

Policy and Resources Committee

Held at Council Chamber, Ryedale House, Malton
on Thursday 3 December 2009

Present

Councillors Acomb, Arnold, Bailey, Mrs L M Burr, Mrs Hodgson, Knaggs, Legard (Vice-Chair), Wainwright (Chairman) and Woodward

Overview & Scrutiny Committee Observers: Councillors Mrs Wilford and Windress

In Attendance

T Anderson, P Cresswell, Mrs E Hayes, G Housden, Mrs C Slater, Miss J Waggott, A Winship and Mrs A Wood

Minutes

47 Apologies for absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Maud.

48 Minutes of a meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee held on 1 October 2009

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on 1 October 2009 be approved.

49 Minutes of a Meeting of the Resources Working Party held on 18 November 2009

Resolved:

That the minutes of the Resources Working Party held on 18 November 2009 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

50 Urgent Business

The Chairman informed Members of the work recently carried out by staff especially from Streetscene who had been involved with work preventing flooding in Pickering and Sinnington. He informed Members that many of the staff had worked late into the night, and then been back at work the following morning. The Committee thanked all staff involved for their work.

51 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Mrs Burr declared a personal interest in Item 6 References from Other Committees, as her property had been flooded in the past.

52 **Items referred from other Committees**

Members considered a report that had been referred from the Community Services Committee regarding the Vale of Pickering Channel Management Pilot Project.

The report sought support for a request for a financial contribution from Ryedale District Council towards a jointly funded Channel Management Pilot Project in the Vale of Pickering.

The objective of the pilot projects was to assess the effects of vegetation and sedimentation on water levels in the main rivers within the Vale of Pickering and to assess the effects of maintenance of vegetation and sedimentation of the main rivers on ecological biodiversity. The two main river reaches identified for investigation were the River Hertford/Derwent from the A64 at Staxton to the confluence with Thornton Beck and the River Derwent, from Rye mouth to Old Malton.

Full details of the proposed project were contained in an annex to the report.

Resolved:

That approval be given to:-

- i) Funding for the 3 year project up to a maximum of £28,000 (£15,000 in year one, £8,000 in year two and £5,000 in year three) from the existing Capital Provision 'Pickering Flood Scheme' of £1m.
- ii) Procurement of the project be undertaken by either the Environment Agency or the Internal Drainage Board; and
- iii) Ryedale District Council be regularly updated regarding progress and project findings emanating from the study.

Reason:

The pilot looks at the potential effects of vegetation and sedimentation on water levels in the Vale of Pickering. The project could facilitate the development of best practice, which could be applied to all critical watercourses.

Councillor Woodward asked that his vote of abstention be recorded as he was not happy with the wording of the proposal.

53 Performance and Finance - Aim 5 Transformation

Members considered a report which presented for comment the performance and finance report for Council Aim 5 "To transform the Council"

Performance against aims one to four were reported to the Community Services Committee in November 2009.

Annexed to the report was a progress report on the delivery of the Council Plan to the end of October 2009 in terms of actions delivered and performance levels achieved, and a review of the financial implications to date.

Resolved:

That the performance and finance report be endorsed.

Reason:

To ensure that progress made against the Council's agreed aims and strategic objectives is noted.

54 Revenue Budget Monitoring

Members considered a report which presented the budget monitoring report for 2009/2010.

Established practice for budget monitoring currently took place outside the formal budget process. EMIS reports were prepared and considered by Corporate Management Team and the Heads of Service.

A report had been presented to the Resources Working Party in September 2009 where it had been resolved that budget monitoring information system reports be a standing item for discussion at the Resources Working Party (RWP) and that a formal budget monitoring report be presented to the Policy and Resources Committee following each RWP.

Annexed to the report was a summary of the significant variances within the Council's revenue accounts in the current year 2009/10.

Overall there was a net increase in costs of £89,000 with a projection for the full year of £344,000. Of this, £151,000 was planned to come from specific Council reserves and £90,000 related to funding of the Council's capital programme.

Additional to the annexed summary, Members were informed that:-

- i) The salary saving included approximately £70,000 from the pay award being 1% less than budgeted. This saving would assist in preparing the Council's 2010/2011
- ii) The compensation payable to Red Cross arose out of the legal agreement should they choose to relocate
- iii) The shortfall on the efficiency programme had been monitored by the Resources Working Party and compensating savings had been identified to cover part of the shortfall.
- iv) External audit fees had increased significantly over recent years and it was likely that unavoidable growth in that area would need to be considered as part of the 2010/2011 budget.

Other significant budgets including Concessionary Fares and vehicle leasing costs were all expected to be within budget in the current year.

Resolved:

- i) That the revised budget monitoring reporting arrangements be noted.
- ii) That the contents of the report be noted.

Reason:

To meet the requirements of internal inspection and to ensure Members were kept regularly informed of the Council's financial position.

