

Minutes of Policy and Finance

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 9 April 2024, starting at 6.30 pm
Present: Councillor S Hore (Chairman)

Councillors:

S Bibby	
D Birtwhistle	K Horkin
L Edge	L Jameson
S Fletcher	R Newmark
M Graveston	S O'Rourke
J Hill	J Rogerson
S Hirst	A Wilkins-Odudu

In attendance: Chief Executive, Director of Resources & Deputy Chief Executive, Director of Economic Development and Planning, Director of Community Services, Head of Financial Services, Head of Revenues and Benefits, and Principal Policy and Performance Officer.

Also in attendance: Councillor K Barnsley

823 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillor S Atkinson (Chairman).

The Vice Chairman Councillor Simon Hore took the chair due to the absence of the Chairman.

824 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meetings held on 23 January 2024 and 13 February 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

Councillor S Bibby declared an interest in Agenda Item 5 as a Trustee of Carer's Link.
Councillor S Hirst declared an interest in Agenda Item 27 as a Trustee of Salesbury Village Hall.

Councillor S Hore declared an interest in Agenda Item 5 in respect of Ribble Valley Crossroads Care.

Councillor S O'Rourke declared interests in Agenda Items 5 in respect of Clitheroe Castle Bonfire & Fireworks through Ribblesdale Rotary, the Little Green Bus Company, and Ribble Valley Crossroads Care.

Councillor J Rogerson declared an interest in Agenda Item 5 as a Trustee and future President of Goosnargh & Longridge Show.

Councillor R Newmark declared interests in Agenda Item 5 in respect of Clitheroe Community Bonfire through Ribblesdale Rotary, as a previous Trustee of Homestart, and associations with Ribble Valley Village Halls association.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Chairman welcomed Darrin Robinson who spoke on agenda item 27 – Rural England Prosperity Fund.

The Chairman noted his intention to leave the meeting in respect of his interest in the next agenda item. Councillor K Horkin proposed and Councillor S Bibby seconded that Councillor S Hirst proceed as Chairman. A vote was taken and it was agreed that Councillor S Hirst would Chair the meeting for Agenda Item 5.

Councillors S Bibby, S Hore, R Newmark, S O'Rourke, and J Rogerson left the meeting in respect of the next agenda item.

VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION GRANTS 2024/25

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report asking Committee to approve the allocation of voluntary organisation grants for 2024/25.

The report outlined the scheme to Committee and provided a summary of the twenty-two applications that had been received. The working group had met on 14 March 2024 to consider the applications and recommended grant support of £68,100 to thirteen applicants as set out in the report. For three of the applications the working group suggested that the grant offers be subject to conditions as follows:

- £15k to Citizens Advice East Lancashire on condition that a comprehensive face-to-face service is provided in the Ribble Valley
- £12k to Little Green Bus Ltd on condition that there is wider publication of the service across the Borough, and
- £4k to The Foundation for Ribble Valley Families on condition that the organisation promotes awareness of the services offered, particularly for young people in the Ribble Valley

As it had been several years since Policy and Finance Committee had reviewed the grant scheme the working group recommended that a report be brought to a future committee meeting to allow for options to update the scheme to be considered by committee members. This recommendation was supported by Committee.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Approve the allocation of grants as proposed by the Voluntary Organisation Grants Working Group as set out in Annex 2 to the Report, totalling £68,100.
2. Request a review of the Voluntary Organisation Grants process with a report to be brought back to a future Committee.

Councillors S Bibby, S Hore, R Newmark, S O'Rourke, and J Rogerson returned to the meeting.

Councillor S Hore resumed as Chairman.

828

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2024/25 TO 2028/29

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report to seek approval of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and Plan for the period 2024/25 to 2028/29. The plan was annexed to the report and it included the implications of the latest budgets for both revenue and capital.

Members were advised that it was a key financial planning document and aimed to provide an assurance that the Council's spending plans were affordable over the Medium Term. It was important that it was understood by all members and staff.

It was noted that there was great deal of uncertainty around much of the document beyond the financial year 2024/25, however the document would continue to be reviewed annually to once again reflect the information at that point in time.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and Plan for 2024/25 to 2028/29.

