

**COUNCILLOR PETER STEEN, MAYOR**

**MINUTES OF: THE COUNCIL OF THE BOROUGH OF ROSSENDALE**

**Date of Meeting: 27<sup>th</sup> March 2007**

**PRESENT: The Mayor Councillor P. Steen (in the Chair)  
Councillors A. Barnes, D. Barnes, L. Barnes, Challinor,  
Dickinson, Driver, Eaton, Essex, Farquharson,  
Forshaw, C. Gill, P. Gill, Graham, Haworth, Lamb,  
Lynskey, Morris, Neal, Ormerod, S. Pawson,  
Robertson, Ruddick, Sandiford, Smith, Starkey and  
Thorne**

**IN ATTENDANCE: Carolyn Wilkins, Chief Executive  
George Graham, Executive Director of Resources  
Heather Moore, Committee Services Manager  
Bill Lawley, Interim Legal and Democratic Services  
Manager  
Julian Joinson, Democratic Services Manager  
Tom Keena, Audit Commission Relationship Manager**

**ALSO PRESENT: 2 Representatives of the Press**

**APOLOGIES: Councillors Alcroft, D Barnes, L Barnes, Crosta,  
Driver, Eaton, Entwistle, Farquharson, Forshaw,  
H Steen, P Steen and Unsworth.**

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## **MINUTES SILENCE**

The meeting observed a minutes silence as a mark of respect for the death of Councillor Cheetham. The Mayor reported that Councillor Cheetham was first elected to the Eden Ward in Rossendale in 1994 and was subsequently re-elected in 1998, 2002 and 2006. He served as Mayor during 2005/06 and actively served the community in his role as the Member Champion for Older People.

### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of the Deputy Mayor Councillor J. Pawson and Councillors Crosta, Hancock, H. Steen and Swain.

### **2. MINUTES**

#### **Resolved:**

That subject to it being noted that the Mayor's Ball had taken place on the 24<sup>th</sup> March 2007 and not the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007 as recorded, the minutes of the Council meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2007 be signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

### **3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made.

### **4. COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE DEPUTY MAYOR, THE LEADER, OR HEAD OF THE PAID SERVICE**

The Mayor reported that the Chief Executive had been in post for one year and he outlined the positive contribution she had made during this time and the future achievements that the Council was working on including the Investors in People award.

The Mayor reported that Ruth Alcroft and Leondard Entwistle had tendered their resignations from the Council. He asked Members of the Council to join him in thanking Ruth Alcroft and Leonard Entwistle for their hard work and the diligent way in which they had carried out their duties.

The Leader of the Council reported that following the outcome of the Making it Better Consultation which proposed the closure of the maternity services at Fairfield Hospital in Bury, the Council sent a cross party letter in support of Bury Council's decision to refer this to the Secretary of State. This was on the grounds of inequality of access and the logistical problems of over 5,000 women annually having to travel to access services at North Manchester Hospital from the Rochdale, Bury and Rossendale areas. The Secretary of State agreed to an Independent Reconfiguration Panel to be set up to assess the situation and make further recommendations. The Panel had met with the Members of the Joint Scrutiny Committee in Oldham and Councillor Sandiford as a Member of that Committee provided further evidence in support of retaining maternity services at Fairfield Maternity Unit as being in the best interests of mothers and babies in Rossendale. The Panel would give their final decision in July.

There were no communications from the Chief Executive.

### **5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no questions raised under this item.

### **6. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS TO THE LEADER**

Councillor A. Barnes asked the following question:-

At recent meetings of Rossendale's Regeneration Board I was surprised to see that neither the Cabinet Member for Regeneration nor the Leader of the Council were present at the meeting. Could the Leader of the Council please tell us what he is doing to ensure that Rossendale gets its share of the £17m North West Development Agency (NWDA) funding that has recently become available in East Lancashire?

The Leader replied that he was not a member of the Regeneration Board therefore he did not attend those meetings. He indicated that Councillor Challinor regularly attended the meetings, however was on holiday at the time of the last meeting. In respect of the £17m NWDA funding, the Leader of the Council indicated that this was not Local Enterprise Growth Initiative (LEGI) funding and there were arrangements in place to ensure that Rossendale would receive this funding. He highlighted that Officers of the Council were involved in a series of meetings to ensure that the Council was able to unlock some of the funding for economic development activity to support the Elevate Housing pathfinder. The Leader reported that he and the Chief Executive were actively involved in the setting up of the East Lancashire Leaders and Chief Executives' Group which would be working in partnership to ensure that funding opportunities were maximised.

Councillor Neal asked the following question:-

At the last meeting of the Council, I asked the Leader about the future of the Brookville site in Whitworth and I have not yet received a response. Please can you let me know when I will receive a reply?

The Leader apologised that Councillor Neal had not received the response. He indicated that his reply was in the process of being typed up and would be sent out by the end of the week.

Councillor Neal then asked a further question as follows:-

At the last Development Control Committee, at which you were present, you mentioned about the Council's priority of promoting Rossendale as a place to live and visit. Shelter, the housing and homelessness charity are concerned about the level of affordable housing in the Country therefore do you believe that Rossendale should look at the Borough as a whole in future?