55 Treasury Management Monitoring

Members considered a report which informed them of treasury management activities for 2009/10 and updated Members on current investments in accordance with the CIPFA code of Practice on Treasury Management.

The Council aimed to achieve the optimum return on investments commensurate with the proper levels of security and liquidity. In the current economic climate, it was considered appropriate to keep investments short-term and only invest with highly credit rated financial institutions.

The report showed the relative performance of external and internally managed funds with the 7 day benchmark for the period ended 31 October 2009. This illustrated that the Authority had to date outperformed the benchmark.

Managed investments as at 31 October 2009 totalled £16,200,000. The report detailed how these had been lend out, and with which institutions.

Officers confirmed that the approved limits within the Annual Investment Strategy were not breached during the second quarter of 2009/10.

Resolved:

- i) That the report be received
- ii) That the current investments and performance in 2009/2010 be noted.

Reason:

The CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury management had been adopted by the Council. A provision of the Code was that regular reports must be made to the Council relating to treasury management activities.

56 **ICT Programme Approvals**

Members considered a report which sought approval of the recommendations from the ICT Programme Board for projects outside the scheme of officer delegation.

Members were informed that the collection of Council Tax and NNDR, Benefits processing and Benefit overpayment was administered by Revenues Customer Services and Benefits, using a software package "Civica", which had been in place since 1996 with various upgrades over the years. All other North Yorkshire Revenues and Benefits teams use the Northgate system, as did the East Riding of Yorkshire Council.

Civica had seen over recent months a decline in their client base and there was concern that at any time they could terminate the product with short notice. Such a scenario would probably necessitate a rushed conversion to another supplier with a risk of reduced performance during the changeover.

Annexed to the report was the business case for the Northgate system. It was stated that the Council could procure a new system through pre-tendered national framework agreement with Northgate (Catalist). This achieved competitive pre-tendered prices without necessitating a full EU procurement exercise which could take up to a year to complete. The cost of the project would be met from the Council's capital programme 2009/12.

Resolved:

- i) That the Committee approve a waiver of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules such that procurement of the Northgate Revenues

- and Benefits IT system be undertaken using the Office of Government Commerce Catalist Framework Contract.
- ii) That the Committee approves delegated authority to the Corporate Director (s151) in consultation with the Chairman of Policy and Resources Committee to appoint suppliers or contractors.

Reason:

To ensure that the Revenue and Benefits service does not suffer the adverse effect of any future termination of the Civica product, and in order to achieve revenue efficiency savings.

Councillor Woodward asked that his vote against the recommendations be recorded.

PART 'B' – MATTERS REFERRED TO COUNCIL

57 Fees and Charges

Members considered a report, which set out the proposed fees and charges for 2010/2011 for services under the remit of this Committee.

The report outlined the budget strategy that had been presented at the October 2009 meeting of this Committee. It had been decided at that time that the parameters for increases in fees and charges would be set at 4%, but officers would consider whether such charges could adversely affect income overall in making their recommendations.

Annexes B and C to the report set out the proposals for Development Management and Land Charges.

Officers recommended that discretionary fees for charging for Development enquiry forms and pre-application advice were recommended to stay at 2009/10 levels, to encourage potential applicants and developers to continue to engage with the Council during difficult period for the development industry.

Since the setting of Land Charge fees for 2009/10, the Council's in house team had been successful in gaining business back from personal search companies, with approximately 75% of searches being conducted in house. It was recommended that in light of current market conditions that there was no increase in the overall fees set for Land Charges in 2010/11, as it would probably undermine the competitiveness of the in house service.

Members also noted that minor changes to the fee schedule in Annex C, relating to the Official Search in Register, which was proposed to rise to £22. A commensurate reduction in fee levels was recommended elsewhere in the schedule in order to ensure that the full Standard Search charge did not exceed that set in 2009/2010.

Resolved:

- i) That the Development Management and Land Charges Fees and Charges as set out in Annexes B and C to the report be approved.
- ii) That delegated authority be given to the Corporate Director (s151) for further minor revisions to fees charged for the individual CON 29 questions referred to on the schedule.

58 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

Resolved:

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of items 13 (Hardship Relief) and 14 (Write offs) as the reports contained information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (item 13) and information relating to any individual (item 14).

Reason

In both cases the public interest test had been considered and in all the circumstances of the cases, the public interest in maintaining the exemption was considered to outweigh the public interest in disclosing the information.

59 **Hardship Relief**

Members considered a report which considered two applications for non domestic rates hardship relief.

Resolved:

That no non domestic rates hardship relief for 2009/2010 be awarded to the two applications referred to in the report.

Reason:

The provision of relief in these instances was not in line with the Council scheme.

60 **Write Offs (to follow)**

Members considered a report which sought approval to write off housing benefit/sundry debts.

Resolved:

That the write off of £26,670.75 be approved.

Reason:

Staff, External Bailiffs, Experian and tracing agents have been used to try and recover the debts to no avail.

61 **Any other business that the Chairman decides is urgent.**