

COUNCILLOR JUNE FORSHAW MAYOR

MINUTES OF: THE COUNCIL OF THE BOROUGH OF ROSSENDALE

Date of Meeting: 30th March 2005

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

IN ATTENDANCE: Owen Williams – Chief Executive
Gillian Bishop – Deputy Chief Executive
George Graham – Executive Director of Resources
Lynn Hurrell – Director of Housing Services
Mark Weston – Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Julian Joinson – Democratic Services Manager
Chris McConville – Principal Administrative Assistant

APOLOGIES: Councillors: A Barnes, D Barnes, Marriott, McShea, J Pawson, S Pawson and Swain

495. MINUTES

Resolved:

That the minutes of the Special Meeting of Council held on 22nd February 2005 be signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

496. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Huntbach declared a personal interest in Item 7b)(i) – Housing Strategy 2005 – 2008, in respect of his directorship of and shareholding in the Harvest Housing Group.

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

The Leader invited Councillor P Steen, Lead Member for Street Scene and Liveability, to speak in connection with the Waste Minimisation Scheme.

Councillor Steen presented the Council with a trophy in respect of the Waste Minimisation Scheme, which had been awarded to the Council as a result of the Rossendale's involvement in the Lancashire Waste Partnership. The award, in particular, reflected the hard work of the Waste Collection staff based at the Henrietta Street depot and, accordingly, the Council thanked them for their efforts.

There were no communications from the Mayor or Head of Paid Service.

498. MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME

Councillor P Steen asked, given that e-procurement had been operating for some time, whether the Leader could advise upon the financial benefits realised by the Authority and the number of local companies participating in e-auctions.

The Leader indicated that the Council had been involved in four joint procurement exercises with other East Lancashire authorities. The authorities had offered for auction their consolidated annual spending, termed the "basket". The four auctions in connection with stationery, IT consumables, paper and janitorial supplies had produced significant savings. Other efficiency savings might arise in respect of:- reduced processing times and transactional costs; reduced stock holding costs; reduced ordering points within the organisation; and the use of preferred standard products.

The number of local suppliers involved in the final auction process had ranged from none to four, although more local companies had been involved at the initial stages of each process. One of the successful companies was an East Lancashire company, based in Nelson.

Councillor P Steen enquired whether, given that a feasibility study was being undertaken by the East Lancashire Railway Trust about the possible use of the East Lancashire Railway line as a commuter service, consideration had been given, within in the Rawtenstall Master Plan, to the potential parking requirements.

The Leader responded that the Master Plan did acknowledge the possibility of enhanced railway usage, that any information arising as a result of the study would be welcomed and that the Master Planners would be asked to liaise closely with the Railway Trust.

Councillor Crosta referred to information contained in the Police newsletter "Upbeat", about Lancashire Constabulary's accommodation requirements within the Pennine Division and asked whether the Council would be consulted about any implications for the Borough.

The Leader replied that the Council had already entered into preliminary discussions with the Police about a number of possible options.

Councillor Neal asked if, when a Member reported damage to bus shelters within Rossendale, they should have some action taken within a reasonable timescale.

The Leader confirmed that remedial action should be taken within a reasonable period of time and that if Members felt that a specific query had not been dealt with properly he would refer the matter to the Highways Manager on their behalf.

Councillor Neal referred to an investigation by the District Auditor some ten years ago into the missing Town Clerk of Whitworth and asked whether, in the light of renewed interest in the matter by the Police, it would be appropriate to reopen this case so that facts not investigated in 1995 could be looked into.

The Leader indicated that the matter had been fully investigated in the past by the Audit Commission's District Auditor, in conjunction with the Police, and assisted by officers from the Council's Internal Audit Team. All the relevant records would be held by the District Auditor. Advances technology might enable the Police to reopen the case and in that event the Council would be happy to co-operate in any further investigation.

Councillor Hancock raised a question in relation to whether a Member could adequately perform his duties while working abroad.

The Leader indicated that it was not appropriate for him to comment about how individual Members executed their office.