829

CAPITAL AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report to seek Member approval for the Council's Capital and Treasury Management Strategy for the 2024/25 financial year.

It was noted that elements of the document had previously been approved as part of the budget setting process, but they were attached to the report together under a single strategy.

***RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Recommend to Council the Capital and Treasury Management Strategy as set out in Annex 1 to the report.

830

TREASURY MANAGEMENT POLICIES AND PRACTICES

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report to review, approve and adopt the Treasury Management Policy Statement and Practices for 2024/25.

Members were informed that the Treasury Management Policies and Practices document was reviewed on an annual basis to comply with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code. Since March 2023, there had not been any further changes to the CIPFA Treasury Management Code and so the majority of the document remained unchanged with any amendments shown in tracked changes.

***RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Review, approve and formally adopt the Treasury Management Policies and Practices document as attached in Appendix 1 to the report, incorporating the:
 - Treasury Management Key Principles
 - Treasury Management Policy Statement
 - Treasury Management Clauses
 - Treasury Management Practices and Schedules
2. Recommend to Council the Treasury Management Policies and Practices 2024/25.

831

REVIEW OF FINANCIAL REGULATIONS AND CONTRACT PROCEDURE RULES

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report to recommend to Council the acceptance of the reviewed Financial Regulations and Contract Procedure Rules.

A full review of the existing Financial Regulations had been carried out and the minor changes were summarised as follows:

- Clarification that where a virement is over £10,000 and requires service Committee approval, and the virement is to be between Service Committees, then the approving Committee must be the committee offering up the available budget.
- Update of the post title of the 'Director of Resources' to 'Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive'.

A review of the Contract Procedure Rules had also resulted in the following changes:

- The main change was to update the post title of the 'Director of Resources' to 'Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive'.
- Additionally, there had been an update to the Public Contracts Regulations thresholds.

The revised Financial Regulations and Contract Procedure Rules were appended to the report and would require onward approval by Full Council.

***RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Recommend to Full Council acceptance of the reviewed Financial Regulations and revised Contract Procedure Rules.

832

LOCAL TAXATION WRITE OFFS

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report to obtain Committee's approval to write off Business Rates debt relating to one business that had been dissolved.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve writing off a total of £36,118.31 in business rates with £180.00 costs where it had not been possible to collect the amount due.

833

UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND (UKSPF)

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 use of some of the Council's UKSPF allocation.

The report listed the schemes for which the UKSPF had been spent or earmarked to, and the amounts allocated within each financial year were as follows:

- Year 1 (2022/23) allocation £238,805
- Year 2 (2023/24) allocation £477,610
- Year 3 (2024/25) allocation £1,251,339

Based on the Council's spend in years 1 and 2 it was expected that 100% of the Council's 2024/25 funding would be paid upfront, after the closure of the upcoming reporting window on 1 May 2024. Based on actual spend and commitments to date, minus administration costs, £600,289 of the Council's UKSPF allocation was yet to be allocated to projects.

Committee was updated on the outcome of discussions by the UKSPF Working Group to date. Information and updates were provided on the schemes that had been recommended for approval and Committee were asked to consider which schemes should be approved for support from the 2024/25 allocation.

Clitheroe Market - Committee discussed the proposed schemes and intention to keep disruption to the market at a minimum was highlighted. The Director of Economic Development and Planning would continue to meet with Market Traders quarterly to provide updates and opportunity for discussion.

Longridge Pump Track - Members were updated that the Director was meeting with the Longridge Pump Track contractors the following week to discuss the outcome of the consultation exercise and any suggested highlighted minor amendments, following which the final design would then be subject to planning approval.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Agree to increasing the UKSPF allocation to the market to £150,000 to undertake the improvement works to Clitheroe market as set out in the report.
2. Direct the Director of Economic Development and Planning to procure the improvement works to the market to be undertaken following the food festival.
3. Approve an exemption to the Council's Contract Procedure Rules in respect to the number of quotes obtained for the Pump Track.
3. Authorise the Director of Economic Development and Planning to request quotes from major commercial letting agents to undertake a soft marketing exercise for the vacant and underused parts of the Castle, up to £2,500.

HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report updating Committee on the Household Support Fund Round 5 (HSF5) and seeking approval for potential spend.

