



Minutes

FINANCE AND DEMOCRACY COMMITTEE

Date:	Monday, 21 March 2016
Venue:	Town Hall, St Annes.
Committee Members:	Councillor Karen Buckley (Chairman) Councillor Roger Small (Vice-Chairman) Councillors David Donaldson, Tony Ford JP, Angela Jacques, Kiran Mulholland, Linda Nulty, Liz Oades, Richard Redcliffe, Vince Settle, Richard Taylor.
Other Councillors Present:	Councillor Jan Barker.
Officers Present:	Allan Oldfield, Paul O'Donoghue, Paul Walker, Ian Curtis, Katharine McDonnell
Other Attendees:	Andrew Turpin and Graeme Ruse, Shared Revenue and Benefits Service, Blackpool Council Three members of the public

1. Public Platform

There were no speakers on this occasion.

2. 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 on this occasion.

3. Confirmation of minutes

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the Finance and Democracy Committee meeting held on 22 February 2016 as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

4. Substitute members

There were no substitutions.

Decision Items

5. Community Asset Nomination – Blackpool Airport Terminal Building

Ian Curtis, Head of Governance advised that the Council had received a nomination for inclusion of the Blackpool Airport terminal building on the community asset register. However, he explained, after careful consideration the officer recommendation was to refuse the community asset

nomination as it did not pass the two stage test for inclusion on the register. He explained that the first test was for the committee to decide if there had been a time in the recent past when the use of the land, specifically as an airport terminal, had furthered the social wellbeing or social interest of the local community. Only if this stage was satisfied must the committee move onto the second stage test, which was whether it was likely that there could be a time within the next five years where the land could further the social wellbeing of the local community.

Mr Curtis suggested that the use of the land as an airport terminal might have furthered the logistical or economic wellbeing of the local community, but did not further social wellbeing, and consequently officers were recommending refusal of the nomination. He further advised that given the future plans for the land, he felt it was unlikely that the second stage test could be satisfied.

The committee asked a number of questions regarding the definition of social wellbeing and social interest. Mr Curtis responded that it was a balanced judgement, taking into account a number of factors.

Following a discussion, the Committee RESOLVED:

1. To decline to include the terminal building at Blackpool Airport in the council's list of assets of community value because in the opinion of the authority neither the actual use nor any recent use of the building furthers or has furthered the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community; and
2. To include the terminal building in the council's list of unsuccessful nominations.

6. Write Off of Uncollectable Debts 2015/16

Paul O'Donoghue, Chief Financial Officer, and Graeme Ruse, Recovery Manager, Revenue and Benefits Shared Service, presented the report detailing debts in relation to Business Rates and the recovery of Housing Benefit overpayments.

Mr O'Donoghue advised that 98% of monies due were ultimately collected and writing off was always a last resort. He advised that debts in excess of £25k could only be written off following a decision by committee. He explained that as an authority Fylde had billed approximately £23m in relation to business rates in 15/16 of which approximately £1.7m or 7%, was ultimately retained by Fylde, with the majority going to the Government and other preceptors. Therefore of the debts before committee for consideration, only around 7% of the total debt would affect Fylde. He further advised that the write-off would be made against the provision for bad debt was always made as standard accounting practice in the budget.

Mr O'Donoghue, advised that debts under £25k were written off under delegated responsibilities and were presented to the committee for information.

In response to questions from committee, Mr Ruse explained that the debts before committee had accumulated over a relatively short period, but even after the normal recovery procedures had been followed, where businesses folded, some debts were simply unrecoverable.

Mr Ruse further explained that the normal procedures for recovery after a payment was missed, were to issue a reminder; to then issue a summons; and then send an enforcement agent. He advised that most debtors would try to pay either via a payment schedule or through recovered goods, but there were some instances where there were no goods to be recovered, for example empty properties. He also explained that the authority could initiate bankruptcy procedures, but it was not a cost or time effective route to take.

