

MINUTES OF: THE CABINET

Date of Meeting: Wednesday, 13th December 2006

**PRESENT: Councillor Ruddick (in the Chair)
Councillors Challinor, Essex, Farquharson, Graham,
Ormerod and Smith**

**IN ATTENDANCE: Helen Lockwood, Deputy Chief Executive
George Graham, Executive Director of Resources
Jon Sharples, Head of Economic Regeneration and
Strategic Housing
Lesley Noble, Head of Policy and Change
Gary Parsons, Housing Research and Strategy Officer
Linda Fisher, Head of Planning and Legal and Democratic
Services
Julian Joinson, Democratic Services Manager**

**ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Entwistle, Hancock, Lamb, Lynskey, Starkey,
Sandiford and Robertson
1 Member of the Public
1 Representative from the Press**

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Driver.

2. MINUTES

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 15th November 2006 be signed by the Chair as a correct record.

3. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Leader of the Council reported that a decision had been taken recently, under the provisions for special urgency, by the Head of Planning and Legal and Democratic Services in consultation with the Chair of the Licensing Committee, to recognise local taxi associations.

4. URGENT ITEM OF BUSINESS

The Chair reported that there were no urgent items of business.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported.

6. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Councillor Sandiford, on behalf of the public, expressed a view that she was disappointed with the layout of the room for the meeting. The Leader replied that the layout was in the style of a Council Chamber and had already been used for a meeting of full Council. He agreed to note her comments.

With the agreement of the meeting Items E and F1 on the Agenda were taken next.

7. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Decision Made and Reason for Decision:

That the public and press be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business on the grounds that it involves disclosure of exempt information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

8. LONG TERM ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY

Councillor Essex, the Chair of the Long Term Accommodation Strategy Member Working Group, reported on progress as to the provision of a long term civic facility within the Borough. He presented a report which highlighted the Council's future accommodation needs, the methodology of deciding on a preferred site, the evaluation of options and the deliverability of the preferred option, together with the next step forward. The aim was to provide a high quality facility which would house the majority of staff and would be the embodiment of civic pride within Rossendale.

The Executive Director of Resources explained the background to the anticipated accommodation needs based upon staffing numbers and the site evaluation process used. Following that process Capita Symonds had been engaged to undertake a feasibility study of the preferred site in Rawtenstall. Two main options had been considered:-

Option A – All functions currently located in the Town Hall Annex plus Civic facilities, requiring c. 1,300m² of floor space.

Option B – As above plus all other office based staff requiring c. 2,500m² of floor space.

Mr Richard Halstead, of Capita Symonds gave a presentation which showed a number of options to meet the accommodation requirements in relation to the preferred site. The presentation considered the possibility of adapting existing

properties, new build retaining existing facades, or entirely new build. The latter option provided the best solution. Consideration was also given to the relationship between the proposed civic facilities and the new Valley Centre, other local amenities and public open space.

A number of comments were made from the floor. Councillor Essex outlined the consultations which had taken place so far and then summarised the proposals.

Decisions Made:

1. That the preferred site Option B selected by the Working Group be agreed.
2. That the Council be recommended to make available the resources to complete acquisition of the preferred site and take steps to expedite site acquisition.
3. That officers be instructed to commence the Council's project management procedures in relation to this scheme including a comprehensive risk analysis.
4. That officers be instructed to identify means of financing the development of the preferred option and to provide recommendations for consideration in February 2007 as part of the Capital Programme process.
5. That officers be instructed to work with technical advisers to develop a timetable for the procurement and design stages of the project following the securing of the site and agreement of finance.

Reasons for Decisions:

The provision of modern office and civic accommodation which is fit for purpose, is central to the Council's long term Accommodation Strategy.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

A wide range of site options were considered by the Working Group and evaluated against the criteria set. Option A on the preferred site was considered by the Cabinet, but did not meet the ideal criteria of creating a single site solution.

The public and press rejoined the meeting.

9. COMMUNITY COHESION STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

The Portfolio Holder for Community and Partnerships, Councillor Smith, presented the report of the Head of Community and Partnerships setting out a proposed a statement of intent in relation to community cohesion, which had been developed by a theme group of the Local Strategic Partnership. The statement linked closely with one of the aims of the recent Government White Paper "Strong and prosperous Communities".

Decisions Made:

1. That the statement of intent on Community Cohesion be adopted by the Council.
2. That Heads of Service be requested to consider Community Cohesion within their Business Plans.

