

COUNCILLOR JUNE FORSHAW MAYOR

MINUTES OF: THE COUNCIL OF THE BOROUGH OF ROSSENDALE

Date of Meeting: 27th April 2005

PRESENT: The Mayor J Forshaw (in the Chair)
Councillors D Barnes, L Barnes, Challinor, Cheetham, Crosta, Disley, Eaton, Entwistle, Farquharson, Graham, Hancock, Lamb, Neal, Nicholass, J Pawson, S Pawson, Robertson, Ruddick, Sandiford, H Steen, P Steen, Thorne, Unsworth, and Young

IN ATTENDANCE: Owen Williams – Chief Executive
Gillian Bishop – Deputy Chief Executive
Mark Weston – Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Phil Seddon - Head of Financial Services
Ilona Snow-Miller - Head of Community and Partnerships
Colin Walker - Head of Economic Development and Spatial Development
Nick Molyneux - Communications Manager
Gillian Hoyle - Media Relations Assistant
Brian Sheasby - Team Manager (Development Control)
Gwen Marlow - Planning Technical Officer
Paul Talbot - Planning Technical Assistant
Helen Longworth - Planning Assistant
Diane Dungworth - Administrator (Development Control)
Avril Dunn - Administrative Assistant (Planning)
Gary Parsons - Housing Research and Strategy Officer
Steve Jackson - Housing Market Restructuring Manager
Gary Marlow - HMR Research & GIS Assistant
Keith Bell - Building Control and Facilities Manager
Mike Chaderton - Senior Building Control Officer
Andy Pearson - District Building Control Officer
Alan Dixon - District Building Control Officer
Gillian Tattersall - Building Control Administrator
Patricia Lees - Building Control Administrator
Trish Ellins - Community Safety Officer
Julian Joinson - Democratic Services Manager

APOLOGIES: Councillors: Atkinson, A Barnes, Driver, Huntbach, McShea, Ormerod, Starkey, Wadsworth

536. MINUTES

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 30th March 2005 be signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

537. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Swain declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 9 – Office Accommodation Strategy, in the light of a client’s connection with the proposals. Councillor Neal declared a personal interest in Item 9 - Office Accommodation Strategy, in the light of his question about Whitworth Civic Hall under item 5.

538. COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE MAYOR, THE LEADER OR HEAD OF PAID SERVICE

The Mayor indicated that she had received a letter from Bacup Rec` Bowling Club concerning the maintenance of bowling greens. Officers were requested to circulate a copy of the letter to all Members of the Council.

The Chief Executive announced positive achievements made in three service areas details of which were as follows:-

Development Control

The Planning Section had been awarded a Planning Delivery Grant by the government, totaling £373,594. More than £200,000 of that grant had come because of the improvements that had taken place in Development Control over the last 20 months and from meeting performance targets. The remainder had come to the Council because it was in a Housing Pathfinder area.

The grant would be used to continue to improve planning performance standards, as well as providing improved levels of customer service.

Housing Strategy

Rossendale Council’s Housing Strategy had been awarded the “Fit for Purpose” standard by Government Office Northwest. The Council’s Strategy was one of the first in the North West to receive Government approval.

The Strategy, which covered the period from April 2005 to March 2008, focused on four key priority areas of work:

- Providing affordable housing
- Attracting housing regeneration cash for Bacup, Stacksteads & Britannia
- Meeting the Government’s Decent Homes Standard
- Identifying emergency accommodation for a variety of homelessness groups

It covered all forms of housing including council housing, housing associations and the privately owned homes.

Building Control

The Building Control Service had been awarded the BS ENISO 9001 standard. That standard was awarded by the National Quality Assurance organisation and

was a recognition of the department's excellent work over the last 18 months to improve customer service standards and improve service delivery.

A certificate was presented to Keith Bell, Building Control and Facilities Manager.

Members of the Council thanked the teams involved for their hard work, which was enabling Rossendale Council to move forward and achieve its corporate aims and objectives.

