

At a Meeting of the **RESOURCES COMMITTEE** held at the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Kilworthy Park, Drake Road, **TAVISTOCK** on **TUESDAY** the 7th day of **OCTOBER 2014** at **2.00pm**

Present: Cllr P R Sanders – Chairman
Cllr R E Baldwin – Vice-Chairman
Cllr S C Bailey Cllr W G Cann OBE
Cllr T J Hill Cllr A F Leech
Cllr J R McInnes Cllr T G Pearce
Cllr P J Ridgers

Substitute: Cllr A Clish Green for Cllr C R Musgrave

In attendance: Cllr M J R Benson Cllr L J G Hockridge
Cllr D M Horn

Executive Director (Communities)
Head of Finance and Audit
Customer Services Manager
Economic Development Officer
Strategic Planning Officer
Member Services Manager

***RC 9 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr C R Musgrave for whom Cllr A Clish Green substituted, and Cllr E H Sherrell.

***RC 10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be discussed and the following were made:

Cllr Baldwin declared a personal interest in Item 10: 'Application to Designate Neighbourhood Plan Areas' (Minute RC 17 refers) by virtue of being the local Ward Member for Milton Ford. He remained in the meeting and took part in the debate and vote.

Cllr Bailey declared a personal interest in Item 9: 'Tavistock Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) Scheme: Section 106 Funds Contribution' (Minute RC 16 refers) by virtue of being a Director of the Tavistock BID. She remained in the meeting and took part in the debate and vote.

Cllr Pearce declared a personal interest in Item 8: 'Rural Development Programme for England – Local Action 2015-2020' (Minute RC 15 refers) by virtue of being a member of the management committee of the Greater Dartmoor LEAF. He remained in the meeting and took part in the debate and vote.

***RC 11 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Resources Committee Meeting held on 15 July 2014 were confirmed as a correct record.

RC 12 REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2015/16 TO 2018/19

The Chairman introduced a report that provided a forecast of the budget situation for the year 2015/16 and a forecast for the four years to 2018/19. The forecast was intended to provide a framework within which decisions could be made regarding the future service provision and council tax levels whilst building an approach that guaranteed West Devon Borough Council's longer term viability.

During discussion the following points were made:

- One Member queried why some staff had not taken up the positions offered to them. In response, the Chairman advised that one of the Executive Director positions had been offered to a member of staff who had subsequently decided not to accept the position for personal reasons. A number of discussions had been held with South Hams District Council on how to proceed and a further meeting would be held next week. In response to a further query as to whether additional costs would be incurred the Chairman advised that if an advertisement were placed, then there would be an additional cost, as indeed there would be if iESE was involved in the recruitment process;
- A Member queried whether there had been an impact on projected savings as a result of the number of staff who had already left the organisation and the consequent cost in terms of redundancies. The Chairman responded that it was always recognised that redundancy costs would be difficult to predict in advance but that it was still expected that projected savings would be made within three years;
- The Head of Finance and Audit updated Members on the Council Tax Support Grant and explained how changes to the benefit scheme affected the council tax base;
- A number of Members stressed the importance of innovative ways of generating income and how ideas could be forwarded to the Working Groups at both Councils;
- In discussing the level of council tax increase, Members would give a minded to view at this meeting on the understanding that a final decision would not be made until the New Year.

It was then **RESOLVED** that Council be **RECOMMENDED** to consider the following 'minded to' views in order to guide the 2015/16 budget process:

- (i) The level of council tax increase should not be above 1.9%;
The use of New Homes Bonus to support the revenue budget be agreed (final amount to be agreed as part of the budget process);

The amount of Council Tax Support Grant to be passed on to Parish and Town Councils should be reduced by the same amount that the Borough Council's Government Grant is reduced by (currently predicted to be 15.37%); and
Other budget savings and income generation to be looked for and considered;

- (ii) The Council's policy should remain as recommending a minimum level of unearmarked revenue reserves of £750,000.

RC 13 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION

The Chairman presented a report of the Customer Service Manager that considered the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2015/16 by 31 January 2015 and requested a recommendation to Council.

Members were happy to support the proposal but asked that Members be notified of any changes that were made. The Leader confirmed that any significant changes would be the subject of a further report to the Resources Committee.

It was then **RESOLVED** that Council be **RECOMMENDED**:

1. To agree to continue with the existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2015/16; and
2. That delegated authority be given to the head of Finance and Audit, in consultation with the Leader, to make amendments to the policy document to take account of any further changes in law, government guidance or policy that require urgent amendment.