Mr O'Donoghue advised that the numbers of bad debtors remained fairly static, and Fylde compared favourably against other local authorities in the North West.

Following a discussion, it was RESOLVED:

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

7. Council Tax and Business Rates Discretionary Discount Policy 2016/17

Paul O'Donoghue, Chief Financial Officer, and Andrew Turpin, Revenue and Benefits Shared Service, introduced the item advising that the policy was updated and brought to committee annually. The policy reflected any changes in government policy in regards to rate relief and discounts to be offered.

Mr O'Donoghue advised that there were a number of changes from the previous year including the end of retail relief which would end on 31 March 2016; and a new section had been included on temporary part occupation relief. He further advised that the policy was consistent with the Council Tax Discount Scheme and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

In response to questions, Mr Turpin advised that there were a number of other rate relief streams available to businesses but they were not discretionary so did not appear in the policy.

On conclusion of the discussion it was RESOLVED to approve and adopt the Council Tax and Business Rates Discretionary Discount Policy (2016/17 update).

8. Request for Additional Section 106 Funds – Kwik Save Site

Paul Walker, Director of Development Services presented a request from Great Places Housing Group to allocate further s106 funding for the scheme at the former Kwik Save site, St Annes. Mr Walker explained that following changes made by the Government in the July 2015 budget, specifically a 1% reduction to all affordable rent tenure properties, Great Places Housing Group would make a loss of £146k on the scheme.

Mr Walker advised that the item had been before the Development Management Committee who recommended that £75k of additional s106 funding be allocated to Great Places for the Kwik Save scheme, with the funding to be allocated from the Queen Mary School Development contribution.

Mr Walker further advised that the changes made by the Government had occurred mid-way through the development, and Development Management Committee had advised that if the change had occurred before the scheme started, the Committee would have been minded to allocate additional funds to the scheme.

It was RESOLVED to approve an additional £75,000 fully funded revenue budget increase in 2015/16 to be met from a Section 106 contribution (Agreement Ref: 03/0157 – Queen Mary School Development) held by the council paid under planning obligations for affordable housing of the same amount, to offset half of the losses Great Places will incur on delivering affordable housing on the Kwik Save site, following the impact of 1% rent reduction to all affordable rent tenure properties announced in the Government's July 2015 budget.

9. Appointment to Outside Bodies/Working Groups

Allan Oldfield, Chief Executive advised that the committees were requested to make recommendations to appointments from within their respective memberships, where possible, for those outside bodies relating to the remit of the committee. She also asked members to note the reports from members currently serving on outside bodies.

A number of questions were asked about the budget setting process and the reporting of the decisions of the budget working group. The Chairman reminded the committee that all committees

had had sight of an early draft of the budget book, and had considered the capital bids and the fees and charges in relation to those committees.

After a full and frank discussion, it was RESOLVED;

1. To recommend nominations to the outside bodies listed for consideration by council;
 - a. Nominate The Mayor to the Community Projects Fund
 - b. Nominate the Chairman of Finance and Democracy committee to the North West Employers Organisation, with Councillor Richard Taylor as named substitute.
 - c. Nominate Councillor Edward Nash to the North West of England and Isle of Man Reserve Forces and Cadets Association
2. To confirm the continuance of the budget working group to meet as and when required, the membership of which would consist of Councillors Aitken, Buckley, Eaves, Fazackerley, Fiddler, Little, Redcliffe, Small and Taylor;
3. To thank Councillor Donaldson for his work on the budget working group;
4. To confirm the continuance of the accommodation working group to meet as and when required, the membership of which would consist of Councillors Buckley, Fazackerley, Ford, Fiddler, Jacques and Oades;
5. To note the reports from members currently serving on outside bodies.

(Under Council Procedure Rule 15.6, Councillors Oades and Nulty requested that their vote against resolution 2 above be recorded).

Information Items

10. Employee Survey 2015

The Committee received the responses to the 2015 Employee Survey.

(Councillor Mulholland left the meeting before the conclusion of item 10).

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