On 6 March 2024, in the Spring Budget, the Chancellor had announced that the Household Support Fund (HSF) would be extended for a further six months from 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024. Lancashire County Council (LCC) had been awarded £9,678,235.22 which matched their previous six-month period allocations.

LCC had confirmed that there were some slight additions to the terms and conditions of the grant, and they aimed to provide details for District allocations after the Easter holiday.

Under the Household Support Fund Round 4 (HSF4), a supermarket voucher application scheme ran initially from 3 July to 1 September 2023, the criteria for which was noted in the report. A second round of applications ran from 2 October to 1 December 2023. The report informed Members that 214 eligible applicants from HSF4 had not received vouchers due to insufficient funding, and Committee approval was therefore sought to prioritise these applicants in the HSF5 round of funding, subject to sufficient funding from LCC.

The report also detailed key changes from the previous versions of the fund, as confirmed by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

A further report would be brought to Committee setting out the proposed HSF5 scheme which would detail the amount of funding and any specified criteria from LCC.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve that the eligible applicants as part of HSF4, who did not receive a supermarket voucher due to insufficient funding, should be prioritised in the event that RVBC receive sufficient funding from LCC, and that each of the households be invited to apply for funding again to ensure that they are still eligible (in accordance with the scheme delivered as part of HSF4).

RETURNING OFFICERS' SCALE OF FEES 2024/25 – BOROUGH AND PARISH ELECTIONS

The Chief Executive submitted a report for Committee to agree the adoption of the Returning Officer's Scale of Fees in connection with any Borough and Parish Council By Elections that might arise in 2024/25.

The Returning Officer was held personally responsible for the organisation and conduct of every election held within the Borough, and in the case of a General Election the Ribble Valley Parliamentary Constituency which extended into the neighbouring Boroughs of South Ribble and Preston.

For Local Elections the Council were required to set the fees which the Returning Officer should not exceed. A scale of fees for Lancashire was developed by a working group of Elections Officers in 2007, which had been updated annually in line with inflation, general staff pay awards and guidance from DLUHC. The updated scale of fees was included with the report for Committee to consider.

It was highlighted at the meeting that cost of running Parish Council Elections had increased significantly over the years, particularly when a Parish By Election was held in isolation. The Council could recharge the cost of administering these elections to Parishes. Committee requested that a report be brought to the next meeting in order to fully consider the options.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Agree the Returning Officers' Scale of Fees for 2024/25 Borough and Parish Elections as set out in the report.
2. Request that a report be brought to a future meeting detailing the costs to the Council for running Parish Council Elections and the options available for Committee to consider.

836

REVIEW OF STANDING ORDERS

The Chief Executive submitted a report for Committee to review the Council's Standing Orders (Part 4 of the Council's Constitution) to ensure clarity.

A review was undertaken annually to ensure that the document was up to date as it contained the rules which governed the conduct and proceedings of the Council's meetings.

Minor amendments were proposed to Standing Orders 5 and 22, with the full revised standing orders appended to the report with tracked changes.

*** RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Approve the changes to the Council's Standing Orders outlined in the report.
4. Refer the proposed changes to the Council with a recommendation for their approval.

837

DRAFT COMMITTEE CYCLE 2024-25

The Chief Executive submitted a report outlining the proposed meeting cycle for the forthcoming municipal year 2024/25.

There were no Borough elections being held in May 2025, therefore, it was proposed that the 2024/25 Annual Meeting be held on 13 May 2025.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve the draft meeting cycle as detailed in the report for ratification at the Annual Meeting on 14 May 2024.

838

APPROVAL AND ADOPTION OF THE CORPORATE PLAN 2023-2027

The Chief Executive submitted a report for Committee to approve and formally adopt the Council's Corporate Plan 2023-2027 and the associated Corporate Plan Technical Appendix 2023-2027.

The Corporate Plan set out the strategic direction of the Council covering the period 2023-2027, and provided a focus to ensure that the service the Council delivered met the needs of our communities. The Plan would be reviewed annually to ensure that it continued to reflect the changes to the Council's priorities that occurred over time.

