

Minutes

FINANCE AND DEMOCRACY COMMITTEE

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| Date: | Monday, 20 March 2017 |
| Venue: | Town Hall, St Annes. |
| Committee Members: | Councillor Karen Buckley (Chairman) Councillor Roger Small (Vice-Chairman) Councillors David Donaldson, Angela Jacques, Liz Oades, Richard Redcliffe, Vince Settle, Elaine Silverwood. |
| Other Councillors Present | Councillor Christine Akeroyd |
| Officers Present: | Allan Oldfield, Paul O'Donoghue, Graeme Ruse, Katharine McDonnell |
| Other Attendees: | One member of the public |

Public Platform

There were no speakers on this occasion.

1. Declarations of interest

Members were reminded that any disclosable pecuniary interests should be declared as required by the Localism Act 2011 and any personal or prejudicial interests should be declared as required by the Council's Code of Conduct for Members.

Councillor Karen Buckley declared a personal and prejudicial in item 4, the nature of the interest being that she was a landlord.

Councillor Silverwood declared a personal and prejudicial interest in item 4, the nature of the interest being that she was a business owner.

Both Councillors left the meeting for the duration of the item.

2. Confirmation of minutes

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the Finance and Democracy Committee meeting held on 20 February 2017 as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

3. Substitute members

There were no substitutions on this occasion.

Decision Items

4. Council Tax and Business Rates Discretionary Discount Policy – 2017/18 Update

(Having earlier declared an interest, Councillor Buckley and Councillor Silverwood left the room, Councillor Roger Small assumed the Chair).

Paul O'Donoghue, Chief Financial Officer, and Graeme Ruse, Principal Income & Recovery Manager, Shared Service, presented the Council's updated Council Tax and Business Rates Discretionary Discount Policy. Mr O'Donoghue explained that like all local authorities, Fylde Borough Council had a scheme of discounts and exemptions for Council Tax and Business Rates, as directed by central government. Periodically the policy required updating to incorporate new reliefs, or amendments to existing reliefs or to provide clarity.

Mr O'Donoghue explained that the update before members was to reflect the discontinuation of the Retail Relief, Re-Occupation Relief and New Build Relief, and to remove references to the 2017 Rating List. Mr O'Donoghue advised that a number of retailers who had been eligible for the Retail Relief would now be eligible for Small Business Rate Relief. He also updated the committee on a number of reliefs announced in the recent Government Budget, the detail of which had not yet been released, he advised it may therefore be necessary to further update the Policy later in the year.

Following a brief discussion, it was RESOLVED to approve and adopt the Council Tax and Business Rates Discretionary Discount Policy 2017/18.

(Councillors Buckley and Silverwood returned to the room on conclusion of the item, and Councillor Buckley reassumed the Chair).

5. Write-Off of Uncollectable Debts 2016/17

Paul O'Donoghue, Chief Financial Officer, and Graeme Ruse, Principal Income & Recovery Manager, Shared Service, presented details of the write-off of debts in relation to Business Rates, Council Tax and recovery of Housing Benefit overpayments.

Mr O'Donoghue explained that in accordance with the council's constitution, three unrecoverable debts less than £25,000 each had been written off by the Chief Financial Officer under delegated powers. The details of these debts were presented to the committee for noting.

Additionally, Mr O'Donoghue provided details of two uncollectable business rates debts in excess of £25,000 which required committee's approval for the write-off. He advised that 98% of business rate debt was collected, and debt was only ever written off in exceptional circumstances.

The committee commented on the high recovery rate and congratulated the team for their work.

Following a brief discussion, it was RESOLVED

1. To approve the write-off of the two uncollectable Business Rates debts in excess of £25,000 details of which were provided in Appendix A to the report; and
2. Note the write-off by the Chief Financial Officer under delegated powers of the three uncollectable Business Rates debts below £25,000, details of which were also set out in Appendix A to the report.

6. Accommodation Project – Phase 7 Works

This item was not tabled. Mr Oldfield explained that the item had been withdrawn to seek further tenders, as officers did not consider the quotes received to be competitive.

7. Appointment to Outside Bodies/Working Groups

The Committee were invited to recommend nominations to the various outside bodies/working Groups, within the remit of the committee, for consideration at Full Council. In addition, copies of reports received from members currently serving on outside bodies were also included as an appendix to the report for information.

As some errors had been identified in the originally printed report, the Chairman referred members to the corrected report which had been circulated prior to the meeting.

Following consideration of each outside body in turn, it was RESOLVED to

1. Recommend the following nominations to the outside bodies for consideration by council:
 - Fylde Community Project Fund – The Mayor
 - Blackpool Airport and Hillhouse Enterprise Zone Project Board – Chairman of Finance and Democracy
 - North West Employers Organisation – Chairman of Finance and Democracy Committee (named substitute – Councillor Roger Small)
 - North West of England & Isle of Man Reserve Forces and Cadets Association – Councillor Ed Nash
2. Confirm the continued establishment of (i) Budget working group comprising Councillors Fazackerley, Buckley, Little, Aitken, Eaves, Fiddler, Redcliffe, Small and Settle; and (ii) Accommodation working group comprising Councillors Fazackerley, Oades, Buckley, Fiddler, Ford and Jacques;
3. Note the reports from members currently serving on outside bodies.

8. Mussel Tank Improvement Project

Allan Oldfield, Chief Executive, presented information regarding a scheme developed by the Lytham St Annes Civic Society to improve one of the former mussel tanks adjacent to Lytham Green. He explained that the Civic Society had secured the necessary funds for the scheme, and the scheme had recently been approved by the Tourism and Leisure Committee.

He advised that the Civic Society were requesting that the Council act as the accountable body for the proposed addition of a fully funded budget increase of £130,000 to the 2017/18 capital programme from the Civic Society for the mussel tank scheme.

Following a brief discussion it was RESOLVED

1. To agree to that the Council act as an accountable body for the proposed capital scheme;
2. To approve an addition to the 2017/18 capital programme in the sum of £130,000 to be fully funded from a grant from the Lytham St Annes Civic Society as detailed in the report; and

3. To specify that in relation to the Lytham Mussel Tank Improvement Project, expenditure on the scheme will only be committed following receipt of funding from the LSA Civic Society in at least the same sum.

9. Fylde Coast Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer Project

Allan Oldfield, Chief Executive, presented information regarding a recent funding award from the Department of Communities and Local Government. He explained that the project was to put in place methods of early intervention to prevent and reduce homelessness. The project had been approved by the Environment, Health and Housing and the committee had recommended the project to the Finance and Democracy Committee.

The award was £120,000 (or £60,000 for 2017/18 and £60,000 in 2018/19) to fund a Housing Options Customer Services Specialist and a Tenancy Support Officer.

It was RESOLVED

1. To note the contents of the report and the proposals to undertake the Fylde Coast Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer project across the Fylde Coast Authorities; and
2. To approve a fully-funded revenue budget increase for the total sum of £120,000 (£60,000 in 2017/18 and £60,000 in 2018/19) in line with the recommendation from the Environment, Health and Housing Committee of the 14 March 2017.

Information Items

10. Employee Survey 2016

Allan Oldfield, Chief Executive, presented the results of the Employee Survey 2016 to committee.

A number of questions were asked around increasing engagement with staff. Mr Oldfield advised that options were being explored including the recent purchase of electronic hand held voting machines.

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