

MINUTES OF: THE CABINET

Date of Meeting: Wednesday, 9th November 2005

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

**IN ATTENDANCE: Owen Williams, Chief Executive
Carolyn Wilkins, Deputy Chief Executive
George Graham, Executive Director of Resources
Phil Seddon, Head of Financial Services
Angela Parkinson, Interim Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Helen Lockwood, Head of Customer Services and E-Government
Heather Moore, Executive Office Manager**

**ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Entwistle, Hancock, Lamb, J. Pawson,
Robertson, Sandiford, Starkey and Thorne
1 Member of the Public
2 Representatives from the Press**

1. BUSINESS MATTERS

1.1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were submitted.

1.2. MINUTES

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on the 12th October 2005 be signed by the Chair as a correct record.

1.3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members of the Cabinet were asked to consider whether they had an interest in any matters to be discussed at the meeting and the following interest was declared:-

Councillor Janet Graham declared a prejudicial interest in Minute Number 8.1 (Prudential Borrowing) by virtue that a close relative was employed by Rossendale Leisure Trust. Councillor Graham vacated the meeting during the discussion on and consideration of the item.

2. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Councillor Starkey enquired about the provision of tourist information facilities. The Chair reported that the Council was currently considering different ways of delivering the service.

3. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chair reported that he was delighted with the announcement that Council tenants in Rossendale had voted 'Yes' to transferring the ownership and management of their homes to Green Vale Homes.

He informed the Cabinet that in a postal ballot, 82.5 per cent of tenants voted in favour of transferring from the Council to Green Vale Homes and overall there was a 62.4 per cent turnout.

He thanked staff, tenants and elected members specifically Councillors Judith Driver and Alyson Barnes for their efforts to date. He pointed out that the Council would work hard to ensure a smooth transfer to Green Vale Homes on 1st April 2006.

4. IMPROVING CUSTOMER SERVICES

The Head of Customer Services and E-Government made a presentation outlining proposals to improve customer services. She outlined the background and key drivers for the Customer Services and E-Government Agenda as detailed below.

- Customer Service
- Corporate Objectives
- CPA 2005
- Efficiency Savings
- Consultation
- Best Value
- One Stop Shop/Shared Services Contact Centre
- Procurement
- High Quality Services
- Partnership Working
- Priority Outcomes

She referred to the Best Value Review of Customer Services in 2004 and the improvement planning process which outlined the activities that needed to take place in the short, medium and long term. She informed the Cabinet that the corporate identity of the Council, the One Stop Shop and improvements to Revenues and Benefits and Council Tax Services were key to delivering the Council's commitment to have 8 out of 10 customers satisfied with its services by 2008.

4.1 CORPORATE IDENTITY FOR THE COUNCIL

The Cabinet considered the report of the Head of Customer Services and E-Government which outlined progress on the development of a new corporate identity for the Council.

The Head of Customer Services and E-Government reported that consultation work undertaken as part of the Best Value Review of Customer Services in 2004 had identified that Rossendale's legacy logo was associated with a Council that had a poor reputation primarily because it had historically delivered poor customer service and weak community leadership.

She informed members that as part of the development of Rossendale's Local Strategic Partnership the new logo "Rossendale Alive" was developed during 2005. It was intended that the logo be used as a generic Rossendale wide logo that all partners could promote jointly and she gave details of the variation which had been developed for use by the Council. She highlighted that the logo would raise the profile of the Council by promoting a positive inspirational message together with a demonstration of community leadership.

She further reported that a detailed implementation plan would be developed and the logo would be applied to Council branded activities and materials on a phased basis, thus minimising the cost of adopting the new logo.

Decisions made:

1. That the "Rossendale Alive" brand and new corporate identity for the Council be approved.
2. That its phased introduction over the next five years be agreed.

Reasons for the Decisions:

The Improvement and Development Agency's (IDeA) research and the Best Value Review of Customer Services indicated that negative perceptions of the legacy logo would be a major barrier to progress. The adoption of a new brand and corporate identity would help to improve perceptions of the Council's customer services and present a more consistent image to customers. Furthermore, it would help the Council to fulfil one of its customer service promises - 'Improved recognition of Rossendale Council branding and association with professional quality services'.