Reasons for Decisions:

Community Cohesion is linked to the corporate priority of embedding our Customer Promise and is key to making Rossendale a great place to live and visit.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

Not to approve the statement might jeopardise the Council's ability to deliver against the community cohesion agenda and could lead to increased tension within the Borough and a decrease in the community spirit.

10. OLDER PEOPLE'S STRATEGY

The Older People's Champion, Councillor Cheetham, presented a report of the Head of Community and Partnerships, concerning the adoption of a strategy in respect of older people. The Strategy detailed the Council's contribution to improving the lives of older people and how it would deliver on some of the key outcomes which would improve their quality of life. The following key outcomes had been identified:-

Financially and materially secure
Accessing mainstream services
Making a positive contribution
Healthy and well
Safe and supported.

Rossendale's Strategy would complement the strategy for an ageing population, which was being developed by the Lancashire Partnership.

Decisions Made:

1. That the Strategy for Older People be agreed, subject to the outcome of consultation with community groups and older people's groups.
2. That further amendments to the Strategy in the light of consultation be delegated to the Head of Community and Partnerships in consultation with the Leader and Member Champion for Older People.

Reasons for Decisions:

The Strategy supports the Council's corporate priority of embedding our Customer Promise.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

Not to approve the Strategy might undermine the Council's ability to improve the lives of older people within the Borough.

11. VALIDATION POLICY

The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Councillor Challinor, presented the report of the Head of Planning and Legal and Democratic Services on the introduction of a Validation Policy in respect of development control applications under the Town and Country Planning Acts.

The policy provided guidance to service users and aimed to improve the quality of information provided with applications. The policy also gave information on how the Council would deal with pre-application discussions and the timetable for dealing with major applications and s106 agreements.

The Policy would also be considered at a meeting of the Developers' Forum.

Decisions Made:

1. That the Validation Policy be agreed and that it be applied with immediate effect.
2. That a period of consultation on the Policy be carried out from 13th December 2006 to 30th January 2007 and that the Policy be posted on the Council's website with immediate effect.
3. That a further report be brought to the Cabinet to consider any comments and objections received during the consultation period.
4. That the approval of policy statements in respect of the process of amending an application and the handling of design and access statements be delegated to the Head of Planning and Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration.

Reasons for Decisions:

As part of the Council's improvement to the Development Control Service it is essential that the Council has a clear process for the receipt and validation of planning applications.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

Not to approve the Policy might represent a risk to the Council in terms of its ability to process applications efficiently which is fundamental to embedding our Customer Promise.

12. AFFORDABLE HOUSING STRATEGY

The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Councillor Challinor, presented the report of the Head of Economic Regeneration and Strategic Housing which outlined the need for affordable housing within identified areas in Rossendale and the options available for delivery, together with the Affordable Housing Strategy 2006–2008.

Members were informed that it was anticipated that the Interim Affordable Housing Policy and Housing Position Statement would be presented to the Cabinet in January 2007. Members were also informed that at Paragraph 4.3.2 of the Strategy would be amended to indicate that the affordable housing contribution would now be raised from 30% to 45%.

Decisions Made:

1. That, subject to the above amendment in respect of the affordable housing contribution, the Affordable Housing Strategy 2006-2008 be approved.
2. That the targets set out within the Action Plan at Appendix 1 of the Strategy be agreed.

Reasons for Decisions:

Approval to the Strategy and Action Plan will help to generate awareness and increase the delivery of affordable housing for local people and meets the Council's corporate priority of delivering regeneration across the Borough.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

Not to deliver the Strategy would result in fewer affordable homes being delivered, lack of clear guidance for developers and a failure to deliver those affordable housing units already identified within the Housing Needs & Market Assessment Report 2005. This could increase the exclusion gap and force sections of the community to seek cheaper residential accommodation outside the Borough.

13. LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL PLANNING POLICY PAPER

The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration presented the report of the Head of Planning and Legal and Democratic Services on the application of the Lancashire County Council Planning Obligations in Lancashire Policy Paper.

The Head of Planning and Legal and Democratic Services reported that a number of representations had been received in connection with this item from members of the public and the matter had been discussed at a recent meeting of the Developers' Forum. The Leader of the Council indicated that the adoption of the policy would give developers an indication of what was expected of them and he reassured Members that the rules would be applied sensibly when considering individual applications.

