

POLICY COMMITTEE

3rd November 2015

Present – The Chairman (Foster) and Councillors Barrett, Brockbank, Clark (substitute for Sutcliffe), Dawson, Ireton, Hull, Kerwin-Davey, Lis, Mulligan, Place, G Quinn, Solloway (substitute for Heseltine) and Sutcliffe

Officers – Chief Executive, Director of Services, Corporate Head of Business Support, Strategic Manager – Financial Services (S.151 Officer), Strategic Manager - Planning and Regeneration, Solicitor to the Council (Monitoring Officer), Spatial Planning Manager (Planning Policy), Housing and Environmental Health Manager, Principal Planning Officer (Planning Policy), Communications and Partnerships Manager, Affordable Housing Development Officer and Committee Administrator.

Also in Attendance: Michael Bullock from Arc4.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors English, Heseltine and Myers.
Councillor Lis arrived at 6.50pm.
Councillor Barrett left at 7.39pm

Start: 6:30pm

Finish: 8.25pm

The minutes of the Committee's meetings held on 15th September 2015 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

That, in accordance with the Council's Access to Information Procedure Rules, the public is excluded from the meeting during consideration of Minute POL.702 marked (\$) below on the grounds that it is not in the public interest to disclose the Category 3 exempt information (financial or business affairs of any particular person including the Council).

Minutes for Report

POL.695

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Under the Council's Public Participation Scheme the following persons addressed the Committee regarding the Council's proposed housing target and housing distribution strategy for the emerging Local Plan:

Marcia Turner, a Skipton resident and former Craven District Councillor

David Walsh, a Craven resident

Brian Shuttleworth, Chairman of Embsay with Eastby Parish Council and a member of the Council for the Protection of Rural England.

POL.696

TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID-YEAR REPORT 2015/16

The Strategic Manager for Financial Services (S.151 Officer) submitted a report updating Members on the treasury activity undertaken in the first six months of the year in the context of current and forecast economic climates. The Council managed its cash flows, banking and capital market transactions in accordance with the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management which had been adopted by the Council in March 2012.

The report provided an economic update for the first part of 2015/16 and gave a forecast of future interest rates. The Strategic Manager for Financial Services (S.151 Officer) advised that the

Council held £13.330m of investments as at 30th September 2015 and a current account balance of £0.321m. Returns on investments had been slightly above benchmark rates and, additionally, investment income had been boosted by a discount of £14,100 on the annual pensions' contribution as a result of making an advance payment. The total investment income received from all sources was £34,720 as at 30th September 2015 with the total budgeted investment return for the full year being £61,400. However, the forecast outturn was £84,140 due to cash balances and yields being higher than originally forecast.

The Council's current borrowing was £5.988m and it was expected that no borrowing had been undertaken during the first half of the 2015/16 financial year.

Resolved – That, the treasury management mid-year report for 2015/16 is noted.

POL.697

CRAVEN COMMUNITY CORE FUNDING GRANTS UPDATE

The Chief Executive submitted a report updating Members on the work of the eight community organisations that were core funded by the Council during 2014/15 and 2015/16 and the progress they had made towards securing their future sustainability.

The Community Grants Sub-Committee had been satisfied that each of the core funded organisations had made acceptable progress in implementing their delivery plans to enable release of provisional funding awards for 2015/16 although it was apparent that some organisations were in a far better position to obtain alternative ongoing funding and/or developing income streams.

However, whilst the Citizens Advice Bureau had significantly reduced their overheads by merging the separate bureaux of Craven, Ripon and Harrogate, they felt they may be unable to continue to provide a permanent office in Craven without ongoing funding from the Council. In order to meet national criteria, Citizens Advice had to deliver a guaranteed level of service including face to face advice. Without premises they were concerned that they would lose volunteers resulting in a very basic outreach service to far fewer clients. Around 1650 clients were seen each year and there was a two week waiting time for non-urgent appointments, indicating the demand for the service.

The cost of delivering the service in Craven was £82,250 and the current year's income was made up of £34,649 from North Yorkshire County Council, £20,000 from Craven District Council, £5,000 from Skipton Building Society and £5,000 from local charities and personal donations. Whilst Citizens Advice were confident they could make up the deficit of £17,601 from fund raising and reserves, they felt that without the £20,000 grant from this Authority in future years the service would cease to be viable.

