

Minutes of Policy and Finance

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 7 November 2023, starting at 6.30 pm
Present: Councillor S Atkinson (Chair)

Councillors:

S Bibby	L Jameson
D Birtwhistle	G McCrum
L Edge	R Newmark
S Fletcher	J Rogerson
M French	A Wilkins-Odudu
S Hirst	J Hill
K Horkin	

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

Also in attendance: Councillors T Austin, K Barnsley and S O'Rourke

456 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillor S Hore.

457 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

Councillors S Fletcher, M French, and J Hill each individually declared an interest in Agenda Item 26 – Cemetery Lodge, Clitheroe.

Councillor S Hirst declared an interest in Agenda Item 27 – Rural England Prosperity Fund.

459 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Chairman welcomed David Marsh who spoke on behalf of Longridge Pump Track Group on agenda item 8 – UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and Lesley Taylor who spoke on agenda item 9 – Clitheroe Market.

460 REFERENCES FROM COMMITTEES

There were no references from Committees.

The Chief Executive submitted a report to inform Committee of the Report of the Electoral Commission on the May 2023 local elections in England and the additional measures which the Council had put in place following the elections.

The report looked at how the May 2023 elections had been run, how voters and campaigners had found taking part, and lessons learnt. The May 2023 elections had been the first since the first tranche of changes had been implemented under the introduction of the Elections Act 2022. The findings and recommendations set out in the report included voting at elections, voter ID at elections, and the election register.

Members raised local issues with the May 2023 elections. Following the elections, the Council had introduced a number of additional control measures to its processes to seek, as far as possible, to prevent errors occurring in the future. The Council had changed its processes for new or altered properties being added to the register. This would include checks being carried out between the Council's Geographical Information System (GIS) and its Electoral System as properties are added to the register, with any differences being raised at that point, discussed, and agreed before being added. Once added a further check would be carried out by a third officer to ensure it had been added in the agreed polling district. The Council would also implement a separate and additional check of all electoral polling districts within the register on its electoral system against those in its GIS system before the electoral register was produced at an election. This would act as an additional safety measure.

The Chief Executive submitted a report for Committee to agree the implementation date for the Living Wage Foundation minimum rate of Pay for Council employees.

At the meeting of the Full Council on 10 October 2023 it was resolved that the Council:

1. Adopt the Living Wage Policy for the lowest paid members of Council staff both full time and part time aged 18+; and
2. To make appropriate steps to become accredited by the Living Wage Foundation as a Living Wage employer.

On 24 October 2023, the Living Wage Foundation had announced its new minimum hourly wage rate for employees outside London to be £12 per hour, which employers needed to implement as soon as possible, and by May 2024. It was therefore recommended that the Council adopt 1 April 2024 as the implementation date, and in subsequent years on 1 April if the rate is amended.

The report noted that this would bring the pay increase in line with the annual increase in all Council staff pay under the National Joint Council conditions of service. It was noted that the Council's pay award for 2023 had been agreed which would bring the rate of pay of the lowest paid workers above current Living Wage rate. Following discussions with the Living Wage Foundation it was anticipated that the accreditation could be granted subject to the Council submitting an implementation plan which would demonstrate the milestones in place to achieve full compliance.

Members discussed the anticipated milestones, which would include contacting any agencies and contractors that the Council use to inform them of the minimum pay requirement. Members raised concerns that some businesses may struggle to

comply and felt this may be a potential barrier to appointing contractors going forward. The Committee felt that a three-year implementation plan did give time to work through issues and that a report detailing the services and contracts that would be affected was required at a future Committee.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Agree to implement the current Living Wage Foundation pay rate from 1 April 2024 and thereafter on 1 April each year when amended.

463

UKSPF UPDATE

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report updating Members in respect of the Council's UK Shared Prosperity Fund and seeking approval for the use of the Council's 2024/25 allocation.

