



# Minutes

## FINANCE AND DEMOCRACY COMMITTEE

<b>Date:</b>	Monday, 28 September 2015
<b>Venue:</b>	Town Hall, St Annes.
<b>Committee Members:</b>	Councillor Karen Buckley (Chairman) Councillor Roger Small (Vice Chairman)  Councillors Jan Barker, David Donaldson, Angela Jacques, Linda Nulty, Richard Redcliffe, Vince Settle, Elaine Silverwood and Richard Taylor.
<b>Other Councillors Present:</b>	Councillor Susan Fazckerley
<b>Officers Present:</b>	Allan Oldfield, Paul O'Donoghue, Marie McRoberts and Katharine McDonnell
<b>Other Attendees:</b>	One member of the public

### Public Platform

There were no members of the public who wished to speak 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. There were no declarations of interest.

#### 2. Confirmation of minutes

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the Finance and Democracy Committee meeting held on 3 August 2015 as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

#### 3. Substitute members

The following substitutions were reported under Council procedure rule 24(c):

Councillor Jan Barker for Councillor Liz Oades

### Decision Items

#### 4. Timetable for Developing Budget Proposals 2016/17

Mr O'Donoghue, Chief Financial Officer, presented a draft timetable for budget proposals and setting for the committee's consideration. He explained that any timetable approved needed to comply with the budget and policy framework rules, statutory deadlines, and where possible to also facilitate early billing for Council Tax.

The timetable set out timescales for the consideration of the draft budget provision, the programme committees, and when budget consultation would take place.

After a brief discussion, it was RESOLVED to adopt the proposed budget setting timetable for the 2015/16 budget.

5. Business Rate Pooling 2016/17

Mr O'Donoghue (Chief Financial Officer) advised the committee of the intention of a number of the Lancashire local authorities to establish a business rate pool for 2016/17. He summarised the operation of such a pool, where instead of a portion of the collected business rates being paid over to central government, it would be shared amongst participants of the pool. In this way the pool would allow councils to benefit from a share of any growth in their business rates base, however it would expose them to the risk of reduced income where changes were adverse because the government protection of a safety net is not available for members of a pool.

Due to a number of factors the council's business rate income was below the safety net level in the last year, and it was therefore not considered prudent to enter into a pool with other Lancashire authorities for 2016/17, but to keep Fylde's position under review.

Mr O'Donoghue, in response to questions, advised that the council was budgeting at a safety net level. He confirmed that the government tariff was not a fixed percentage and changed year on year for each council. He advised that the rules surrounding pools had not been published for 2016/17 and the assumptions were based on last year's prospectus, however the other Lancashire authorities were requiring a decision in anticipation of the prospectus being published.

Another factor in weighing the benefits and risks of entering the pool was the number of outstanding business rate valuation appeals for Fylde. There were a number of appeals in process which were with the Valuation Office for decision, however due to the volume and complexity of the appeals, there was significant delay in determining the appeals.

After a discussion it was RESOLVED

1. That due to the financial risk arising from the potential cost to the Council from outstanding historic business rate appeals that Fylde Council do not participate in a Lancashire business rate pool for 2016/17; and
2. That participation in a Lancashire business rate pool for 2017/18 and subsequent years should be kept under review and should be the subject of a report to the committee for consideration during next financial year.

Information Items

The following information items were received by the committee.

6. Community Projects Fund
7. General Fund Revenue Budget Monitoring Report 2015/16 – Position as at 31<sup>st</sup> July 2015
8. Capital Programme Monitoring Report 2015/16 – Position as at 31<sup>st</sup> July 2015

Exempt Items

9. Exclusion of the Public

Members of the committee were invited to consider passing a resolution excluding the public from the meeting for the consideration of item 10 below in accordance with the provisions of Section 100(4) of the Local Government Act 1972. This was on the grounds that the business to be discussed was exempt information as defined in paragraph 7 (Information relating to any action

taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime) of Schedule 12A of the Act.

It was RESOLVED to exclude the public.

**10. EXEMPT ITEM - Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support – Introduction of Risk Based Verification of Claims**

Mr Paul O'Donoghue, Chief Financial Officer, and Mrs Marie McRoberts, Head of Shared Service, presented information regarding the introduction of risk based verification of claims for housing benefit and council tax support.

After a debate, it was RESOLVED to

1. Support the adoption of a Risk-Based Verification Policy (RBV) for the processing of new claims for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 with implementation of the policy planned to commence during 2016/17;
2. Approve the proposed Fylde Council Risk-Based Verification Policy (RBV) as attached at Appendix A to this report, subject to endorsement of the policy by the Council's Chief Financial Officer and by the Audit and Standards Committee;
3. Approve the withdrawal of paper-based application forms for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support, with the usual means for submitting such a claim being by way of an online form, whilst ensuring that claimants receive the appropriate level of support to ensure that the online form is accessible to them and that they retain access to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support;
4. Note that the cost of implementing the change will be met from the existing approved revenue budget for the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service; and
5. Note that following implementation of these changes a review will be undertaken to seek further opportunities for improving efficiencies in claims management processes.

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