Alternative options considered and rejected:

Retaining the current brand with the associated risks around continued poor perception of the Council.

4.2 CUSTOMER SERVICES STRATEGY ONE STOP SHOP UPDATE

The Cabinet considered the report of the Head of Customer Services and E-Government which outlined progress towards the development of the One Stop Shop.

The Head of Customer Services and E-Government reported on the first phase of improvements to customer services specifically the implementation of the walk in, face-to-face One Stop Shop. She pointed out that it was intended to undertake testing of IT and telephone systems from the end of November to early December thus allowing the public to use the One Stop Shop as soon as possible thereafter. The second phase would be the implementation of an embryonic telephone contact centre located within the One Stop Shop, which would go live early in 2006.

The Cabinet discussed opening times of the One Stop Shop and the Head of Customer Services reported that customer access would be from 8.45am until 5.15pm weekdays. She highlighted that a review could be undertaken thereafter and pointed out that research through other local authorities showed that people did not want late opening hours as there was a greater demand for electronic services.

The Cabinet discussed the provision of the services in the One Stop Shop together with aspirations for a Multi Agency One Stop Shop to cover partner services.

The Head of Customer Services extended an invitation to elected members for an opening event of the One Stop Shop which would be held on 14th December 2005 and the Chair recommended that members attend to support of the improvements.

Decisions Made:

That the progress towards the implementation of the One Stop Shop be noted.

Reasons for Decision:

The implementation of the One Stop Shop is a major contributing factor to achieving the District Vision of Rossendale Alive together with progress towards the Council's commitment to have 8 out of 10 customers satisfied with its services by 2008.

Alternative options considered and rejected:

None.

4.3 IMPROVING HOUSING BENEFITS AND COUNCIL TAX SERVICES

The Cabinet considered the report of the Head of Customer Services and E-Government which outlined the performance of Housing Benefits and Council Tax Services together with an update on progress towards the procurement of Housing Benefits, Council Tax and customer contact services through partnership arrangements.

The Head of Customer Services and E-Government reported on the Revenues and Benefits Operation Plan together with the Implementation Plan and Policy Statement which had been designed to set out the service's strategic, business and operational objectives and to identify performance targets and improvement activities.

The Head of Customer Services updated the Cabinet in respect of the procurement of a partnership solution for Revenues and Benefits and Customer Access, including the Shared Contact Centre. She outlined the key elements of the project delivery plan for the consideration of the Cabinet.

Decisions Made:

1. That performance of Housing Benefits and Council Tax Services be noted.
2. That the Revenues and Benefits Operational Plan, Improvement Plan and Policy Statement be approved.
3. That the work being undertaken in relation to the development of a full market test with regards to Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services be noted.

Reasons for Decisions:

A partnership solution for Revenues and Benefits Customer Access including the Shared Contact Centre will ensure long term improvements can be sustained. The Revenues and Benefits Operational and Improvement Plan operational are significant tools which will enable the Council to monitor compliance with central government performance standards.

Alternative options considered and rejected:

To not pursue the market testing exercise with the associated risks around the capacity to sustain improvements to service delivery performance.

5. STRATEGIC ITEMS

5.1 MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Cabinet considered the report of the Interim Head of Legal and Democratic Services which outlined the Member Development Strategy for 2005/2006.

The Interim Head of Legal and Democratic Services reported on the success of the Personal Development Plans which all members were invited to complete in order to facilitate and inform the Member Development Strategy. She pointed out that the Plans had been undertaken by staff within Democratic Services in partnership with the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA). She reported that the Plans assessed each Councillor's achievements to date, plans for the future, training undertaken, appointments held, key skills sets, future development needs and preferred learning styles.