***RC 14 WRITE OFF REPORT**

The Chairman presented a report that outlined how the Council was responsible for the collection of Sundry Debts including housing benefits overpayments, Council Tax and national Non-Domestic Rates and informed Members of the debt written off for these revenue streams. Debts up to the value of £5,000 being written off by the Head of Finance and Audit, under delegated authority. Permission was sought from the Committee to write off individual debts with a value of more than £5,000. The report covered the period 1 April 2014 to 20 June 2014.

Members raised concerns at the level of overpayments that had been written off. The Customer Services Manager explained how the overpayments could arise. Following further discussion, it was agreed that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be asked to receive a report that gave more detailed information in respect of overpayments.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

- (i) In accordance with Financial Regulations, the Head of Finance and Audit had authorised the write-off of individual West Devon Borough Council debts totalling £43,045.56 as detailed in Table 1 and 2 of the presented report be noted; and
- (ii) Authority to write off individual debts in excess of £5,000 as detailed in Table 3 of the report be granted.

***RC 15**

RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME FOR ENGLAND – LOCAL ACTION 2015-2020

The Chairman presented a report that sought to put in place arrangements that will enable effective delivery of approx. £2.2million of external funds covering West Devon and parts of South Hams and Teignbridge for the period 2015-2020 under the Community Led Rural Development Programme for England. This community led programme was known as the Greater Dartmoor Local Enterprise Action Fund (LEAF).

A Member noted that particular businesses had benefited from the previous programme but the Economic Development Officer was able to confirm that the appropriate checks were in place. It was also noted that the new Programme focused on the growth agenda which would deliver economic growth in rural areas through job creation, business growth and improved productivity.

It was then **RESOLVED** that Members agree an annual contribution of £16,400 a year for six years, totalling £62,400 towards the costs of programme management and administration and project development from unearmarked reserves.

***RC 16**

TAVISTOCK TOWNSCAPE HERITAGE INITIATIVE (THI) SCHEME; SECTION 106 FUNDS CONTRIBUTION

The Chairman presented a report that, following the Stage 2 approval of the Tavistock THI Scheme in September by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), outlined how it was now essential to secure the funding package to allow the scheme to start. The report identified funds that were available through the Section 106 agreement with Marchfield Properties which may assist this scheme and proposals by the Tavistock Business Improvement District Company for the introduction of a pay-on-exit scheme for Bedford Car Park, the funds to be set aside for public realm works in the town centre.

Members discussed the merits of a pay-on-exit car park that retailers felt would enable visitors to enjoy their stay in Tavistock without rushing back to their cars before their ticket expired. However, there was a significant cost to having a barrier for a pay-on-exit car park, and a member of staff would be required in case the barrier jammed. An alternative proposal was an all day ticket price, which should result in the same levels of income as the car park currently generated.

A Member noted that the existing barriers currently prevented people coming into and utilising the car park for evening events. The Committee agreed that this matter should be investigated.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

1. Up to £40,000 be set aside from the 'Town Centre Improvements' contribution under the Section 106 Agreement with Marchfield properties Ltd as a contribution towards public realm works under the Tavistock THI Scheme;
2. A further £15,000 be set aside from the 'Townscape Heritage Contribution' towards signage improvements in Tavistock town centre relating to the townscape heritage; and
- 3a. Up to £30,000 be set aside as a contribution towards the pay-on-exit scheme for the Bedford Car Park in Tavistock but that
- 3b. In the event of the Pay-on-exit scheme for Bedford car park not going ahead within the timescale of the current Tavistock Business Improvement District scheme, then the remaining £30,000 under the 'Town Centre Improvement' be made available as a further funding contribution towards the Tavistock THI Scheme.

***RC 17**

APPLICATION TO DESIGNATE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN AREAS

The Chairman introduced a report that outlined how the following parish councils had submitted an application to the Council to designate a plan area in respect of preparing a neighbourhood plan:

- Milton Abbot Grouped and Kelly Parishes
- Bridestowe and Sourton Parishes
- Buckland Monachorum Parish

The applications had been advertised for six weeks during which comments were invited about whether the plan areas were appropriate.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

- (i) Members approve the designation of the Plan Areas for the purposes of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan; and,
- (ii) Members support any future applications for financial support from central government to help cover the costs of the Local Authority associated with preparing a Neighbourhood Plan.

(The Meeting terminated at 3.20 pm)