The Leader replied that there was affordable housing throughout the Borough and he referred to a recent report on Affordable Housing which outlined information on a ward basis. The Leader reported that he would send a copy of the report to Councillor Neal.

Councillor Thorne asked the following question:-

Could the Leader of the Council join me in thanking the Enforcement Officer in Development Control for taking action against a developer who was breaching their planning conditions at a site in Haslingden?

The Leader responded that officers were proactive in issuing the Stop Order against the developer and he thanked the Head of Planning, Legal and Democratic Services and the Enforcement Officer who had worked until 10.00pm on a Friday evening to enforce the Stop Order.

Councillor Dickinson asked the following question:-

Regarding the Play Strategy which the Cabinet had approved at its last meeting, could I ask the Leader to thank the Cabinet Member and the Officers for drafting the Strategy? I was particularly pleased that being a member of the Worsley Ward this area was given priority in the Strategy.

The Leader responded that the Strategy would improve play areas in the Borough and he was also pleased that Worsley Ward was a priority area.

Councillor D. Barnes asked the following question:-

Does the Leader agree that partnerships are the way forward? Examples include working in partnership with the Community Leisure Association of Whitworth (CLAW) on building Whitworth Civic Hall and also working with Whitworth Town Council on the Amberwatch Scheme which is an initiative that provides an early warning alert system for emergencies and also provides some income for the Town Council through advertising.

The Leader replied that partnerships were the way forward and this way of working supported the Council's capacity building approach. He informed Council that he was in Whitworth earlier that day to look at the Amberwatch Scheme which he hoped would be extended to other parts of the Borough. He also referred to the Mayor's Ball which was held at Whitworth Civic Hall and he thanked Councillor D. Barnes for his contribution.

Councillor Smith asked the following question:-

What is the Leader's view on the decision regarding local government reorganisation, specifically the bids for unitary authority status?

The Leader replied that the Government had announced that it would not be proceeding with the bids from Burnley and Pendle, Preston and Lancaster to create unitary authorities and he reminded Members that this had been predicted at a previous Council meeting when Rossendale agreed to take forward the enhanced two tier working model with Lancashire.

Councilor P. Gill asked the following question:-

Will a comparison be made on the provision of a Council Chamber in the Valley Centre against the cost of a refurbishment of the alternative site which had previously been identified?

The Leader replied that there were no plans for a Council Chamber in the Valley Centre with which to make a comparison. He indicated that consideration had been given to the provision of a Council Chamber on a site adjacent to the Valley Centre.

## **7. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDERS**

Councillor Robertson had submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Risk Management:-

Could the Cabinet Member for Finance please tell me what arrangements he has in place for monitoring the 07/08 budget?

Councillor Ormerod replied that the same monitoring arrangements would continue in 2007/08 which would include monthly monitoring reports to Cabinet, regular meetings would be held with the Head of Financial Services and covalent would be used to monitor BVPI performance. Councillor Ormerod highlighted that the Leader may re-select the Cabinet for 2007/08.

Councillor Robertson had submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration:-

Has the planning application for Rawtenstall town centre redevelopment come in to the council yet? Who will process this application on the Council's behalf?

Councillor Challinor replied that the application had been received and was in the process of being validated by planning officers. The application would be processed in-house by the Council.

Councillor Robertson had submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration:-

What issues were highlighted during the recent housing inspection and what are the council going to do to remedy the issues raised?

Councillor Challinor replied that the Audit Commission's report on the Council's Strategic Housing Service was published on the 15<sup>th</sup> March. It was available on the Council's website and also on the Audit Commission's website and the full recommendations were detailed within the report. To ensure that the recommendations were actioned they would be included in the Economic Regeneration and Strategic Housing Business Plan and he would monitor progress through the Business Planning process and meetings with the Head of Economic Regeneration and Strategic Housing.

Councillor A. Barnes had submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration:-

Could the Cabinet Member for Regeneration please tell us where things are up to in the recruitment of the regeneration team?

Councillor Challinor replied that funding had been secured from the Council through the budget process and from Lancashire County Council through its Lancashire County Developments Limited arm. Discussions were ongoing with the North West Development Agency regarding the balance of the funding needed and subject to confirmation of that funding, of which a decision was expected within the next six weeks, the recruitment process would be immediately.

Councillor Lamb had submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Policy and Performance:-

What are the expectations of the portfolio holder for Policy and Performance for the fourth quarter's Best Value Performance Indicators?

Councillor Essex replied that indicative figures for Quarter 4 showed that the Council's performance continued to improve both in terms of the Corporate Improvement Plan and Best Value Performance Indicators. He highlighted that one to one training on the Covalent Performance Management System was available for all Elected Members.

Councillor Lamb had submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration:-

Will the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration state at what stage is the Bacup, Stacksteads and Britannia Masterplan?

Councillor Challinor replied that a report was considered by the Cabinet on the 21st February 2007 which gave an indicative timetable for the suite of documents that comprised the Local Development Framework for Rossendale which included the Bacup, Stacksteads and Britannia Area Action Plan. It was anticipated that a preferred options version of the Area Action Plan would be published in August of 2007.