The Leader outlined the content of a letter from Nick Raynsford, of the Office of the Deputy Prime-Minister, dated 22nd March 2005, which acknowledged the quickening pace of change in Rossendale, the intention to move to permanent executive arrangements and the fact that the Council's Recovery Plan was now embodied in the Corporate Plan. It was particularly pleasing to note that the Council's progress had been recognised by Central Government.

539. MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME

Councillor Neal asked whether any progress had been made in relation to the development of Whitworth Civic Hall since November 2004.

The Leader replied that in November 2004 a working group had been established to consider the provision of a facility to replace the former Civic Hall and the Council had given a commitment to rebuild on the current site using the full insurance proceeds. Meetings of the working group had subsequently taken place, a preliminary design and costings had been produced, and officers had considered issues in relation to revenue and capital funding, the role of the insurers and the implications of the new Corporate Priorities.

The Council had considered a further report in February 2005 and had agreed the way forward. Since then an environmental works study had been completed, quotations had been sought for the second stage, and planning permission was being sought. A decision would shortly be taken on the selection of professional advisors to assist in the project management and quantity surveying services for the rebuild project.

Councillor Lamb referred to the use of external venues for meetings of the Executive and the difficulties posed by lack of public transport to certain venues. The Mayor added that the principle of taking the Executive out to all areas of the Borough was laudable, although ease of access was a consideration.

The Leader responded that peripatetic meetings were experimental and intended to make the Executive more accessible to the public. However, it was acknowledged that attendance figures had remained largely unchanged.

Councillor P Steen enquired about the financial impact to the Council of the Government's revised policy in relation to the Local Government Pension Scheme.

The Leader indicated that the detailed implications of the changes were not yet known.

Councillor Disley asked whether she would receive a reply about the frequency of use of Holden Vale Hotel, which had been promised at the last Council meeting.

The Leader apologised for the delay and undertook to expedite a reply.

Councillor Hancock enquired whether the minutes of the Improvement Board could be made available to all Members.

The Leader answered that the Improvement Board was facilitated by the ODPM and that access to its minutes was a matter for that organisation. However, core information arising from the improvement process was under the Council's control. The Leader met regularly with the Chief Executive to discuss progress in relation to Business Plans and monitoring information arising from that process could be circulated to all Members. The Chief Executive added that the Minister's letter had given effect to a change in the reporting procedures to the Improvement Board, such that the Council would be leading the process.

540. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions asked at the meeting.

541. RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

Executive – 20th April 2005

Crime and Disorder Strategy

Members considered a report by the Community Safety Officer on the Crime and Disorder Strategy 2005 - 2008. The Strategy set out the strategic objectives of the Crime and Disorder Partnership for the next three years together with the relevant targets.

Members raised a number issues:- including a perceived lack of response by the Police to certain reported local issues; the need for more youth facilities and adequate open space to minimise youth nuisance; possible sources of funding; and the positive work being undertaken by the Police and Community Together group (PACT).

Councillor Hancock highlighted the positive approach of the Strategy document and the need to work in partnership to reduce crime. The figures showed that crime in Rossendale was falling in every category. However, there remained a need to tackle perceptions and the fear of crime.

Councillor Young, the retiring Chair of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership Steering Group, reported that a number of thematic sub-groups had been established to tackle specific areas of concern. The Chairs of the sub-groups were as follows:-

Dave Shepherd (Police) - Prolific Offenders
Trish Ellins (Rossendale BC) - Domestic Violence
Carole Todd (Rossendale BC) - Anti-Social Behaviour

Trish McGurk (Police) - Drugs
Craig Fairbrother (Rossendale BC)- Violent Crime (and Alcohol)

Resolved:

To approve and adopt the Crime and Disorder Strategy 2005-2008.