Decisions Made:

1. That the Lancashire County Council Policy Paper on Planning Obligations in Lancashire for be adopted Development Control purposes and that the District Council will use the Policy as the starting point but ultimately will exercise its discretion in applying the Policy when dealing with applications.
2. That the authority to amend the Protocol for the working relationship between the Districts and the County Council be delegated to the Head of Planning and Legal and Democratic Services.
3. That Appendices 2 and 3 to the policy be approved as improvements to the way that planning obligations are dealt with.

Reasons for Decisions:

Adoption of the Policy Paper supports the corporate priority of delivering regeneration across the Borough.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

14. PLANNING POLICY STATEMENT (PPS) 3 HOUSING

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration referred to the Planning Policy Statement 3 Housing. The Head of Planning and Legal and Democratic Services reported that it had originally been hoped to bring a report on the Affordable Housing Policy, but that the issuing of PPS 3 had not been anticipated. In the absence of an existing policy it was recommended that PPS 3 should be applied with immediate effect.

The Head of Planning and Legal and Democratic Services reported that a number of representations had been received about the possible adoption of this Policy Statement.

Decisions Made:

That the Policy Statement (PPS) 3 Housing be adopted with immediate effect.

Reasons for Decisions:

Adoption of the Policy Statement supports the corporate priority of delivering regeneration across the Borough.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

15. QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE

The Portfolio Holder for Performance Management presented a report of the Head of Policy and Change Management on the Council's second quarter performance, together with information as to the arrangements for and role of elected Members in scrutinising and challenging performance.

Appendix 1 of the report indicated that 8 projects were classified as green, on track and having no substantial issues or risks which required action by the Council's Performance Board. 9 projects were classified as amber, having some issues or risks which required Board action to keep the project on track. There were no projects classified as red, in jeopardy.

The Head of Policy and Change Management reported that the data had been independently assessed in July 2006 as regards quality assurance. The findings of the report had not yet been published, but informal indications were that Rossendale was amongst the best in Lancashire.

Decisions Made:

1. That the levels of performance detailed in the report be noted.
2. That the performance of those actions that are not fully completed continue to be monitored.
3. That the new reporting styles be noted and confirmed as an effective means of presenting performance management information.

Reasons for Decisions:

The monitoring of performance is central to delivery of the actions within the Council's Corporate Improvement Plan.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

16. FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Risk Management presented the report of the Head of Financial Services on the General Fund Estimates for 2006/07, the Capital Programme and Treasury matters as well as progress with delivering budget savings and growth.

Decisions Made:

That the Financial Monitoring Report be noted.

Reasons for Decisions:

The monitoring of the Council's financial position is in accordance with its stated corporate priority of embedding financial management throughout the authority.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

17. VALLEY OF STONE PROJECT

The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration presented the report of the Head of Economic Regeneration and Strategic Housing in respect of the Valley of Stone Project. The aim of the project was to raise the profile of and improve the accessibility of Rossendale's unique stone quarry heritage, to secure its future conservation and to contribute to the cultural economy and well being of local communities.

Decisions Made:

1. That the Council supports the Heritage Lottery Fund bid for the Valley of Stone project and agrees in principle to the proposed works being carried out on any land that is owned or leased by the Borough Council, subject to the final details of individual schemes being agreed by officers of the Council.
2. That provision is made in future annual budgets to meet the on-going maintenance and inspection costs, estimated to be in the region of £8,000 per annum.

Reasons for Decisions:

The Valley of Stone project offers a significant opportunity for Rossendale to begin to maximise its natural and built heritage in ways which will be beneficial to both residents and visitors to Rossendale.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

Not to support the scheme may expose the Council to potential liabilities in respect of the safe use of these sites.

18. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK – 2ND ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT (2006)

The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration presented the report of the Head of Planning and Legal and Democratic Services on the second Annual Monitoring Report (AMR), which was to be submitted to Government Office North West by 31st December 2006.

Decisions Made:

1. That it be noted that a second Annual Monitoring Report will be prepared and submitted before 31st December 2006 to Government Office North West and that the AMR will be publicly available and placed on the Council's website.
2. That approval of the Annual Monitoring Report for submission to the Secretary of State be delegated to the Head of Planning and Legal and Democratic Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration.

Reasons for Decisions:

The Annual Monitoring Report is linked to improving performance across the 8 x 8 by 2008 indicators. BVPI 200c refers specifically to producing this report. The report also shows the Council's performance in relation to plan-making and achieving both government and local planning objectives.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

By not submitting the Annual Monitoring Report on time the Council would fail to meet BVPI 200c, which would have implications on the Council's performance rating.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 8.35pm)