The Interim Head of Legal and Democratic Services outlined the key objectives of the Strategy as detailed below:

- To provide a comprehensive Member Development Strategy and Development Programme which balances group and individual needs with Council priorities;
- To ensure that all newly elected Members are properly inducted into the Council and their role;
- To ensure that all Members are connected to the Council's IT system;
- To undertake annual personal development plans for Members based upon individual need and preferred learning style to assist them in their development;
- To improve the external recognition of Rossendale Borough Council as a lead authority for Member development.

The Cabinet considered the Strategy and associated Action Plan together with the terms of reference of the Member Development Working Group.

Decisions Made:

1. That the reasons for the production of the Member Development Strategy be noted.
2. That the revised terms of reference of the Member Development Working Group be approved.
3. That it be recommended to the Council that the Member Development Strategy for 2005/06 and associated Member Development Action Plan 2005/06 be approved.

Reasons for Decisions:

The Member Development Strategy will provide clear guidance and direction for the development and support of elected members over the forthcoming year. It will provide Members with the necessary skills and knowledge to deliver the Council's corporate improvement priorities for the benefit of local constituents.

Alternative options considered and rejected:

To not approve the Strategy which would leave the Council without a strategic framework within which to drive forward one of its 8 priorities for improvement.

6. POLICY MATTERS

6.1 LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME – CORE ISSUES AND OPTIONS REPORT

The Cabinet considered the report of the Forward Planning Officer which outlined the Issues and Options Report stage of the development of the Core Strategy.

The Deputy Chief Executive reported that the Issues and Options Report was the initial stage of the Core Strategy's preparation.

She informed the meeting that the Issues and Options report detailed the preliminary ideas for the Rossendale Core Strategy and it outlined the key issues from a range of background documents together with options on how those issues could be addressed in terms of planning policy.

She further reported that subject to Cabinet approval, consultation would commence to develop the preferred options for the Core Strategy. She pointed out that although the Council had some flexibility in the planning policies that could be included in the Core Strategy, it was still required to be in conformity with national, regional and county planning documents and to have regard to the Rossendale Community Strategy.

Decisions Made:

That the Issues and Options Report be endorsed and published for consultation.

Reasons for Decisions:

The consultation will help to inform and facilitate the preferred options for the Core Strategy.

Alternative options considered and rejected:

None.

6.2 COMMISSIONING A PATIENT LED NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE – PLANS TO RESTRUCTURE PRIMARY CARE TRUSTS (PCTs)

The Cabinet considered the report of the Head of Community and Partnerships which outlined the Strategic Health Authorities' proposals to reorganise primary care structures within Lancashire together with a recommendation to respond to the consultation.

Councillor Farquharson reported that the Strategic Health Authority (SHA) had recently issued a pre-consultation on proposals for revised primary care structures within Lancashire. The suggested way forward was to move from the current arrangement of eight PCTs in Lancashire to a single PCT covering the whole of the

Lancashire County Council area. This would serve a population of over 1.1million, making it one of the largest PCTs in the UK.

She informed the Cabinet that an alternative structure had been proposed by the PCT and a number of other local authorities, namely three PCTs covering the areas as detailed below:

PCT 1 (EAST)

Burnley
Pendle
Hyndburn
Ribble Valley
Rossendale

PCT 2 (CENTRAL)

Preston
Chorley
South Ribble
West Lancashire

PCT (NORTH)

Lancaster
Fylde
Wyre

The Cabinet considered the proposals detailed in the report.

Decisions Made:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the Strategic Health Authority be advised that the Council's preferred option for Primary Care Trust (PCT) structures across Lancashire is for three PCTs (East, Central and North).

Reasons for Decisions:

The option for three PCTs (East, Central and North) will ensure efficiency gains together with the delivery of high quality and safe services, improving health and focus on inequalities, improving engagement with LSPs and GPs, increased capacity and skills to deliver high quality public health services, improving co-ordination with Social Services and District Councils and to support the delivery of the Local Area Agreement.

Alternative options considered and rejected:

The Cabinet considered and rejected the option for one single PCT covering the whole of the Lancashire County Council area which would serve a population of over 1.1million as this may not be able to work as closely with the Council to deliver localised and joined up services.

7. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

7.1 FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT

The Cabinet considered the report of the Head of Financial Services which outlined General Fund estimates for 2005/06 and progress on capital spend and disposals together with the Housing Revenue Account.

Councillor Ormerod reported that in respect of Asset Disposals and Capital Receipts, in the 6 month period to 30th September there had been £102k of capital receipts in relation to general fund assets. Rights to Buy (RTB) had generated a retained value of £671k.

He further reported that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister had recently published draft amending reports for the 2004/05 and 2005/06 Revenue Support Grant Settlements. The reports dealt with correcting the effects on grant entitlement of inaccurate population data derived from the 2001 census. The overall effect of the two reports on Rossendale was a loss of grant of up to £10,000 which could be recovered through reducing payments in 2006/07.

The Cabinet considered in detail the additional capital items which had emerged and required approval.

Decisions Made:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the Council be recommended to increase the 2005/06 capital programme by £227,000 as detailed below.

£20k for the shared contribution to restoration and repairs to East Lancashire Railway Clock Tower

£27k to repair to drains and sewers at Lea Brook estate

£180k to fund additional resources required following the full costing exercise for Whitworth Civic Hall.

3. That £10,000 from the current year under spend be earmarked to mitigate the effects of the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) amending reports.

Reasons for Decisions:

By increasing the capital programme this will ensure delivery of the additional items which have emerged. In respect of the Revenue Support Grant by earmarking £10k of the General Fund revenue underspend forecast to offset the loss of grant the Council's underlying budget position going forward will be protected.

Alternative options considered and rejected:

None.

N.B. Councillor Janet Graham vacated the meeting during the discussion on and consideration of the following item of business.

8. MAJOR STRATEGIC MATTERS

8.1 PRUDENTIAL BORROWING

The Chair welcomed Gary Hood, Executive Director of Rossendale Leisure Trust and Norman Hauserman, Chair of Rossendale Leisure Trust.

The Cabinet considered the report of the Head of Financial Services which outlined proposals to borrow under the Prudential Code in order to support the Rossendale Leisure Trust (RLT) in its plans to extend and redevelop Haslingden Sports Centre to create a lifestyle centre.

The Head of Financial Services reported that the Trust in association with Matrix Consultants Limited (MCL) had developed a business case which involved the expansion and redevelopment of a new fitness and leisure suite at Haslingden Sports Centre at an estimated capital cost of £1.2m. The basis of the scheme was to generate additional income for the Trust which could then be invested into the other leisure facilities throughout the borough. The business case developed by the Trust and MCL suggested that based on a leasing arrangement the facility would become profitable after an initial period of six months losses. Cumulative loss in the first year being £10k, with cumulative profits of £188k at the end of 5 years.

He reported that the preferred developer to manage the delivery of the facility was Alliance Leisure Services Limited. The initial financing of the project was for a leasing arrangement with the Council acting as guarantor. However, it would be more economical for the Council to use its own borrowing powers under the Prudential Code as the Council had access to less expensive financing arrangements to the commercial market, through the Public Works Loan Board (PWLb).

Councillor Gladys Sandiford, Chair of the Policy Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee reported on concerns which members of the Committee had expressed in respect of the business case and therefore the Committee was unable to make recommendations to Cabinet.

Members of the Cabinet considered the risks associated with the proposal including market demand, operational projections and security of borrowing.

The Executive Director of Rossendale Leisure Trust reported that a feasibility study had been commissioned which identified a gap in the market and the proposal was key to the Trust's financial strategy.

Decision made:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the matter be referred to the Policy Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee for further detailed examination of the business case, thereafter the Committee be requested to submit detailed recommendations to the Cabinet for consideration.

Reasons for the Decisions:

The Cabinet required further detailed consideration of the business case prior to making a recommendation to the Council.

Alternative options considered and rejected:

To agree to undertake prudential borrowing based upon the information presented, which the Cabinet considered to leave the Council too exposed to financial risk.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 9.00pm)