## **8. COMMITTEE SCHEDULE 2007/08**

A copy of the proposed Committee Schedule was submitted to the Council for consideration.

It was noted that a separate schedule would be circulated later in the week detailing internal meetings.

In response to a question about Member Development sessions, the Portfolio Holder for Human Resources and Member Development reported that the Member development Working Group would consider the training schedule for 2007/08 at their meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2007.

### **Resolved:**

That the Committee Schedule for 2007/08 be agreed.

## **9. URGENT DECISIONS**

The Leader of the Council presented a report on the use of the urgency procedures under the Access to Information Rules. The Council's Constitution specified the process that had to be followed when key decisions were taken which were not in the Forward Plan but which were urgent. The report covered urgent decisions taken under Rules 15 and 16 since the last meeting of the Council.

It was noted that there had been no decisions taken under the General Exception Rule 15.

It was further noted that there had been one decision taken under Special Urgency (Rule 16), in which the Cabinet delegated the determination of disabled parking spaces to the Head of Economic Regeneration and Strategic Housing in consultation with the Car Park Member Working Group to ensure that there was no delay in progressing the Traffic Regulation Order.

### **Resolved:**

That the report on the use of the urgency procedures under the Access to Information Rules be noted.

## **10. ANNUAL AUDIT AND INSPECTION LETTER**

The Council welcomed Tom Keena from the Audit Commission who presented the findings of the District Auditor's Annual Audit and Inspection Letter.

Tom Keena reported on the key messages of the report as detailed below.

- General service performance continues to improve.
- The retained strategic housing responsibility requires further development to support important issues such as affordable and decent housing, although it was recognised that good progress had been made in the context of the review taking place only six to nine months post the successful transfer of the Council's housing stock.
- Good progress has been made in the Council's contribution to the county-wide Children and Young People's Partnership.
- Improvements have been made to secure adequate performance in its use of resources but scope remains for stronger arrangements.
- The IT control environment and arrangements need to be improved to limit the exposure to IT fraud or abuse, although identified issues are being quickly addressed as part of the Council's ICT Strategy.
- Good progress has been made, in a relatively short timeframe, on data quality management and ethical governance arrangements.

Tom Keena highlighted that it had been another year of good progress and he wished the Council luck with the forthcoming CPA inspection.

### **Resolved:**

That the District Auditor's Annual Audit and Inspection Letter be noted and that it be referred to the Audit Scrutiny Committee for detailed consideration.

## **11. PROGRESS REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

Councillor Sandiford, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee presented a progress report on the work of the Task and Finish Groups for the consideration of the Council.

Councillor Sandiford informed the Meeting that it had been a busy year for Overview and Scrutiny. She informed the Council that the recommendations from the Highways Task and Finish Group had been accepted by Lancashire County Council and work had been included in their programme for next year.

In respect of the polling station review it was noted that the full review was pending subject to Government guidance being issued to all authorities. The Task and Finish Group had requested funding for additional signage to polling stations and this had been approved for the next Election.

It was reported that the Community Cohesion Task and Finish Group was ongoing and would continue into 2007/08. It was noted that the Group would visit Salford to review gating areas which would ensure that children could play safely.

It was reported that the Car Park Member Working Group would continue to meet in 2007/08 to progress disc parking and disabled parking.

The Council commended the work of Overview and Scrutiny and thanked Councillor Sandiford, the Committee Services Manager and the Scrutiny Support Officer on the improvements that had been made. Members indicated that the new arrangements ensured that there was effective cross party working resulting in positive outcomes for the Borough.

**Resolved:**

That the report outlining the work of the Task and Finish Groups be noted.

**12. USE OF THE COAT OF ARMS OF THE FORMER MAYOR, ALDERMEN AND BURGESSES OF THE BOROUGH OF BACUP**

The Council considered the report of the Executive Director of Resources which outlined proposals to use the Coat of Arms of the former Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses of the Borough of Bacup by the Close to the Hedge Project which had assumed responsibility for the former municipal greenhouses at Stubblelee Park.

In response to a question about the use of the Coat of Arms by Bacup Renaissance Committee, the Leader reported that the Head of Planning, Legal and Democratic Services would look into the matter.

**Resolved:**

That the use of the Coat of Arms of the former Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses of the Borough of Bacup by the Close to the Hedge Project on the terms set out in paragraph 4.4 of the report be approved.

**13. PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION – QUESTIONS TO MEMBERS**

The Leader of the Council presented a report on proposed amendments to the Constitution in respect of Questions to Members.

The Leader reported that the proposals would encourage further debate at Council meetings.

**Resolved:**

That the Council Procedure Rules 10, 10A and 10B be amended and replaced by a new Council Procedure Rule 10 in accordance with the report.

**14. VOTE OF THANKS**

The Mayor reported that the meeting would be the last Full Council prior to Annual Council. He extended his thanks to Members of the Council for their courtesy in his time of Chairing Council meetings and to Officers for their assistance and guidance during the period.

**(The meeting started at 7.10pm and concluded at 8.35pm)**