By making a commitment to Citizens Advice, the Council would be supporting its residents, some of whom were experiencing real financial hardship through unemployment, physical disability or long-term health conditions and the report highlighted that the advice and support provided enabled people to have more financial security.

Resolved – (1) That, the report is noted.

(2) That, the Council commits to providing on-going funding of £20,000 to Citizens Advice Craven and Harrogate Districts and that a revenue bid for £20,000 is submitted to enable ongoing funding for 2016/17 onwards to be reviewed after three years.

(Councillor Hull declared an Appendix B interest in the above item as she was the Honorary Treasurer for Age UK North Craven – Village Agent Scheme, one of the core funded community organisations.)

POL.698

SKIPTON TOWN HALL: ARTS COUNCIL BID TO RESTORE MAIN HALL

The Strategic Manager for Planning and Regeneration submitted a report presenting the scope of a bid for funding to the Arts Council in order to improve the facilities and equipment of the main hall and seeking confirmation for the application to continue.

In September 2015, the Arts Council gave permission for the Council to submit an application for £250,000 funding from its £9.6m capital grants programme for 2016/17. No match funding was required. The application process was extremely competitive and as the last round for this funding was 8th October 2015 a submission for £250k was made on the basis that it was the last opportunity to apply for funding in 2016/17. A decision on whether the Council had been successful was expected in February 2016.

The submission for £250k was in excess of delegated powers given to officers and therefore Members' approval was required for the funding application to continue through the Arts Council process.

Resolved – That, the continuation of the funding application to the Arts Council is confirmed.

(Councillor Solloway declared a Paragraph 15 interest in the above item as he was sometimes an exhibitor at the Town Hall.)

POL.699

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

The Corporate Head of Business Support submitted a report updating Members on the progress of establishing a strategic partnership for the delivery of revenue, benefit and IT services.

Resolved – (1) That, the report is noted.

(2) That, the Corporate Head of Business Support is authorised to manage the next stages of the procurement process to establish a revenue, benefits and IT strategic partnership.

(3) That, a further report setting out the outcome of outline and detailed solution stages and seeking approval to go out to final tender is submitted to this Committee and copied to all Members.

POL.700

GRANVILLE STREET ALLOTMENTS – LAND FOR WATER SUPPLY

The Director of Services submitted a report seeking Members' approval to acquire, for nil consideration, a small piece of land on Granville Street, Skipton, for the purposes of siting a new water supply and meter for the Granville Street allotments.

Following the discovery of a leak, and the resultant low pressure in the water pipes feeding the allotments, Yorkshire Water had advised that to undertake the required level of investigation and repair would be a costly, particularly as the meter and pipework were not on Council owned land. Yorkshire Water suggested a new water connection and meter could be installed on a small piece of land currently owned by Lovells. Although Yorkshire Water would not connect over privately owned third party land, Lovells had used, and paid for, access to this water in the past and, as a solution, they were agreeable to transferring this land to the Council at nil consideration. Lovells had also agreed to organise the disconnection of the existing water meter/supply.

Resolved – (1) That, the acquisition, at nil consideration, of the piece of land illustrated on the plan at Appendix A to the report now submitted, for the purposes of siting a new water supply and meter to the Granville Street allotments which the Council owns and manages is approved.

- (2) That subject to (1) above, the Director of Services together with the Council's legal officers are authorised to complete the land transfer accordingly.

(The Chief Executive left the meeting whilst this item was debated and voted upon.)

POL.701

MINUTES OF SUB-COMMITTEES

The Chairman presented the minutes of the Community Grants Sub-Committee meetings held on 29th June and 5th October 2015 and of the Craven Spatial Planning Sub-Committee meetings held on 1st October and 19th October 2015 and re-produced as Appendix A to these minutes.

Resolved – That, the minutes are approved.

POL.\$702

SHARED OWNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The Director of Services submitted a report seeking approval for the delivery of a pilot scheme to develop shared ownership housing.

Resolved – (1) That, the delivery of a pilot scheme to develop shared ownership housing on a Council owned site is approved and that a funding application to the Homes and Communities Agency is submitted.