The report listed the schemes which had been supported and were either completed or ongoing, utilising the Council's UKSPF allocations for 2022/23 and 2023/24. The UKSPF Working Group had met on 25 September 2023 and 31 October 2023 in order to consider potential schemes to utilise the 2024/25 UKSPF allocation, which was anticipated to be £1.2 million. The following schemes were discussed for which updates were provided in the report and verbally at the meeting:

- Townley Garden Event Space – Recommended to Committee for approval.
- Barrow Community Space - Recommended to Committee for approval.
- Whalley Education Foundation - Recommended to Committee for approval.
- Pump Track, Longridge - Recommended to Committee for approval.
- Primrose Community Nature Trust – There was insufficient funding to support the project at this stage
- Sports Centre/Community Park, Whalley – Further information was required.
- Whalley Chamber of Trade – The working group did not recommend for approval.
- Ribblesdale Wanderers Cricket and Bowling Club – the scheme was not currently recommended for approval but would be kept under consideration.
- Ribble Valley Sports and Recreation (Roefield Leisure) - the scheme was not currently recommended for approval but would be kept under consideration.
- Dandy Crowdfund – the scheme was not currently recommended for approval and it was felt it may be more appropriate to apply for a Culture and Leisure grant.

A working draft list of the projects proposed and suggested to date was included in the report. It was noted at the meeting that the project costs were estimated and subject to further quotes. Any required additional spend on agreed projects would therefore be subject to further consideration by the Working Group. Based on the projects considered to date by the Working Group, four schemes were recommended for approval by Committee from the 2024/25 UKSPF allocation, on the proviso that the funding was confirmed and received.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Agree to utilising the 2024/25 UKSPF allocation to support the following schemes:
 - Townley Garden Event Space
 - Barrow Community Space
 - Whalley Education Foundation

- Pump Track, Longridge

2. Authorise the Director of Economic Development and Planning to take all steps necessary to facilitate the agreed schemes as noted in the report.

464

CLITHEROE MARKET

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report seeking a decision from Committee in respect of what to include within the tender documentation for the Clitheroe Market improvements.

At the meeting of 28 March 2023, Committee had agreed to utilise £100k of the Council's 2023/24 funding allocation along with £72k of capital funding to undertake improvements to Clitheroe Market. The agreed improvements included removing all metal stall units, resurfacing the bull ring area, additional central fixed trading units, introducing additional power supplies, a new modern canopy structure, and for Officers to consider options for wind mitigation measures. Given the value of the works, tender documentation was being prepared for submission, with a view to submitting to tender in early December.

Some Members had received concerns from existing Market Traders in regard to the proposed works, and in particular the removal of the casual stalls, a number of which were being used by existing cabin holders as an extension to their stalls.

The report noted that the agreed improvements were recommended following the market consultant's report, which had included extensive consultation with the market traders. The minutes of the quarterly market trader meetings, at which market traders had been kept informed of the proposed works, were included in the report.

Given the concerns raised, two options for inclusion in the tender documentation were put forward for Committee to consider:

Option 1: Remove the casual stalls, resurface the whole bullring area (creating a central area of open space with new planting and electric points) and erect a block of new permanent cabins (option 1); or

Option 2: Remove the casual stalls, resurface the whole bullring area (creating a central area of open space with new planting and electric points) and erect a block of new casual stalls (not dissimilar to the current offer). This option may allow for the resurfacing works to be extended along the pedestrian routes between the existing cabins (budget permitting).

It was also noted that a new modern canopy structure had been included in the agreed works, however, this was subject to the suitability of such a structure in respect of wind conditions. The new canopy structure did not form part of the options presented and as such Committee were also asked to consider the removal of the central canopy area from the scheme at this stage, and that further options would be considered by the Working Group.

Members discussed the Market and the proposal at length. A group of Members had also visited the Market recently and had discussions with traders. The recent success of the Market was noted at the meeting along with the quality of the produce on offer. Committee agreed that the Market was a valuable asset to the town and assisted local businesses to start and develop. Members felt that the resurfacing works were essential, as the surface had deteriorated due to cars needing to drive on it regularly. The longevity of the new surface would therefore be considered.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Authorise the Director of Economic Development and Planning working with the Head of Engineering to invite tenders for the market improvements works.
2. Agree that option 2 should be included within the tender pack.
3. Remove the central canopy area from the scheme at this stage with further options to be considered by the Working Group.

465

LOCAL TAXATION WRITE OFFS

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

There were two cases where the company had been dissolved.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE

Approve the writing off total £16,836.84 in business rates where it had not been possible to collect the amount due.

466

FEES AND CHARGES 2024/25

The Director of Resources & Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report seeking member approval on proposals to increase this Committee's fees and charges with effect from 1 April 2024. The proposals were the first stage in the review of this Committee's budget for the forthcoming 2024/25 financial year.

