



# MINUTES

## Finance and Democracy Committee

<b>Date:</b>	Monday, 28 March 2022
<b>Venue:</b>	Town Hall, St Annes
<b>Committee Members Present:</b>	Councillor Karen Buckley (Chairman) Councillor Vince Settle (Vice-Chairman)  Councillors Peter Anthony, Peter Collins, Ellie Gaunt, Matthew Lee, Linda Nulty, Liz Oades, David O'Rourke, Richard Redcliffe, John Singleton JP Michael Withers.
<b>Officers Present:</b>	Allan Oldfield, Bill Fisher, Phil Haworth, Carly Smith, Lyndsey Lacey-Simone, Ross McKelvie.
<b>Other Attendees:</b>	Louise Jones - Head of Revenue and Benefits Shared Service Graham Ruse - Revenues Manager - Shared Service

### 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 Matthew Lee declared a personal interest in item 4 on the agenda relating to write-off of uncollectable debts 2021/22 in so far as it related to The Windmill, Clifton Lane, Preston.

Councillor Peter Collins declared a personal and prejudicial interest in item 5 on the agenda relating the agreement for grazing land at Kirkham and withdraw from the meeting during the discussion and voting on the item.

#### 2. Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the Finance and Democracy Committee meeting held on 8 February 2022 as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

#### 3. Substitute Members

The following substitution was reported under Council procedure rule 23 (c):

Councillor Matthew Lee substituted for Councillor Elaine Silverwood.

### Decision Items

#### 4. Write-Off of Uncollectable Debts 2021/22

The Chairman invited Louise Jones, Head of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service to present the report. In doing so she advised that the report included details of proposed write-off of debts in relation to Business Rates, Council Tax, and the recovery of Housing Benefit overpayments relating to the period prior to 31st March 2022.

Members were reminded that the Council's Constitution specifies the amounts that can be written-off by key officers under delegated powers for figures under and in excess of £25,000 per individual debt which require reporting either to committee for information purposes and / or require subsequent Committee approval.

It was reported that the Chief Financial Officer (Section 151 Officer) had recently exercised this delegated power by writing-off three uncollectable Business Rate debts, two Housing Benefit overpayments and a single Council Tax debt below £25,000. In addition, there were five uncollectable Business Rates debt in excess of the £25,000 limit for which write-off was requested. It was highlighted that there were no uncollectable debts in excess of the £25,000 limit in respect of any other category of debt.

Section 1 of Appendix A of the report provided details of debts in excess of £25,000 for which write off was requested and Section 2 of Appendix A provided details of debts under £25,000 for information purposes. Appendix 2 of the report provided details regarding the associated terminology.

Questions were invited from the Chairman. These related to the following areas: information relating to historical preferential creditors for business rates and monitoring arrangements for the recovery of debt. The questions were addressed in turn by Ms Jones and Mr Ruse as appropriate.

Following consideration of this matter it was RESOLVED:

1. To approve the write-off of the five uncollectable debts in excess of £25,000 details of which were set out in Section 1 of Appendix A the report; and
  2. To note the write-off by the Chief Financial Officer under delegated powers of the six uncollectable debts below £25,000, details of which were also set out in section 2 of Appendix A to the report.
5. Agreement for Grazing Land at Kirkham

Phil Haworth (Estates & Assets Officer) introduced the report which proposed a Farm Business Tenancy for a period of 20 years to be granted to John Kirkham for grazing of the land at Carr Farm, Kirkham.

It was reported that the proposed Farm Business Tenancy, as described in the report had an initial annual rental of £50.00 per annum which increased every 5 years.

Included as appendices were a copy of the Demise Plan and the draft Farm Business Tenancy.

The Chairman invited questions. These related to the following areas: tenancy arrangements and the cost of grazing land. Mr Haworth addressed the points raised.

It was RESOLVED: that Fylde Council grants a Farm Business Tenancy to John Kirkham for a term of 20 years as set out in the report.

6. Commercial Strategy Review

The Chairman invited Allan Oldfield, Chief Executive to introduce the report. In doing so, he advised that the revised Commercial Strategy for Fylde Council had been informed by the cross-party working group. He explained that the revised strategy is appropriate for the current financial position and corporate objectives informed by feedback from the elected members on the working group.