(2) That, a supplementary revenue estimate of £17,000 to implement all actions necessary to complete the pilot scheme and prepare a delivery programme to be funded from the Enabling Efficiencies Reserve is approved.

(3) That, a supplementary capital estimate of £300,000 from short term borrowing for the construction of the pilot development site is approved.

(4) That, a report is presented to the April 2016 Policy Committee advising on the progress of the pilot together with a detailed proposed first phase of a delivery programme.

Minutes for Decison

POL.703

CONFIRMATION OF THE COUNCIL TAX BASE 2016/2017

The Corporate Head of Business Support submitted a report seeking approval of the Council Tax Base for the 2016/17 financial year. The Committee was advised that the formula used to calculate the base had been updated to take account of both the technical changes to council tax discounts and exemptions and the change from council tax benefit to local council tax reduction schemes i.e. council tax support.

RECOMMENDED – (1) That, in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 1992 (as amended) the amount calculated by Craven District Council as its tax base for the whole of the area for 2016/17 financial year is set at 21,824.76.

(2) That, in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 1992 (as amended) the amount calculated by Craven District Council as the tax base for each of its parishes for the 2016/17 financial year is that as set out in Appendix A to this report.

POL.704

COUNCIL TAX LIABILITY DISCRETIONARY POWERS POLICY

The Corporate Head of Business Support submitted a report introducing a discretionary scheme in order to reduce the amount of Council Tax a person would be liable to pay should the qualifying criteria of the scheme be met.

Relevant case law established that local authorities should have a scheme permitting discretionary reductions of Council Tax. Whilst Craven does have a Council Tax Reduction Scheme in place, it does not take account of a number of unusual or exceptional circumstances where the scheme on its own would not provide an appropriate level of financial assistance.

It was envisaged that the number of awards under the scheme would be few, and of relatively small amounts and that a fund of £2,000k would be sufficient.

RECOMMENDED – (1) That, with immediate effect, the introduction of a scheme permitting discretionary reductions of Council Tax under 13A (1) (c) of the Local Government Finance Act is approved.

(2) That, delegated authority is given to the Corporate Head of Business Support to make ongoing adjustments to the scheme in future years.

(3) That, financial provision within the contingency fund amounting to £2,000 is approved.

POL.705

CRAVEN OBJECTIVELY ASSESSED NEED FOR HOUSING AND THE HOUSING DISTRIBUTION POLICY

The Strategic Manager for Planning and Regeneration presented a report seeking approval for a housing target and a housing distribution strategy for the emerging Local Plan based on an objectively assessed need for new dwellings.

Members were reminded that the level of housing need now proposed for the plan period was based on updated economic and housing evidence that was being used to underpin the plan as well as advancements in Government guidance. Sustainability checks had indicated that the proposed upward adjustment to the housing requirement (from an annual minimum target of 160 new homes to 256 per annum for that part of the District outside the National Park) would be most sustainably concentrated in the market towns, in particular Skipton.

RECOMMENDED – (1) That, the objectively assessed need for housing of an average of 290 dwellings per year for the entire Craven District housing market area based on the best available information is accepted.

(2) That, a housing target, across the Craven Local Planning Authority area based on the objectively assessed need of 5,120 net new dwellings for the 2012-2032 plan period, representing an average of 256 dwellings per year, is agreed.

(3) That, the housing distribution strategy as set out within the Strategic Manager for Planning and Regeneration's report at table 5 is agreed for the purposes of preparation of a draft Local Plan for public consultation.

POL.706

FEES AND CHARGES POLICY

The Strategic Manager for Financial Services submitted a report presenting for approval an updated Fees and Charges Policy. The Council levied fees and charges on a range of items raising about £5m in annual revenue. The fees and charges applied were a combination of statutory charges prescribed by Government or discretionary charges set by the Council. The current Fees and Charges Policy was reviewed in the 2014/15 financial year and approved by Policy Committee on 17th November 2014.

In light of current budget pressures and the economic climate a further review has taken place with the presumption that the value of fees and charges should be maintained in real terms over time and increased annually in line with inflation in order to maintain a balanced budget.

RECOMMENDED – That, the updated Fees and Charges Policy as now submitted, is approved.

Chairman