In September 2023 Committee had approved the Council's three-year budget forecast which assumed a 4% inflationary increase in the level of income raised from fees and charges, and the review aimed to increase the budgeted income for 2024/25 by that amount as a minimum.

Following discussions, the proposed set of fees and charges for implementation from 1 April 2024 were produced for this Committee for members to consider and were set out in Annex 1 to the report. The proposed fees and charges for this Committee would produce on average a 4.87% increase, based on budgeted demand levels.

Following a review of the Council's legal services fee structure it was proposed to introduce a number of additional fees from 1 April 2024 for the estimated administrative cost of undertaking various legal works which were listed in the report.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Approve the level of fees and charges for this committee for 2024/25 as outlined in the report.

467

REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY

The Chief Executive submitted a report for information to provide members with an update on the Boundary Commission's review of the parliamentary constituency, and how this would impact elections in the Ribble Valley.

The Boundary Commission for England (BCE) published the 2023 Review of Parliamentary Boundaries in England in June 2023. Maps showing the extent of the proposed new constituencies were included in the report, which were expected to come into effect in November 2023. UK parliamentary elections held after the order came into force would be run on new boundaries. Any by-elections held before the next UK parliamentary elections would be on existing boundaries.

The Council would begin the Review of its Polling Districts and Polling Places of Parliamentary constituencies imminently, the results of which would be brought to Committee and recommended to Council for approval.

468

ARMED FORCES COVENANT

The Chief Executive submitted a report for information updating Committee in regard to the Council's work in order to comply with the Armed Forces Covenant Pledges.

The Armed Forces Covenant, as approved at the meeting of the Council 11 October 2022, included the pledge to provide training to contact centre staff in matters relating to the Armed Forces. Suitable staff to undertake the training had been identified and training would be arranged. To further demonstrate the Council's commitment to the Armed Forces, the Council was also exploring the Armed Forces Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) in order to understand the requirements under the scheme, and any changes required in order to progress.

469

COUNCIL TAX BASE 2024/25

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report informing members of the Council's Taxbase for 2024/25.

Members were reminded that:

- The council tax base was set each year between 1 December and 31 January and was an important calculation which set out the number of dwellings to which council tax was 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 was adjusted to take account of any discounts, premiums or exemptions.
- The resulting figure for each band was 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 was calculated. These were then multiplied by the authority's estimated collection rate for the year.
- The tax base was used for the purposes of calculating the band d council tax for the billing authority and also major precepting authorities and parish councils.

The tax base had increased steadily over the years. The Council Tax Base for 2024/25 was 25,321, which was a 1.4% increase on that for 2023/24.

470

CONCURRENT FUNCTION GRANTS SCHEME

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report for information in regard to the areas included and excluded under the concurrent functions grant scheme.

The Council's concurrent function grant scheme had been approved by Policy and Finance Committee in 2008 at the recommendation of Budget Working Group, and was later subsequently expanded to include parish lengthsman and CCTV expenditures. The scheme supported parish and town councils with net revenue expenditure on the following concurrent functions:

- Burial Grounds
- Bus Shelters
- CCTV (since 2021)
- Footpaths
- Footway Lighting
- Litter Collection
- Dog waste bins
- Parks and play areas
- Parish lengthsman (since 2017)

471

VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION GRANTS – CITIZENS ADVICE UPDATE

The Director of Resources submitted a report for information providing Committee with the service statistics for the Ribble Valley area as provided by the Citizen's Advice East Lancashire Service (CAEL) for the April to September period of the 2023/24 financial year.

In March 2023, Committee approved the allocation of £5k to Citizens Advice Rossendale & Hyndburn to support an extension of the service into the Ribble Valley area. In addition, the Voluntary Organisation Grants Working Group had recommended to Committee that a review of Citizen's Advice Rossendale and Hyndburn be carried out after six months. Monitoring information provided by the CAEL was attached to the report.

472

REVENUES AND BENEFITS GENERAL REPORT

The Director of Resources & Deputy Chief Executive 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.

473

TREASURY MANAGEMENT MONITORING 2023/24

The Director of Resources & Deputy Chief Executive submitted a monitoring report for information on the treasury management activities for the period 1 April 2023 to 30 September 2023. 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.

474 CAPITAL MONITORING 2023/24

The Director of Resources & Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report for information on the progress on this committee's 2023/24 capital programme for the period to the end of September 2023. At the end of September 2023 £71,989 had been spent or committed. Of the twelve schemes in the capital programme at the end of September 2023, nine schemes were currently on-track to be completed or substantially completed in-year, and four were unlikely to be completed within the financial year.