The working group had met twice to develop the plan based on local and national priorities, a number of other high level Council plans and strategies, the 2023 Peoples Survey - Life in the Ribble Valley, and feedback from CMT and Heads of Service (HoS). The Strategy contained:

- Four corporate goals to address issues that mattered most to the Borough.
- Each goal had a number of objectives – things that we wished to achieve for the Borough.
- The objectives were supported by a number of key actions – the things we would do to achieve our objectives.
- Key measures of success were outlined in Appendix B – Draft Corporate Plan Technical Appendix 2023-27. The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) would be used to monitor and analyse progress and achievements during the life of the Plan.

The Corporate Plan would be published on the Council website and shared internally with all staff. Where available, KPI data would be reported in a Quarterly Performance Report and scrutinised by Officers, CMT, and relevant Committees.

Members thanked the Council's Policy and Performance Officer for the document and supported the implementation subject to minor amendments in wording.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve the Corporate Plan and the associated Corporate Plan Technical Appendix 2023-2027 for formal adoption subject to minor amendments as noted at the meeting.

839 REFERENCES FROM COMMITTEES

840 REFERENCE FROM COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE - VEHICLE WASH, SALTHILL DEPOT

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report to consider a request from Community Services Committee for an additional capital programme scheme for the purchase and installation of a replacement vehicle wash at Salthill Depot for a total of £21,730.

Community Services Committee had approved the recommendation at their meeting of 12 March 2024 as the existing vehicle wash at Salthill Depot was no longer operational, and expensive and uneconomical to repair.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve a scheme of £21,730 in the 2024/25 capital programme for the purchase and installation of a replacement vehicle wash at Salthill Depot, to be funded from the VAT Shelter Earmarked Reserve.

841

REFERENCE FROM HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE - FIRST TIME BUYERS GRANT CAPITAL SCHEME

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report to consider a request from Health and Housing Committee for the continuation of the First Time Buyers Energy Efficiency grant scheme in to 2024/25 through the approval of a capital programme scheme. It was proposed that the £100,000 capital programme scheme be created by taking (virement of) £100,000 from the existing Landlord/Tenant grant scheme.

Health and Housing Committee had approved the recommendation at their meeting of 21 March 2024 in order to continue the First Time Buyers Energy Efficiency grant scheme which had been a success since starting in the 2022/23 financial year.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve a scheme of £100,000 in the 2024/25 capital programme for the continuation of the First Time Buyers Energy Efficiency grant scheme, created by virement of £100,000 from the Landlord/Tenant grant scheme.

842

REVENUE MONITORING 2023/24

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted an information report advising as to the position for the period April to February 2024 of this year's revised revenue budget as far as this Committee was concerned.

The comparison between actual and budgeted expenditure at the revised estimate showed a total underspend of £85,361 to February 2024 of the financial year 2024/25. After allowing for transfers to/from earmarked reserves there was an underspend of £50,148.

843

CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2024/25

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report to inform Members of the schemes approved for inclusion in this Committee's 2024/25 capital programme.

This Committee had a capital programme for 2024/25 of fourteen schemes, totalling £1,101,510. Any slippage on the schemes in the 2023/24 capital programme would be reported to this Committee.

Members requested that a report be brought back to a future Committee detailing the asset register.

844

REVENUES AND BENEFITS GENERAL REPORT

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report to inform Committee of debts outstanding for business rates, council tax and sundry debtors. The report also updated Committee on benefits performance, including benefits processing times and overpayment recovery.

It was noted the continuing progress that the Council made in collecting these debts, and the performance of the Housing Benefit Section remained satisfactory.

845 PREVENT DUTY

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted an information report updating Committee in relation to the Prevent Duty.

The Council, as a local authority, had a legal duty to deliver Prevent in the Ribble Valley to help prevent the risk of people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. The report provided Committee with the revised Ribble Valley district plan 2024/25.

846 COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report for information providing Committee with updates relating to the Community Safety Partnership (CSP).

The report provided an overview of the Ribble Valley CSP, along with the action plan for the period 2022-2025, statistics in relation to anti-social behaviour, and a summary of the projects funded by the RV CSP in 2023/24.

847 MINUTES OF WORKING GROUPS

848 MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE STRATEGY WORKING GROUP 16 NOVEMBER 2023

The minutes of the Corporate Strategy Working Group held on 16 November 2023 were submitted for Committee's information.

