

COUNCILLOR JUNE FORSHAW MAYOR

MINUTES OF: THE COUNCIL OF THE BOROUGH OF ROSSENDALE

Date of Meeting: 16th February 2005

PRESENT: The Mayor Councillor J Forshaw (in the Chair)
Councillors Atkinson, A Barnes, D Barnes, L Barnes
Challinor, Cheetham, Crosta, Disley, Eaton, Entwistle,
Farquharson, Graham, Hancock, Lamb, Marriott, McShea,
Neal, Nicholass, Ormerod, Robertson, Ruddick, Sandiford,
Starkey, H Steen, P Steen, Swain, Thorne and Young.

IN ATTENDANCE: Owen Williams – Chief Executive
Gillian Bishop – Deputy Chief Executive
Lynn Hurrell – Director of Housing Services
Mark Weston – Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Phil Seddon – Head of Finance
Chris McConville – Principal Administrative Assistant

APOLOGIES: Councillors: Driver, Huntbach, J Pawson, S Pawson,
Tickner and Unsworth.

414. MINUTES

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 24th January 2005 be signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

415. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Neal declared a personal interest in item 8 on the agenda (Whitworth Civic Hall) by virtue of his being a member of Whitworth Town Council.

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

The Mayor drew the attention of Members to the retirement of Mr Colin Hyland employee in the Refuse, Cleansing and Recycling Section who had completed over 36 years service with the Council and had retired on 10th February 2005 having reached the age of 65 years.

On behalf of the Council, the Mayor expressed her thanks for the service rendered to the Council and the support for the Mayoralty shown by Mr Hyland during that period.

417. MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME

Councillor A Barnes asked questions relating to the proposed sale of Council owned land particularly in respect of sites at Park Road/Edward Street. She asked why the Council were proceeding with the sales; what the possible end use of such sites might be and whether the Council would consider maintaining the garage site at Edward Street.

The Leader replied that a market testing exercise to determine the value of the sites was currently being undertaken and the decision on whether or not to sell the land was currently under review. The end use of the sites was not known at the present time.

Councillor McShea thanked the Leader of the Council for the written reply requested at the previous Council Meeting in respect of the response to a question by Councillor Young made at a previous council meeting regarding the Leadership. He asked whether Councillor Young had indicated that he was satisfied with that response and whether Councillor Young enjoyed the full support of the Leader.

The Leader replied that he had not received a response from Councillor Young to his reply and he pointed out that he was in regular conversation with Councillor Young on the role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Disley referred to the proposed sale of Council owned land and pointed out that land previously sold by the Council had been developed for new housing. She asked whether the Council could provide rented accommodation and sell land to organisations who were prepared to build houses for rent rather than necessarily selling to the highest bidder.

The Leader responded that the Council did not have funds to build new housing for rent or improve its current existing housing stock. It was for this reason that the Council was considering the transfer of its stock to a social landlord and he looked forward to Councillor Disley's support for that proposal.

Councillor Neal asked whether the Leader of the Council was aware that changes to legislation would be required to allow local authorities to build housing for rent.

The Leader replied that it was not within his powers to change legislation.

Councillor Hancock asked the following question.

What criteria are being used to assess the response to land sale consultations.
(Sites such as Park Road, Waterfoot.)

The Leader replied that in February 2004 the Executive Committee authorised the Head of Finance in consultation with the Leader and Opposition Leader to proceed with the sale of the sites if the option appraisals on the site concluded that the sites should be sold.

The Option Appraisals carried out in respect of all of the sites concluded that they should be sold.

The recommendation in respect of Edward Street was brought back before the Council's Executive Committee on 15th December 2004 as Councillor Hancock had objected to the sale. The Committee resolved that the sale proceed.

Notice of Intention to dispose was published in the Free Press and various objections were received in respect of the proposed disposals.

In light of the current Structure Plan Policy Number 43 restricting new housing development and the recent Holmefield Planning Appeal decision, the Head of Finance is to carry out a market testing exercise by advertising the Edwards Street and Park Road sites for sale.

If the offers are significantly less than was originally expected we will undertake an options appraisal and bring a report back to the Executive Committee.

Any objections must be weighed against the Council's duty to demonstrate the best use of its resources.

Councillor Hancock asked the following question

What is the shortfall on savings from the 2004/2005 budget and what impact has this had on the Improvement Programme?

The Leader replied that

As reported previously, the shortfall on the savings target of £773,000 is estimated to be a maximum £118,000.

The impact on the improvement programme has been that the budgeted Improvement Fund of £267,000 had to be reduced by an equivalent amount.

Again as reported previously, a number of other issues, such as the non introduction of car parking fees, resulted in further reduction of the improvement fund to £145,000.

However, funds have been made available to support the Improvement Programme namely:

1. Improved performance of Revenues and Benefits together with an independent study into potential partnership working and
2. The securing of the grant to Whitaker Park Museum, from English Heritage, due to increasing opening hours.
3. Ensuring continuation of Bacup & Stacksteads CCTV
4. Enforcement Officer for environmental services
5. Commissioning of Rossendale Borough Council first staff survey

But most importantly the Corporate Improvement Plan's target to increase revenue reserves by £175,000 will be achieved.

Councillor Hancock asked the following question

What progress has been made on identifying an alternative site for a Waste Transfer Station for Rossendale?

The Leader replied that

RBC officers have met with LCC officers regarding the progress in relation to the location of a Waste Transfer Station. LCC are the Waste Disposal Authority and are committed as a result of the Lancashire Waste Strategy to siting a Waste Transfer Station within Rossendale.

