

POLICY COMMITTEE

13th September 2016

Present – The Chairman (Foster) and Councillors Barratt, Brockbank, Dawson, Hull, Ireton, Jaquin, Lis, Madeley, Morrell, Mulligan, Place, Shuttleworth (substitute for Heseltine), Welch and Whitaker (substitute for Myers).

Officers – Chief Executive, Director of Services, Corporate Head of Business Support, Solicitor to the Council (Monitoring Officer), Strategic Manager – Financial Services (S.151 Officer), Strategic Manager – Planning and Regeneration and Member Services Manager.

Also in attendance: Councillor Staveley

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Heseltine and Myers.

Start: 6:30pm

Finish: 7.55 pm

The minutes of the Committee's meeting held on 19th July 2016 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

Minutes for Report

POL.774

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Sheila Burman of Skipton Music Festival attended and asked for clarification concerning the modernisation of the Town Hall and the possibility of the stage and proscenium arch being removed and bleacher seating installed. The speaker also requested that Skipton Music Festival be involved in consultation regarding the Town Hall modernisation.

The Director of Services undertook to meet with Mrs Burman and Skipton Music Festival members to inform them of the proposals and assured Committee that they would be involved in future consultation through the stakeholder group.

POL.775

SELECT COMMITTEE REPORTS

Revenues and Benefits Performance

The Chairman of Select Committee presented a report on the outcome of the Committee's considerations of matters relating to the performance of the Council's Revenues and Benefits Department in the processing of housing benefits applications. The Committee had identified a number of factors which had led to the poor performance but were pleased to be able to conclude that those had been effectively addressed and that arrangements were in place to ensure that a good level of performance is maintained.

The Select Committee made a number of recommendations for the future management of the service.

Resolved – (1) That, recommendations 1-3 contained in the report be approved and that recommendation 4 is not approved as it constrains the flexibility of the Council to respond to circumstances which may arise.

(2) That, Select Committee Members be thanked for their work on the review.

Waste Management Working Group

The Chairman of Select Committee presented a report on the outcome of the Waste management Working Group's considerations of matters relating to the Waste Management Policy Review which had been chaired by Councillor Solloway. The Committee had concluded that Members can be reassured that the Waste management Service is compliant with the recommendations of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). However, it was acknowledged that in changing the collection arrangements there has been a reduction in the level or quality of service. The conclusions also highlighted the need to communicate and engage effectively with residents and to respond to concerns raised. The Working Group also suggested that the Council should review the 'lane end collection' policy.

The Working Group made a number of recommendations for the future management of the service.

Resolved – (1) That, the recommendations contained in the report be approved and Select Committee be thanked for their work on this review.

POL.776

REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING Q1 – 2016/17

The Strategic Manager for Financial Services submitted a report advising Members of the revenue budget monitoring position of the Council based on the quarter one review of income and expenditure to the end of June 2016.

The Council had approved its net revenue budget for 2016/17 at £7,896k which was subsequently increased from slippage amounting to £195k from the 15/16 budget giving a revised net budget of £8,410k.

The Council's overall performance against revenue budget was a projected underspend of £119k for the full financial year which included £12.3k from the Council's Income and Savings Plan.

The 2016/17 budget included contributions of £18K to parishes to assist them with the impact of the localisation of council tax; £72k from previous years Council Tax collection fund surpluses; £364k to the Business Rates Collection Funds deficits; a New Homes Bonus grant of £1,086k; net contribution to/from earmarked reserves of £1,451k a corporate contingency of £75k and member ward grants of £15k.

The General Fund balance stood at £995k and it was expected that this balance would remain during 2016/17 assisting in mitigating against the risk of unplanned movements from budgeted net expenditure levels as well as the impact of changes in local government funding.

The Council had £5,615k in earmarked reserves at 1st April 2016 and estimates contributions of £1,128k will be made to them during the year. £4,764k will either be utilised in 2016/17 or has been committed for use.

