainful towards Clitheroe, and so to help things along, he had structured his question as a multiple choice. He asked if Conservatives are:

- A) Simply contemptuous of the democratic process?
- B) Unwilling to give their time for free?
- C) Have they given up on Clitheroe entirely?
- D) Do they live miles from the ward they purport to represent?
- E) All of the above?

The Leader noted that this was another question that didn't relate to the general work of the Council. He took this as a compliment to how this Conservative Council has been run over the last four years. However, he answered by posing a similar question to Councillor Fletcher that did relate to the Council. He stated that the Conservatives have put up candidates in every ward, and every ward in Clitheroe. He confirmed that they care about Clitheroe, having invested in 3G pitches at Edisford, provisionally allocating the largest share of the UK shared prosperity fund to Clitheroe and putting the effort in to secure the Greatest Days movie to promote Clitheroe.

The Leader stated that the Labour Party have significantly more candidates than the Liberal Democrats. He asked why the Liberal Democrats only stood in 14 of the 40 Borough seats. Was it because the Liberal Democrats:

- A) Know you cannot win in any of the villages, Longridge and Whalley
- B) Cannot get candidates to stand
- C) Are only interested in Clitheroe
- D) Think Conservative candidates will always do a better job representing the residents in most areas of the Ribble Valley

Councillor Fletcher responded by thanking the Leader for the constructive way he had previously approached Leader's Question Time. He thanked the Council's Officers, in particular Marshal Scott, Jane Pearson and Mark Beveridge. He thanked the rest of his party, his wife and recognised the Councillors who are stepping down and those who have passed away.

938

COMMITTEE MINUTES

1. Community Services Committee – 14 March 2023
2. Planning and Development Committee – 16 March 2023
3. Special Planning and Development Committee – 16 March 2023
4. Adjourned Licensing Sub-Committee – 17 March 2023
5. Licensing Committee – 21 March 2023
6. Personnel Committee – 22 March 2023
7. Health and Housing Committee – 23 March 2023
8. Policy and Finance Committee – 28 March 2023
9. Economic Development Committee – 30 March 2023
10. Parish Councils Liaison Committee – 6 April 2023
11. Accounts and Audit Committee – 12 April 2023
12. Planning and Development Committee – 13 April 2023
13. Licensing Sub-Committee – 14 April 2023

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the above Committees be received with the exception of Minute numbers 855, 856 and 857.

Minute 855 – Review of Financial Regulations and Contract Procedure Rules

RESOLVED:

That the Council approves the reviewed Financial Regulations and revised Contract Procedure Rules, together with the associated changes to the Corporate Debt Write Off Policy

Minute 856 – Treasury Management Policies and Practices

RESOLVED:

That the Council approves the Treasury Management Policies and Practices 2023/24.

Minute 857 – Capital and Treasury Management Strategy

RESOLVED:

That the Council approves the Capital and Treasury Management Strategy as set out in the annex to the report.

939 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items under this heading.

940 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Annual Council will take place on 23 May 2023 at 6pm.

The meeting closed at 7.47 pm

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