Office Accommodation Strategy

Members considered a joint report by the Executive Director of Resources and the Director of Housing Management Services on the Office Accommodation Strategy. The report dealt with the specific policy issues and principles in relation to the proposal.

The Leader highlighted key elements of the strategy including:- the list of facilities to be disposed of; the properties to be retained; new accommodation; links to the MasterPlan; Members' facilities; financial implications; the reasons for change; and the risks.

Members discussed the relative merits of the proposals. Some disadvantages cited included the remote locations of both Hurstwood Court and Futures Park; loss of the Council's Neighbourhood Office presence in Haslingden, Waterfoot and Whitworth; possible loss of trade to businesses in Rawtenstall and other town centres affected by office closures; and a possible increase of traffic flow along the A681 and of journey times to work.

Advantages discussed included the creation of a One Stop Shop; the need to make way for MasterPlan developments in Rawtenstall; the need to provide staff and Members with modern facilities which were fit for purpose; the need to adapt Council service delivery to respond to changing customer needs; and the positive impact upon the Corporate Priorities.

Councillor Hancock raised some specific questions in relation to the costs of the proposed adaptation to the Town Hall Annex; the cost of previous Town Hall refurbishment; usage of the Neighbourhood Offices; the cost of compensation for staff travelling; and the numbers of parking spaces at Futures Park.

The Leader responded to the general concerns expressed and to the specific questions put. He also reiterated the positive aspects of the proposals and his conclusion that the benefits outweighed any disadvantages.

Resolved:

1. To approve the strategy set out in section 5 of the report for the provision of the Council's Office Accommodation, and authorise consultation with staff and tenants as necessary.
2. To approve the addition of £579,000 from currently uncommitted capital resources to facilitate the relocation of staff, the provision of IT and Telecommunications infrastructure and any necessary building alterations, this

sum to be repaid from the capital receipts from the disposal of properties declared surplus as a result of this project.

3. To approve the closure of the Neighbourhood Offices in Haslingden and Waterfoot.

4. To declare the following properties surplus to requirements and authorise their disposal upon vacation, unless otherwise stated:-

Kay Street Offices, Rawtenstall;
The Main Town Hall Building, Rawtenstall;
The Liberal Club, Rawtenstall;
Waterfoot Neighbourhood Office, subject to resolution of user rights issues as set out in paragraph 5.5 of the report;
Haslingden Neighbourhood Office;
Whitworth Neighbourhood Office (for disposal on completion of the new Civic Hall);
The Roberts Street Depot, Rawtenstall; and
The Heys Street Sub Depot, Bacup.

5. To agree that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be requested to maintain an overview of the implementation of the Strategy.

Customer Services Standards and Complaints Procedure

Members considered a report of the Interim Head of Customer Services and E-Government concerning the draft Customer Services Strategy, the Customer Services Standards and the Customer Feedback Form 'On the Record'.

Members thanked Diane Aspinall for her hard work in producing the various documents.

Resolved:

To adopt the new strategy, standards and feedback form with immediate effect and to approve the methods for reporting and measuring compliance against the new standards.

542. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

Resolved:

That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item on the grounds that there would be a likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 9 and 11 of schedule 12A to the Act.

543. RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

Executive – 20th April 2005

Office Accommodation Strategy

Members considered a confidential report by the Executive Director of Resources on the commercial and staffing issues associated with the Office Accommodation Strategy, the principles of which had been reported earlier in the meeting.

Resolved:

1. To grant delegated authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council to conclude the leases discussed in the report.
2. To approve the earmarking of any surplus capital receipts from this project for the future accommodation strategy.
3. To authorise the Head of Financial Services to switch up to £150,000 of appropriate expenditure between revenue and capital should this be necessary to deliver the strategy.
4. To confirm the appointment of Lambert Smith Hampton, property consultants, to negotiate on the housing service office relocation and to agree that contract standing orders be waived in respect of their appointment.

(The meeting started at 7.00 pm and finished at 8.50 pm)

Mayor