Resolved – (1) That, the revenue budget monitoring position as at 30th June 2016 is noted.

(2) That, £12.3k of the savings expected to be achieved this year are identified as green in Appendix B to the report now submitted are noted and that these savings will be carried forward for support to the 2017/18 budget and beyond.

(3) That, the Council's Long Term Financial Plan be amended to take account of the 'green' savings in 2017/18 and beyond where these are not currently allowed for in the budget.

POL.777 **CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING Q1 – 2016/17**

The Strategic Manager for Financial Services submitted a report informing Members of the capital programme position of the Council based on the first quarter review of income and expenditure to the end of June 2016.

The 2016/17 capital programme of £3,473.7k included £1,500k of slippage from 2015/16 and £382k from previously approved projects.

At 30th June expenditure on the programme was £383k and the report summarised the programme and provided an update on the status of various projects. The forecasted outturn for 2016/17 was £3,456k.

Resolved – That, the capital budget monitoring position as at 30 June 2016 and the additions to the programme are noted.

POL.777 **PERFORMANCE MONITORING Q1 – 2016/17**

The Strategic Manager for Financial Services submitted a report presenting the Council's first quarter performance monitoring report for the 2016/17 financial year as determined by arrangements set out in the Council's performance management framework. Members were informed of progress and details of current performance against the Council Plan and priority indicators.

Monitoring against the Council Plan showed that good progress had been made on implementing the council Plan actions. Fourteen had been assessed as on target by those completing the updates. Three actions had not been started as they were not yet required.

Resolved – That, the performance monitoring position as at 30 June 2016 is noted.

POL.778 **BAD DEBT WRITE OFFS 2015/16**

The Strategic Manager for Financial Services submitted a report informing members of bad debts which had been written off during the 2015/2016 financial year in accordance with the scheme of delegation to officers and following good financial management practices.

Resolved – That the report be noted

POL.779 **COUNCIL TAX EXEMPTION FOR EMPTY AND UNOCCUPIED PROPERTIES 2017/18 AND BEYOND**

The Corporate Head – Business Support submitted a report concerning a review of options on the current council tax exemption for empty and unfurnished properties. The current scheme had been in place for four years and it was prudent to undertake a review.

The review recommended three options:

- continue with the current policy of a maximum of 3 months;
- reduce the maximum 3 months to a maximum of 1 month which could be applied to one liable party; or
- reduce the 3 months to a maximum of 1 month in total but to a maximum of 14 days for a liable party. Consecutive exemptions for different liable parties are permitted but limited to a maximum of 14 days each.

It was reported that options B and C would both result in potential additional income of £19,288.

Recommended – (1) Class C exemptions be renamed “Craven DC empty and unfurnished property exemption scheme”.

(2) Approval be given to consultation on the following two options (options B and C in the report);

Reduce the maximum 3 months to a maximum of 1 month which can be applied to one liable party.

Or

Reduce the 3 months to a maximum of 1 month in total but to a maximum of 14 days for a liable party. Consecutive exemptions for different liable parties are permitted but limited to a maximum of 14 days each.

(3) Authorisation be given for consultation on the Craven DC empty and unfurnished property exemption scheme to include that;

- a. There must be a minimum period of 6 months continuous occupation at a property by any liable party before a further exemption is permitted to that liable party who has already received an empty and unfurnished exemption at the same property.
- b. An empty and unfurnished property is defined as not having sufficient furniture or furnishings for the household to occupy it as its main and sole residence.

(Councillor Whitaker declared a pecuniary interest in the above item and left the meeting.)

Minutes for Decision

POL.780

ACCEPTANCE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S FOUR YEAR SETTLEMENT OFFER

The Strategic Manager for Financial Services submitted a report asking Committee to consider the government offer of a four year funding settlement to 2019/20 to any council that wishes to take it up and provides a draft submission accepting the offer. The submission also includes a Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy for 2016/17 to 2018/19 which the government offer also allowed.