Councillor Hancock asked whether improvements could be made to the facilities for communicating with Stubbylee Hall, in the light of the limitations of the answer-phone system.

The Leader replied that it was not always possible for officers to respond immediately to incoming calls, but that every effort was made to respond within a reasonable period of time.

Councillor Hancock enquired about the cost of holding a by-election in conjunction with the annual elections on the first Thursday of May and the cost of holding a by-election at any other time of the year.

The Leader responded that the estimated cost of running a by-election outside the annual elections process was approximately £1,775 and that assuming a Local, County and National election was taking place at the same time the total cost would be shared three ways equating to approximately £591 per election.

Councillor Hancock enquired about whether there ought to be a greater degree of political balance in the proportion of press releases issued by the political groups and requested an estimate of the Council's publicity budget.

The Leader replied the Council's Communications Manager had produced draft media guidelines which would be discussed further at the next meeting of the Executive. Given that press releases were often made in response to a media enquiry, it was anticipated that the majority of quotations would be obtained from the relevant Portfolio Holder. Press releases issued by officers represented the Council's corporate position and were non-political. The Council had planned to spend £43,500 on corporate communications activities for the forthcoming year.

Councillor Hancock enquired whether the Council had issued a moratorium on house building and when had such a decision been taken.

The Leader indicated that in December 2004 the Council had taken a position on the granting of future residential development, in the light of the appeal decision in respect of Holmfield House and based on the Lancashire County Structure Plan and the Regional Spatial Strategy, which showed an oversupply of housing within the Borough. The number of existing planning permissions would give rise to the target figure of 1,920 housing completions for 2001-2016 being exceeded. Accordingly, new applications were being resisted unless certain very strict criteria laid out in the Structure Plan were met.

Councillor Disley asked about the cost of organising the Media Training day at Holden Vale Hotel on 23rd March 2005 and whether the content and purpose of the course contributed to the Council's Improvement Programme. She also enquired about the number of Council meetings held at Holden Vale Hotel and whether there were plans to hold any further meetings there.

The Leader reported that the cost of the Media Training was £1,570, or approximately £262 per person, which represented a very competitive quote for the type of 'hands on' experience offered and compared favourably to expenditure by other Lancashire Authorities on similar professional media training. The purpose of the training was to provide Council officers and Executive Portfolio Holders with practical media skills and to address some of the communication issues identified in previous external validation reports and at a recent Members' development day. Good communication was seen as vital in helping the Council to deliver its improvement programme.

The Leader would provide a written reply in respect of the previous and planned future usage of Holden Vale Hotel.

Councillor Lamb referred to the recent changes within the organisation and its political management structure and enquired whether discussions had taken place with the Chief Executive to secure his ongoing commitment to Rossendale.

The Leader indicated that the changes of the last twelve months had paved the way for improvements, which would begin to become more apparent in the near future. However, specific employment issues were personal to the individual members of staff concerned.

Councillor Lamb enquired whether there ought to be a greater degree of consultation with all sectors of the community and an increased involvement by Members.

The Leader agreed that close liaison with the community was essential.

Councillor P Steen asked whether the Council would participate in the VJ Day celebrations to commemorate the 60th anniversary of Victory in Japan. The Mayor commented that regrettably the Tsunami Disaster Book had attracted some inappropriate comments by members of the public.

The Leader agreed to seek to arrange a suitable civic event for VJ Day and to place a commemorative book in the Town Hall Reception, with appropriate supervision.

Councillor Ormerod asked how the changes proposed to Council Services would provide positive benefits to the people of Rossendale.

The Leader replied that the customer was at the fore of key improvements including the proposed Housing Stock Transfer, changes to refuse collection, plans for a 'One Stop Shop' and the signing of the Local Strategic Partnership Agreement.

Councillor Young raised again the question of individual Councillors' availability to represent their constituents.

The Leader reiterated his earlier response.

