

Policy Review Committee

- Venue: Committee Room
- Date: 14 January 2014
- Present: Councillors M Jordan (Chair), Mrs K McSherry (Vice Chair), I Chilvers (for Mrs E Metcalfe), Mrs M Davis, K Ellis, R Musgrave, I Nutt, R Packham and Mrs A Spetch.
- Apologies for Absence: Mrs E Metcalfe (substitute I Chilvers)
- Officers Present: Karen Iveson – Executive Director (S151), Helen Drye – Lead Officer, Policy, Ruth Hardingham – Planning Officer and Palbinder Mann – Democratic Services Officer

25. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

26. MINUTES

The Chair explained that the Task and Finish Group looking into the Recovery Policy would be set up once Councillor Mrs Eileen Metcalfe was back from holiday.

RESOLVED:

To receive and approve the minutes of the Policy Review Committee held on 17 December 2013 and they are signed by the Chair.

27. CHAIR'S ADDRESS

The Chair wished everyone a Happy New Year and explained that he would be amended the running order of the agenda with the item on the Renewable Energy Strategy being taken first.

28. PR/13/16 – RENEWABLE ENERGY STRATEGY

Helen Drye, Lead Officer, Policy presented the report and explained that recommendation three outlined in the report would be amended as the Committee has previously agreed not to take forward the AECOM Renewable Energy Capacity Plan. It was also explained that with regard paragraph 4.2, this was referring to looking at the Sites and Policies Plan into the general area of renewable energy and not at allocating specific sites for wind farms.

The Committee were referred to the Wind Farm Guidance which had been produced by the Planning Officer. The Lead Officer, Policy stated that the Chair had also asked for information on the wider community impact and this was circulated to the Committee. It was also explained that correspondence had been received from Bartle and Son and this was circulated to the Committee.

In response to a query concerning the Core Strategy, the Lead Officer, Policy explained that despite the legal challenge to the Core Strategy, substantial weight was still given to it as it was still compliant with planning policy. Queries were also raised on the implications if planning applications on wind farms were submitted to the Council which were not compliant with the guidance. The Lead Officer, Policy explained that the guidance would be used in assisting officers and other planning policy guidance would still apply to planning applications.

It was stated that all forms of energy should be considered and in particular Fracking was mentioned as an area which could be explored. Queries were raised regarding Fracking that despite it being promised that Local Authorities would receive 100% of the domestic rates, the County Council has the responsibility for minerals and therefore they may be eligible to receive some of the income.

RESOLVED:

- i) To endorse the guidance for Wind Farm planning applications and recommend the Executive to adopt the guidance for use as part of the Council's development management processes.**
- ii) To endorse the guidance for Solar Energy planning applications and recommend the Executive to adopt the guidance for use as part of the Council's development management processes.**
- iii) To take forward the overlaying of the wind and solar planning approvals onto the capacity plan to enable the cumulative impact of the applications to be taken into account.**

29. PR/13/15 – DRAFT BUDGET AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Executive Director (s151) presented the report and informed the Committee the report contained the Executive's draft budget proposals which were currently out for consultation. It was explained that the budget had been formulated in accordance with the financial strategy.

Some of the key points highlighted included:

- A 2% Council Tax increase had been planned for which raised the average bill for a Band D property by 6p a week.
- The authority was still dealing with some uncertainty regarding the impact of localised Non Domestic Rates (NDR).
- The Council had three key strands with regard to savings:
 - Transforming
 - Growing
 - Commissioning
- The Housing Revenue Account had a surplus of nearly £1m.
- The Committee were taken through the Capital Programme and the Executive Director (s151) explained that commitments such as ICT Replacements and the Telephony systems were important updates for the Council. It was explained that the Capital Programme was funded primarily through reserves. It was explained that the programme was designed to run to 2015.
- Specific funds had been earmarked for the Programme for Growth which included major projects such as the new leisure centre.
- With regard to reserves, it was explained that the current balance of reserves would be £8.2m.

A query was raised concerning the separate deficits transferred from the balances for the Core and Access Selby. The Executive Director (s151) explained that Access Selby were working within a fixed cost envelope and if there were cost pressures in their budget then they needed to be drawn from other areas of the Access Selby budget. Although the funding for Access Selby and the Core was separate, the money did come from the same pot of money.

A Member of the Committee requested further information on the following areas for the last few years where Council Tax had been frozen:

- The levels of inflation, both RPI (Retail Price Index) and CPI (Consumer Price Index) during the years Council Tax has been frozen.
- What the Council would have had to increase Council Tax by to compensate for the loss due to inflation levels.
- What funding had been received from the Secretary of State for the years that Council Tax has been frozen.

Discussion took place on the financing for Parish Councils. The Executive Director (s151) explained that in the previous Local Government Settlement, the Government had clearly outlined payments for Parish Councils and exact figures had been provided to Local Authorities. The Committee were informed that the figures for 2014/15 did not include the same breakdown and no funding for Parish Councils had been outlined.

The Executive Director (s151) explained that based on the measuring of 'spending power' which was used by the authority to measure the impact of the loss in funding from the Government, £131,000 had to be outlined for Parish Council funding. It was explained that if the Council decided to pass on funding to Parish Councils, the Council would be increasing its spending and further savings would need to be made as it would be difficult to provide funding from reserves.

The Committee were in agreement that this issue should be looked at again by the Executive to see if it was fair with possible alternative options being a reduced level in grant based on the same reduction level for local authorities.

RESOLVED:

- i) To ask the Executive to look again at the decision on funding for Parish Councils to see if it is fair.**
- ii) To support the draft budget.**

30. PR/13/18 – WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2013/14 AND 2014/15

It was agreed to have a presentation on fracking at the April 2014 meeting. It was also agreed to bring back an update on the work on Welfare Reform including the work of the proposed Task and Finish Group at the July 2014 meeting.

The Chair asked the Committee email any comments they had on next year's work programme to himself or the Democratic Services Officer.

RESOLVED:

To note and amend the Policy Review Committee Work Programme for 2013/14 and 2014/15 as outlined above.

The meeting closed at 6.14pm.