

**BALLYMONEY BOROUGH COUNCIL  
RESOURCES TASK GROUP**

**MONDAY 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2013**

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## **RESOURCES TASK GROUP**

Minutes of Resources Task Group Committee held on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2013 at 2.00pm in the McKinley Room, Riada House.

<b>IN THE CHAIR</b>	Councillor I Stevenson
<b>PRESENT</b>	<p><b>Aldermen</b> H Connolly                      F Campbell</p> <p><b>Councillors</b> J Finlay</p>
<b>IN ATTENDANCE</b>	<p>Alderman B Kennedy Chief Executive Head of Corporate &amp; Development Services Committee Clerk</p>
<b>APOLOGIES</b>	<p>Councillor E Robinson (Mayor) Chief Executive</p>

### **48.1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

### **48.2 CONDOLENCE**

The Chair recorded committee's sympathy to the Mayor, Councillor Robinson, on the sad loss she had sustained on the death of her husband, Desmond.

### **48.3 MINUTES OF MEETING NO 48 – 25<sup>th</sup> March 2013**

As the Mayor had indicated at the last Council meeting that she wanted to request a change to the minute record the meeting agreed to defer these to the next meeting in view of her present circumstances.

### **48.4 CLERICAL SUPPORT – COUNCIL SERVICES**

The Chief Executive presented his report, as circulated to members, noting that he had not been present at the last meeting and was not party to the discussion which ensued.

At the meeting of the Resources Task Group on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2013 an item was included on the agenda, at the request of the Chair, to consider resource issues in the Building Control service. The Director of Borough Services had stated during the final rates meeting in February 2013 that "funding for Building Control clerical support had been removed resulting in his service being treated differently from all other service areas in Council."

*During the discussion, letters from Alderman Campbell and Councillor Robinson were read out (copies circulated). After almost an hour it was recommended and subsequently agreed by Council “that the matter be referred to the Chief Executive to seek clarity on the statement made at the rates meeting and a report be brought to the next meeting.”*

*The Director has confirmed that the minute is an accurate record of what he said in relation to the Building Control service. The Head of Service advises that prior to the setting of rates in 2009, there was a full time clerical post in the service as is the case in other council areas. During 2008/09 the post holder retired and the post was filled on a temporary basis. In setting rates for 2009/10 the salary budget for the service was reduced by £20,000. From April 2009 to July 2010, no clerical cover was provided and surveyors undertook clerical work on a rota basis until a part-time clerical officer was appointed (Council approved a budget of £10,000 for this purpose in February 2010).*

*In the 2013/14 rate process officers were directed to find savings so that there would be a zero rate increase. Proposals which achieved this were put before the final rates meeting in February. Among the changes to budget proposed by officers was the removal of the full cost of a Building Control Officer post (£38,711), the post being vacant since January 2011 following the death of the post holder, and the addition of £13,366 for clerical support. The net reduction in cost for Building Control was £30,407.*

*At the meeting alternative proposals were put forward by a councillor. The proposals included the removal of the additional clerical support budget of £13,366. The effect was to retain only part-time clerical support, thereby ensuring that technical staff continue to do some clerical work. It is believed that this change was made without any discussion with either the Director or Head of Service.*

The Chief Executive shared with members recent figures just published by DOE showing expenditure in the Council’s budgets for 2013/14, broken down by service. For building control service, which was a discrete service, the average spend per head of the population across all 26 councils is £4.15. In the Causeway Cluster 3 of the 4 are higher than average:

<b>Council</b>	<b>Spend per head</b>
Coleraine	£5.61
Limavady	£5.74
Moyle	£7.41
Ballymoney	£3.58

Ballymoney’s spend is 14% below the NI average and less than half that Moyle spends. He also noted that even if the money in question had not been removed from Council’s budget it would still be lower than the average.

He indicated that the options for the Group were:

1. Restore funding of £13,366 to building control, taking from reserves if required.

2. Leave budget as decided at rates.

The Chair explained that he had decided to list this item for consideration as the matter had been put in the public domain (at the rates meeting in February 2013) and was a resource issue which he believed should be considered by Resources Task Group, so that the officer who had expressed concern could be given the opportunity to explain the statement made.

Alderman Kennedy asserted that the opportunity to seek an explanation or clarification of the officer's statement was available when it was made at the rates meeting in February, or when the minutes of that meeting were presented to Council for confirmation. He had expressed his concern at the time at the course of action proposed in reducing the salary budget put forward by management. He was also concerned that senior officers were undertaking clerical duties, which was not an efficient use of those resources, while all other key service areas had at least one full time clerical resource. In response to the Chair pointing to other resource reductions (Rasharkin Caretaker and Leisure Centre) Alderman Kennedy pointed out that these were Council decisions based on management advice taken, in the first case on the basis of a change in community centre management arrangements and in the second case on economic grounds due to substantial losses in income in the catering operation over a period of time.

Arising from comments about level of rates the Chief Executive referred to Council's desire to be in the bottom half of the league table based on net cost of service and its call for a 0% increase which had been achieved by management and presented to Council. The tinkering at the rates meeting in February had resulted in low motivation and a perceived lack of confidence in staffing and management arrangements. He cautioned members in re-opening the matter unless there was full support from members. Alderman Campbell expressed concern that the proposed reduction in the building control salary budget put forward at the final rates meeting and in response to a question the Chief Executive advised that there had been no consultation with him, the Director or Head of the Service on the proposed reduction in salary budget put forward by the Chair.

Supporting his stand on the matter the Chair explained his rationale –

1. There had been no application to RTG for additional clerical hours;
2. Previous two years £38K within the building control budget had not been utilised
3. Income in the first version of the draft rates book was £115K, a 25% drop from two years previous [although he accepted that this did not equate to a decrease in the level of work].
4. While additional clerical support budget requested had been removed, £5K had been allowed for student BCO.

In response to a question by Councillor Finlay the Chief Executive confirmed the additional work on energy scheme, that the previous staff complement was 3 BCOs and 1 full-time clerical officer and was currently 2 BCO's and 1 p/t clerical officer. He also confirmed that at members' request any management applications to committees for additional budgets had been deferred to the rates meeting and as a consequence the request for additional clerical support in this instance, supported by the corporate management team, had been

presented directly to the rates meeting, as any recommendation by RTG would have had to have Council approval.

It was proposed by Councillor Finlay and seconded by Alderman Campbell:

***to recommend that Council provides £13,366 to restore the building control budget, the cost to be met from underspend in the current year or from reserves.***

Both members asked that it be recorded that they had not been canvassed in this matter.

The Chair refused to accept the motion as no notice had been given and indicated that he intended to place the matter on the next RTG agenda since the Mayor was not able to attend to present her views. The mover of the motion pointed out that it was a recommendation and all members would have the opportunity to speak to the matter if they wished when it came before Council.

The Chief Executive indicated that the motion, democratically moved, arose from discussion on a matter included on the agenda for the meeting and was in order and asked that his advice be recorded.

Alderman Kennedy appealed to the Chair to reconsider his position. The Chair however ruled that the motion be not taken and the matter deferred to the next RTG.

In response to a question from Councillor Finlay the Chief Executive confirmed that the motion could be put at Council meeting.

**This Chair declared the meeting closed at 2.55 p.m.**