Progress on the UK Shared Prosperity Funded schemes was also reported, and at the end of September 2023 £104,343 had been spent or committed. Of the four schemes at the end of September 2023, one scheme had been completed, one scheme was currently on-track to be completed or substantially complete in-year, and two were unlikely to be completed within the financial year.

475 OVERALL CAPITAL MONITORING 2023/24

The Director of Resources & Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report for information on the progress on the Council's approved 2023/24 capital programme for the period to the end of September 2023.

At the end of September 2023 £1,395,243 had been spent or committed. This was 21.2% of this Committee's overall capital programme budget of £6,597,710.

A summary of progress on the 51 schemes in the capital programme at the end of September 2023 was as follows:

- Eight schemes were complete
- Twenty-eight schemes were currently expected to be completed in-year
- Fifteen of the schemes were unlikely to be completed in-year, and further detail on the operational progress of each of these schemes was provided in the report.

476 REVENUE MONITORING 2023/24

The Director of Resources & Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report for information on the position for the period April to September 2023 of this year's revenue budget for this Committee. The comparison between actual and budgeted expenditure showed an underspend of £340k for the April to September period of the financial year 2023/24. After allowing for transfers to and from earmarked reserves there was an underspend of £187k. The variances were explained in the report, which included the pay award which had yet to be agreed and would likely result in an overspend in this area.

477 OVERALL REVENUE MONITORING 2023/24

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report for information on the overall revenue position for the current financial year for the first half up to the end of September 2023. There had been an overall net underspend of £871k on Service Committee net expenditure after movements in earmarked reserves. Due to unprecedented interest rate increases investment income was £376k ahead of budget. There would be a large additional cost above that budgeted for once the pay award was settled, of approximately £170k. Therefore, the overall

net variance for the first half year was £1.2 million. It was highlighted that the position was due to a number of one-off variances that had occurred in year.

478 MINUTES OF WORKING GROUPS

(i) Minutes of UKSPF Working Group 25 September 2023

RESOLVED: The minutes of the UK Prosperity Fund working group held on 25 September 2023 were submitted for Committee's information.

(ii) Minutes of Budget Working Group 18 August 2023

RESOLVED: The minutes of the Budget working group held on 18 August 2023 were submitted for Committee's information.

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 Paragraphs 1 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be now excluded from the meeting.

Councillors S Fletcher, M French, J Hill, and S O'Rourke left the meeting in respect of the next agenda item.

481 CEMETERY LODGE, CLITHEROE

The Chief Executive submitted a report for Committee to consider the temporary arrangements for the occupation of the Cemetery Lodge.

It was proposed that Council enter into a licence agreement for the occupancy of Cemetery Lodge which would include the opening and closing of the Cemetery gates, and the reporting of anti-social behaviour in the Cemetery.

RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Approve that the Council enter a temporary licence agreement to allow the current occupant to remain in the property; and
2. That the licence agreement be on a 12 month rolling basis with 6 months' notice either side and an end date of 31 December 2025.

Councillors S Fletcher, M French, J Hill, and S O'Rourke returned to the meeting.

Councillor S Hirst left the meeting in respect of the next agenda item.

RURAL ENGLAND PROSPERITY FUND (REPF)

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report updating Committee on expressions of interest received for the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) Scheme.

The scheme had opened for expressions of interest forms on 12 September 2023 and would remain open with applications being assessed on an ongoing basis during the funding period. To date 11 expressions of interest had been submitted, full details of which were included in the report. The UKSPF working group had met on 31 October to consider the expressions received and a verbal update was provided at the meeting.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Notes the verbal update from the working group and approve that the eligible projects listed in the report can progress to full application stage.
2. Authorise the Director of Economic Development and Planning to review expressions of interest and approve eligible projects to complete a full application.

Councillor S Hirst returned to the meeting.

LOCAL TAXATION WRITE OFFS

The Director of Resources & Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report seeking Committee's approval to write off certain Council Tax and Business Rates debts relating to individuals.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve writing off £7,036.82 of Council Tax debts plus £280.00 costs where it had not been possible to collect the amount due.

The meeting closed at 8.07 pm

If you have any queries on these minutes please contact the committee clerk, Rebecca Tait 01200 414408 rebecca.tait@ribblevalley.gov.uk.