849 MINUTES OF THE UKSPF WORKING GROUP 11 DECEMBER 2023

The minutes of the UKSPF Working Group held on 11 December 2023 were submitted for Committee's information.

MINUTES OF THE BUDGET WORKING GROUP 20 DECEMBER 2023, 24 JANUARY 2024, AND 1 FEBRUARY 2024

The minutes of the Budget Working Group held on 20 December 2023, 24 January 2024, and 1 February 2024 were submitted for Committee's information.

850 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports from representatives on outside bodies.

851 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

852

HOUSING BENEFIT, COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT AND LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT WRITE OFFS

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report to obtain Committee's approval to write off Council Tax Benefit (CTB) and Housing Benefit (HB) overpayments and to consider whether to write off the additional Council Tax due as a result of a change to Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) relating to an individual.

The Council administered HB and CTB on behalf of the DWP, which was then reimbursed to the Council as a subsidy for any HB and CTB paid, therefore any DWP error overpayments were at no cost to Council Tax payers. LCTS was a local discount scheme which was not governed by the same rules applied to HB and CTB and as such the cost of the scheme fell on Council Tax payers. The report informed Committee of the circumstances relating to overpayments to an individual, which had resulted from an underpayment of state pension over a sixteen-year period, for which the individual was not responsible.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Approve writing off of £45,496.32 in Housing Benefit overpayments and £4,301.89 in Council Tax Benefits that occurred as a result of DWP error.
2. Approve writing off £9,103.15 additional Council Tax due that had occurred as a result of DWP error.

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

853

RURAL ENGLAND PROSPERITY FUND (REPF)

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report for Committee to consider full applications into the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) grant 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 twenty-four eligible applicants had been invited to complete a full application, and of these thirteen full applications had been received. Committee were provided details for the eleven new projects for consideration totaling £335,825 and the following was discussed at the meeting:

- Members spoke in support of the B4RN project and approved to support the applications, subject to Officers meeting with B4RN to clarify information, particularly what will happen to remaining accumulated income from residents' monthly payments.
- The decision by Committee on 7 November 2023 to limit applications to one per parish on a first come first served basis was highlighted. Concerns were raised at the meeting that Hurst Green Football Club may fall within the Parish of Aighton Bailey and Chaigley therefore Committee requested that Officers establish this, and which should receive priority.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Approve in principal the following schemes from the Council's REPF allocation:

	Applicant	Scheme	Grant Funding
1.	Ribchester Parish Council	Knowle Green Gigabit (1000mbps) Broadband Project	£50,000
2.	Sabden Parish Council	Recreation ground improvements	£9,929
3.	Salesbury Memorial Hall Charity	Safer Access for Everyone (SAFE)	£47,362
4.	Hurst Green Football Club	Solar panels and battery storage	£35,000
5.	Brabins Endowed School	Footpath	£24,908
6.	Wiswell Parish Council	Coronation Gardens	£13,536
7.	Rimmington Recreation Association	Remove existing surface and relay with new tournament MF surface.	£22,740.
8.	B4RN for Bolton-by-Bowland and Paythorne	Gigabit Broadband Project	£50,000
9.	Ramsgreave Parish Council	Composting toilet	£8,482
10.	Aighton, Bailey and Chaigley Parish Council.	Aighton Bailey and Chaigley War Memorial Hall-resurface car park	£43,680
11.	Grindleton Recreation Ground Charity (GRGC)	Solar panels and battery storage	£30,188
TOTAL			£335,825

Subject to the following:

- 1.1 Officers meet with the B4RN project team to clarify the financial mechanisms of the projects as discussed. Delegate authority to the Director of Economic Development and Planning, and Chief Executive to move forward with the B4RN applications subject to satisfactory qualification following the meeting with B4RN
- 1.2 Officers confirm the applicable Parish for the Hurst Green Football Club application and the Aighton Bailey and Chaigley War Memorial Hall; and

1.3 Delegate authority to the Director of Economic Development and Planning, to move forward with the remaining qualifying applications.

Councillor S Hirst returned to the meeting.

The meeting closed at 8.43 pm

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