At the present time RBC have been informed that LCC are still considering and analysing a range of options for the Waste Transfer Station one of these is Water Barn. However, we have been advised that no decision will be made until late Spring 2005. On this basis LCC have confirmed that they will discuss the outcomes of their analysis with officers and members in line with these timescales prior to any public consultation.

Councillor Lamb raised the issue of Member Training sessions and asked whether they were for the benefit of Officers, the trainers or members. She pointed out that members experienced difficulty in attending sessions which were arranged during the working day and that in response to earlier questions at the Council arrangements had been made for member training sessions to start later in the afternoon. She pointed out that member training was the Councils' second highest priority and would only work if members were able to attend, she therefore asked whether further consideration could be given to more convenient starting times for such events for members.

The Leader replied that he had sympathy with the points made by Councillor Lamb and confirmed that such sessions were primarily for the benefit of members. He advised that he had discussed with both the trainers and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and they were working on a solution to the problem. He undertook to continue to review the start times for the Member Training Sessions and to discuss these with the Leader of the Opposition.

Councillor Young referred to the questions by Councillor McShea and pointed out that his original questions relating to the leadership were prompted by his concerns about the public perception of the Council and the way it conducted its business. He pointed out that if Councillor P Steen had been involved in the answers he had received to his questions he was happy with those answers.

Councillor Ruddick confirmed that Councillor P Steen had been involved in his reply to Councillor Young and had expressed his satisfaction with that reply.

418. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Mr Pearson referred to the Corporate Governance Report of two years ago when the leadership was instructed to improve relations between members, senior management and members of staff. He referred to staff meetings held between the interim Chief Executive Officer and the staff which at that time were considered successful and asked what was to be done to foster improved relationships and to address the issue of low morale.

Councillor Ruddick referred to the recent organisational review undertaken by the Council which had caused some disruption within the organisation. He pointed out the matter was being addressed. A staff morale group had been set up and had introduced a number of initiatives. A Staff survey had been undertaken on behalf of the Council by Pendle Borough Council and this had achieved a high response rate. The results of the survey were currently being examined and it was proposed that these would be made available to the staff and a report on the survey would be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Mr Pearson asked whether the Pilot Executive Arrangements were considered successful both from the perspective of members of the Executive and from the perspective of non members of the Executive. He also asked for information on the timetable for consultation on Executive Arrangements and its introduction.

The Leader indicated that the Pilot Arrangements had been successful and it was his understanding that permanent Executive Arrangements would receive the support of members. He pointed out that Councillor Hancock was the portfolio holder in respect of this issue. Consultation would take place over a period of months and dependent on upon the results of that consultation, a permanent arrangement would be introduced within approximately six months.

419. RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

Executive – 9th February 2005 – Executive Arrangements

Resolved

That the Council is minded to move to permanent Executive Arrangements and that a report be brought to a future Council Meeting setting out a action plan with a view to implementing permanent Executive Arrangements and that the Council continues with its pilot executive arrangements until the Council is able to move to a permanent arrangement .

Local Strategic Partnership – Community Strategy

Resolved

That the Council approves the Local Strategic Partnership - Community Strategy

Rossendale Local Development Framework – Local Development Scheme

Resolved

1. That the Council approves the Local Development Scheme and
2. That the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council be given delegated authority to ensure the submission of the Local Development Scheme to Government Office North West by 28th March 2005.

420. WHITWORTH CIVIC HALL

Members considered a report on the options available to them in respect of the site of the former Whitworth Hall which had been destroyed by fire.

During discussion on the item, members thanked those people involved in the working party which had been considering the future of Whitworth Civic Hall and in particular those members of the Community Leisure Association of Whitworth (CLAW).

Reference was made to a petition prepared by the people of Whitworth in support of the rebuilding of the Civic Hall and it was suggested that this should be retained in a permanent place in the proposed new Civic Hall.

Reference was also made to the furniture and name boards of former members of Whitworth Town Council, currently located in the Council Chamber in the Council Offices at Whitworth and a member suggested that these should be made available for use in the proposed new Council Chamber.

Following a full discussion it was

Resolved

1. In principle and subject to due diligence, to work with the Community Leisure Association of Whitworth (CLAW) and others to rebuild the civic hall on the existing site.
2. That subject to a satisfactory independent report from a suitably qualified Quantity Surveyor or similar professional person, the decision on whether or not to suspend standing orders in respect of the tendering process for this scheme be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Leader of the Opposition.

3. To make a capital budget available up to a maximum £1,118,000 for rebuild costs, professional fees and fitting out.

4. To the sale of Whitworth Town Hall subject to the recommendation of our professional advisers.

5. To provide annual revenue support to a maximum of the following:

	2006/07 £	2007/08 £	2008/09 £
Civic Hall	35,000	22,000	0
Swimming Pool	47,000	47,000	47,000
Total	82,000	69,000	47,000

6. That payment of the revenue support be subject to a quarterly review and paid on a quarterly basis

421. APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEES

Further to the resolution at the previous Council Meeting, the Leader of the Council advised that the appointment of Councillor Wadsworth as Chair of Development Control Committee had been considered and it was recommended that Councillor Wadsworth remain the Chair of the Development Control Committee.

Resolved

That Councillor Wadsworth remain Chair of Development Control Committee.

(The Meeting started at 7.00pm and finished at 8.40pm)

Mayor