The report identified the uncertainties associated with the offer in relation to the business rates baseline on the implementation of 100% business rates and how New Homes

Bonus would feature in future government funding. The current income and Savings plan met the requirements for an Efficiency Plan..

Recommended – (1) That, approval is given to the submission for the Government’s four year settlement offer.

(2) That, the Government’s four year settlement offer is accepted.

POL.781 **LONGER TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (LTFS) 2017/18 - 2023/24**

The Strategic Manager for Financial Services submitted a report providing Members with an update and overview on the forecast financial position for the seven year period to 2023/24.

The purpose of the Long Term Financial Strategy (LTFS) was to provide a framework for the Council to assess its financial sustainability over a ten year period. However, given the continuing volatility and uncertainty around Government funding it was proposed that the LTFS covered a seven year period to 2023/24.

The estimates within the LTFS showed that the Council would need to continue with its savings plan and achieve savings ranging at least £626k in 2017/18, rising by at least £268k in 2018/19 and up to £1,029k in 2019/20. This did not allow for any one off items of revenue expenditure, and a further £75-£100k should be allowed for this

Recommended– That, the long term financial strategy 2017/18 to 2023/24 as set out in the report now submitted, is approved.

POL.782 **SKIPTON TOWN HALL**

The Director of Services submitted a report inform Members of findings from the feasibility study commissioned on the restoration of the Concert Hall and proposing next steps in Skipton Town Hall’s development.

The feasibility study found that Skipton Town Hall has the capability to become a primary cultural venue not only for Craven District but for the wider Dales hinterland and which will boost the local economy. The study identified a number of improvements needed to modernise the Concert Hall to meet up to date standards and audience and performers expectations and increase audience participation.

The Arts Council England has awarded the Council £250,000 to improve the lighting and sound systems, acoustics and seating, three of the five required improvement areas identified by the feasibility study. Once complete these improvements will enable the Council to be more ambitious in its programming; improve artistic quality; live-stream national performances; broadcast performances to remoter, rural communities and widen the range of people engaging with the arts.

Resolved – (1) The findings from the feasibility study commissioned on the restoration of the Concert Hall within Skipton Town Hal be noted and the receipt of the Arts Council England funding of £250,000 be welcomed.

(2) The business case for the refurbishment of the Concert Hall, improvements to the back stage rooms and a rear extension is presented to the March 2017 Policy Committee.

Recommended – (3) A detailed business case for the refurbishment of the Concert Hall, improvements to the back stage rooms and a rear extension be produced and a supplementary revenue estimate of £35,000 funded from in-year revenue budget savings to undertake the work be approved.

POL.783

STRATEGIC REVIEW OF RECYCLING BRING SITES

The Director of Services submitted a report seeking approval for the removal of all Council serviced 'bring sites' in the district with the exception of five sites located at Glusburn Institute; Embsay Village Hall car park; Ingleton Community Centre car park; Settle Whitefriars car park; and Skipton Coach Street car park.

Inspection of 'bring sites' had identified significant abuse of the facilities by commercial entities and of contamination of bins. The recyclables commodities market had significantly dropped and the disposal of the waste was now a significant cost rather than an income generator. Use of the sites had also declined as a result of kerbside collection of recyclables. The report also summarised the results of a 10 week public consultation which had been carried out.

The report acknowledged that there might be an increase in fly tipping resulting from the closure of the sites and outlined a number of mitigating actions which could be taken. The report also outlined a communication strategy to publicise the changes.

It was estimated that the proposal would save £11,705 which would be transferred to the Council's savings and income plan.

An amendment was proposed and carried to add an additional retained site at Bentham and to review the usage of the sites.

Recommended – (1) The retention of 5 'bring sites' identified at Appendix A of the report with the addition of a 6th site at Bentham and the removal of all other 'bring sites' across the District from the 30th November 2016 be approved and that the usage of the remaining sites be kept under review.
(2) The communications plan set out in Section 8 of the report be implemented.

Chairman