Councillor Neal expressed his disappointment at the resignation of the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and asked whether the Leader could ensure that the scrutiny function would continue to be impartial and provide a balance to the Executive. Councillor Hancock referred to correspondence with the Leader in which it had been suggested that the Opposition be offered the chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee and that the Committee comprise a majority of Opposition Members.

The Leader commented that the Executive and Overview and Scrutiny should remain independent, but that there was also a need to work closely together in the appropriate circumstances. He confirmed that he had received the communication referred to by Councillor Hancock and that the proposal would be considered further by the Majority Group at their next meeting.

499. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions asked at the meeting.

500. RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

Audit Committee – 7th March 2005 – Amendments to the Constitution

Members considered a report which had been provided to the Audit Committee on 7th March 2005 in respect of proposed amendments to the Council's Constitution in the light of the Organisational Review. The changes included revised job titles, consequential amendments to the Officer Delegation Scheme and additions to the Access to Information Procedure Rules. The Audit Committee had made a number of minor amendments to Appendices B and C of the report, which had been updated accordingly.

The Leader undertook to arrange for information to be provided to Members about new appointments following the Organisational Review.

Resolved:

That the amendments set out in Appendices A, B,C and D of the report be included in the Council's Constitution.

Executive - 16th March 2005

Housing Strategy

Members considered a report by the Housing Research and Strategy Officer, which had been provided to the Executive on 16th March 2005, concerning the Housing Strategy 2005-2008.

Resolved:

That the Housing Strategy 2005-2008, its priorities and objectives and the associated Action Plan be approved.

LSP Community Strategy Delivery Plan 2005-2008

Members considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive on the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) Community Strategy Delivery Plan for 2005-2008.

Resolved:

That the content of the LSP Community Strategy Delivery Plan for 2005-2008 be approved.

Private Sector Decent Homes Policy

Members considered a report by the Private Sector Housing Renewal Manager on the adoption of a Private Sector Decent Homes Policy.

It was Moved and Seconded:

- “1. To approve the use of equity release across the Borough to assist vulnerable homeowners living in non-decent homes to meet the decent homes standard and to amend the Council’s Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy and Strategy accordingly.
2. To approve, in principle, the use of West Pennine Housing Association and the Home Improvement Trust as delivery agents and to give delegated authority to the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Lead Members for Housing to agree service level agreements with both agencies.
3. To delete the use of Renovation Grant and Minor Works Grant as a form of financial assistance to homeowners in the Council’s Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy and Strategy.”

The following Amendment was Moved and Seconded:

“That the following words be added to the original motion: ‘4. That the above policy be monitored by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a three monthly basis’.”

The **Amendment** was **carried**, whereupon the **Substantive Motion** was put and it was:

Resolved:

1. To approve the use of equity release across the Borough to assist vulnerable homeowners living in non-decent homes to meet the decent homes standard and to amend the Council’s Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy and Strategy accordingly.
2. To approve, in principle, the use of West Pennine Housing Association and the Home Improvement Trust as delivery agents and to give delegated authority to the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Lead Members for Housing to agree service level agreements with both agencies.
3. To delete the use of Renovation Grant and Minor Works Grant as a form of financial assistance to homeowners in the Council’s Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy and

Strategy.

4. That the above policy be monitored by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a three monthly basis.

2005/06 Treasury Management and Annual Investment Statement

Members considered a joint report by the Head of Finance and the Deputy Director of Finance on the 2005/06 Treasury Management Strategy and the Annual Investment Statement.

Resolved:

That the Treasury Management Strategy and the Annual Investment Statement for 2005/06 be approved.

Capital Programme 2005/06 and Future Years

Members considered a joint report by the Executive Director of Resources and Head of Financial Services on the Capital Programme 2005/06 and Future Years. Members were informed that the Executive had deferred consideration of the four historical schemes identified at Paragraph 6.6 of the report.

Members discussed the use of the Astoria for public meetings and its suitability in respect of access requirements under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The Leader indicated that arrangements were in hand to address the matter.

