

Minutes of a meeting of the **Policy Group** of the Purbeck District Council held in the Council Chamber, Westport House, Wareham on Wednesday 21 December 2016 at 7.00pm.

Present:-

Councillor Gary Suttle (Chairman)

Councillors Cherry Brooks, Laura Miller, Bill Pipe, Peter Webb and Peter Wharf

Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting: Stuart Dawson, Revenues and Benefits Partnership Manager; Bridget Downton, General Manager – Planning and Community Services; Sue Joyce, General Manager – Resources; Steve Mackenzie, Chief Executive; Kirsty Riglar, Democratic and Electoral Services Manager and Alison Turnock, Natural Heritage and Tourism Manager

(Note: These minutes have been prepared by officers as a record of the meeting and of any decisions reached. They are to be considered and confirmed at the next meeting of the Group).

74.16/17 **Apologies**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Barry Quinn.

75.16/17 **Urgent items**

The Chairman reported that there were no urgent items.

76.16/17 **Public participation time**

There were no members of the public present.

77.16/17 **Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2016 be taken as read, confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

78.16/17 **Declarations of Interest by Members**

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests.

79.16/17 **Forward Plan for Policy Group and Council Meetings**

The Policy Group considered the current Forward Plan. It was noted that the item on the proposed Dorset and East Devon National Park was unlikely to be submitted to meetings of the Policy Group and Council in February due to the ongoing programme of meetings of the Policy Development Panel. Officers would amend the Forward Plan accordingly.

**Resolved** that the Forward Plan be received.

## 80.16/17 Localised Council Tax Support

The Revenues and Benefits Partnership Manager presented a report regarding a review of the conditions of the Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) scheme and proposing a revised scheme, effective from 1 April 2017. The scheme was designed to help those on low income meet their Council Tax liability and provided incentives for claimants to work. When this was introduced in 2013, the Council agreed that it should be as similar to the previous national Council Tax Benefit scheme as possible and also be aligned to the Housing Benefit scheme. As a result of government making alterations to the Housing Benefit scheme, it was proposed to make some housekeeping changes to the Council's LCTS scheme so that both schemes were more aligned. These changes would make the LCTS scheme easier to administer, as well as reducing customer confusion. The proposed changes were:-

- (i) removal of the Family Premium for all new working age claimants;
- (ii) reduction of the maximum period for backdating to one month; and
- (iii) reduction of the period for which a person could be absent from Great Britain and still receive Council Tax Support to four weeks.

In response to a Member's question, it was explained that the removal of the Family Premium was likely to reduce the amount received by claimants by approximately £3.45 per week. This would not affect current claimants but would be applied to any new cases received from 1 April 2017.

It was noted that current claimants who could potentially be affected and key stakeholders had been consulted on the proposed changes to the scheme and 27 responses had been received. Whilst the outcomes of this exercise were set out in the report, Members expressed their concern that there was little in the way of response from officers to the comments made to enable a better understanding of the likely impact on claimants if the changes were introduced. Similarly, the implications for Dorset County Council in terms of funding arising from the proposed changes were unclear.

Members were reminded that it was for each Council to determine its own scheme and the changes were proposed to provide for alignment with the current Housing Benefit scheme introduced by the government. This made it easier to understand for potential claimants and continued the approach previously agreed by the Council.

Members agreed that a report should be submitted to Council recommending the changes to the LCTS scheme but requested that this include:-

- (i) greater clarity about the number of cases that could potentially be affected by the proposed changes;
- (ii) officers' responses to the consultation submissions received; and
- (iii) the likely impact upon Dorset County Council.

**Resolved** that a report be submitted to Council recommending that the changes be made to the Local Council Tax Support scheme, effective from 1 April 2017, to align it to the Housing Benefit scheme, and this include the additional information requested.

### 81.16/17 **Discretionary Rate Relief**

The Revenues and Benefits Partnership Manager presented a report seeking approval of revised Discretionary Rate Relief guidelines to be used by officers when determining applications. The current guidelines were approved by the Council six years ago and needed to be updated in order to ensure that applications were considered in a consistent and transparent way and that financial support was targeted to those organisations which made a maximum contribution towards the community. The revised guidelines had been developed having regard to government guidance and it was estimated that, if adopted, an additional Discretionary Rate Relief of £2,700 would be awarded. This represented an increased cost of £1,080 to the Council.

Members welcomed the report.

**Resolved** that a report be submitted to Council recommending adoption of the guidelines set out at Appendix 1 to the report and that these guidelines be used for the determination of future Discretionary Rate Relief applications from 1 April 2017.

### 82.16/17 **Dorset enterprise co-ordinator – request for funding support**

The General Manager – Planning and Community Services presented a report seeking approval for the provision of funding support towards the enterprise co-ordinator post hosted by Dorset County Council. This post would deliver the Enterprise Advice Network programme; the establishment of a lasting connection between local businesses and nearby schools and colleges in the area. Each council's contribution related to the number of secondary schools in its area. The funding requested from Purbeck District Council was £8,240 over two years.

The General Manager reported that funding contributions had been agreed by the Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership, Dorset County Council and the councils of the Dorset Councils Partnership. It was reported that Christchurch Borough Council and East Dorset District Council had decided not to contribute to the post. Consequently, the post would focus on schools in those areas which were contributing.

Members expressed their disappointment at this and asked how the shortfall in funding would be met. Whilst they supported the proposal, it was agreed that it would not be appropriate to expect the Council to contribute more than requested to assist in meeting the shortfall. The General Manager explained that, to her knowledge, there would be no request for the Council to contribute more than £8,240. She undertook to clarify this in the report submitted to Council, in addition to providing a breakdown of what the contributions would be used for, if possible. She also agreed to clarify any other points if Councillors requested this by email.

**Resolved** that a report be submitted to Council recommending approval of a supplementary estimate of £4,450 in 2016/17 and inclusion of £3,800 in the base budget for 2017/18, both to be funded from reserves, to finance an enterprise co-ordinator.

### 83.16/17 **Revised priorities for the Purbeck Heritage Network**

The Natural Heritage and Tourism Manager presented a report setting out the updated priorities for members of the Purbeck Heritage Network. She reminded Members that the Network had replaced the Purbeck Heritage Committee in 2012. At that time, the

Purbeck Heritage Strategy 2010-2015 became a guide for members of the Network to work towards. A Strategy was not now deemed necessary due to the significant overlap with the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan. Instead, members of the Network had drafted a replacement document focussing on priority areas of work over the period 2016-2020 to conserve and enhance the diverse heritage of the area. It was intended that these could be used by members of the Network when applying for grants or making bids for funding.

**Resolved** that a report be submitted to Council recommending that the Heritage Priorities 2016-2020, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be endorsed.

The meeting ended at 7.39pm.

Chairman