Included as appendices to the report were (a) The Commercial Strategy for Fylde and (b) Terms of Reference for the Commercial Strategy Working Group.

Councillor Redcliffe asked about the Council's approach to investments/risks and drivers for investment. Mr Oldfield addressed this point.

Following detailed discussion, it was RESOLVED to approve the revised Commercial Strategy for Fylde as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

The Chairmen asked to place on record her thanks and appreciation to the working group for work undertaken on the matter.

7. Nominations to Outside Bodies/ Working Groups

The Committee was invited to recommend nominations to the various outside bodies/working Groups (within the remit of the committee) for consideration at Full Council.

At this juncture, Councillor Settle reported that the title of the South Fylde Rail Users Group was incorrect and should be read South Fylde Line Community Rail Partnership and suggested that the name of the Outside Body be amended accordingly.

Following consideration of this matter it was RESOLVED:

1. To recommend to Full Council that Growth Lancashire Ltd is added to the approved list of Outside Bodies for Fylde Council.
2. To recommend to Full Council that the Leader be nominated to sit on the Board of Growth Lancashire Ltd and that the Deputy Leader act as a substitute member.
3. To recommend the following nominations to the outside bodies for consideration by Council:
  - Blackpool Airport and Hillhouse Enterprise Zone Project Board - Deputy Leader - Councillor Roger Small.
  - Fylde Community Project Fund - The Mayor.
  - Local Government Association (LGA) -Leader of the Council- Councillor Karen Buckley.
  - North West Employers Organisation - Chairman of Finance and Democracy (plus a named substitute) – Councillor Karen Buckley and Councillor Vince Settle.
  - North West of England & the Isle of Man Reserve Forces & Cadets Association - Councilor Ed Nash
  - South Fylde Line Community Rail Partnership - Councillor Vince Settle.
4. To confirm the membership of the following working groups that relate to the terms of reference of the committee.
  - Budget Working Group - Chairman & Vice Chairman of F&D Cttee, Chairmen of T&L Cttee, Op Mgt Cttee, EH&H Cttee & Planning Cttees plus 2 F&D members - Councillors Richard Redcliffe & Ellie Gaunt.
  - Leadership Board - Chairmen of each programme committee and the Planning Committee
  - St Annes Programme Board – Leader and Deputy Leader
5. To note the conclusion of the work of the Commercial Strategy Review Working Group and its removal from the working party list.
6. To note the reports from members currently serving on Outside Bodies.

Information Items

8. Customer Access Channel Report (Corporate Plan Follow Up)

The Information report outlined the current arrangements for customer access to council services across all channels with particular focus on the most vulnerable.

Bill Fisher (Customer Services Manager) attended the meeting to address any questions.

Clarification was sought on various matters including: the use social media platforms to promote other Council matters including the Residents Survey; the online 'chat' service, response time to answer telephone calls and the impact of digital working on staffing. Mr Fisher addressed these points.

The Chairman thanked Mr Fisher for his attendance at the meeting and in doing so, asked that the Committee's thanks and appreciation be passed on to the Team for the valued and personal service offered.

It was RESOLVED to request that a similar report be presented to the Committee on an annual basis.

9. The Residents Survey 2020-21

The information report provided details of the latest outcomes from the Residents Survey for both the 2020 and 2021 period. The satisfaction level with services, the Council and the local community was compared against previous data sets as well as the cumulative outcomes. The report included recommendations to develop and improve the process or carry out further research in any given area in response to the findings

Attached as appendices were (a) The Resident Survey Questionnaire and (b) The Resident Survey Results.

Circulated at the meeting was additional data/data table relating to the Residents Survey.

Clarification was sought on various ratings/details listed in the document and the associated intended actions behind the review. This was addressed by the Chairman and Mr Oldfield.

The Chairman drew the Committee's attention to the fact that the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) was due to undertake a review of the planning service in due course.

10. Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone Progress Report

This item was deferred to the next appropriate meeting of the Finance and Democracy Committee.

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