Resolved:

1. To approve the committed Capital Programme set out at Appendix 1, together with the additional schemes set out at Paragraph 6.4 of the report.
2. To note the preparation pool of schemes outlined at Appendix 2.

501. EXECUTIVE ARRANGEMENTS

Members considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services on the intended timetable for the adoption of the new Executive Arrangements. It was proposed to commence consultation with Members in April/May 2005 on the form of the new arrangements and to implement the new governance arrangements by October 2005.

Resolved:

That the Project Plan for the transfer to new governance arrangements set out at Appendix 1 to the report be approved.

502. APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY MAYOR

Members considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services on a proposed revised procedure for the appointment of the Deputy Mayor. The Leader indicated that the

revisions represented a modernised approach to the selection of the Deputy Mayor and a move away from the policy of appointing the longest serving Member.

The intention was that for 2005/06 the Labour Group would select an eligible Member in accordance with the under-mentioned criteria and in 2006/07 the Conservative Group would nominate the Deputy Mayor, unless the circumstances at Paragraph 3 below applied.

Councillor Hancock, as Lead Member for Member Development and Political Arrangements, asked that the officers place on record that his name be not associated with the report.

It was **Moved** and **Seconded**:

“1. That the Deputy Mayor is selected by each political group in turn by whatever method that group sees fit from amongst a list of eligible Members. For this purpose, a political group is one with more than three Members serving on the Council.

2. That an eligible Member is a Councillor who:-

- (a) has at least two years service before re-election;
- (b) is in at least their second consecutive term; and
- (c) has not previously been the Mayor of Rossendale.

3. If the group whose turn it is to make the selection is unable to nominate an eligible candidate, the responsibility for selection will transfer to the next political group and the annual rotation will recommence from the point.

4. The Deputy Mayor will automatically be voted Mayor in the following year.”

The following **Amendment** was **Moved** and **Seconded**:

“1. That whomever serves and is appointed to the office of Deputy Mayor will also be appointed to the office of Mayor for the following year.

2. The appointment of the Deputy Mayor will be based purely on the length of the Member’s service and availability to serve as Deputy Mayor and Mayor.

3. The Deputy Mayor should have at least two years left to serve from the date when appointed.

4. In the event of two Members having equal service then the appointment will be decided by a free vote of all Members of the Council.

5. The appointment will be made at the first Council meeting after Christmas.”

The **Amendment** was **lost**, whereupon a further **Amendment** was **Moved** and **Seconded**:

“That the following words be added to the original motion: ‘5. That the appointment will be made at the first Council meeting after Christmas’.”

The **Amendment** was **carried** , whereupon the **Substantive Motion** was put and it was:

Resolved:

1. That the Deputy Mayor is selected by each political group in turn by whatever method that group sees fit from amongst a list of eligible Members. For this purpose, a political group is one with more than three Members serving on the Council.
2. That an eligible Member is a Councillor who:-
 - (a) has at least two years service before re-election;
 - (b) is in at least their second consecutive term; and
 - (c) has not previously been the Mayor of Rossendale.
3. If the group whose turn it is to make the selection is unable to nominate an eligible candidate, the responsibility for selection will transfer to the next political group and the annual rotation will recommence from the point.
4. The Deputy Mayor will automatically be voted Mayor in the following year.
5. That the appointment will be made at the first Council meeting after Christmas.

Following the adoption of the new procedure the Labour Group declined to nominate a Member for 2005/06, and in accordance with the rotation rules at Paragraph 3 selection fell to the Conservative Group.

Resolved:

That Councillor P Steen be appointed Deputy Mayor for 2005/06.

503. SCHEDULE OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS 2005/06

Members considered a schedule of Committee meetings for the Municipal Year 2005/06.

Councillor P Steen requested that the meetings of the Council and Executive (Briefing) scheduled for 21st and 22nd December 2005 respectively, be rearranged.

Resolved:

That the schedule of meetings for 2005/06 be approved and that the Head of Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to make any minor amendments, as necessary.

(The meeting started at 7.00 pm and finished at 8.45 pm)

Mayor