

COUNCILLOR JEFFREY CHEETHAM MAYOR

MINUTES OF: THE COUNCIL OF THE BOROUGH OF ROSSENDALE

Date of Meeting: 16th November 2005

PRESENT: The Mayor Councillor J Cheetham (in the Chair)
Councillors Alcroft, Challinor, Crosta, Disley, Driver,
Eaton, Entwistle, Farquharson, Forshaw, Graham,
Hancock, Huntbach, Lamb, McShea, Neal, Nicholass,
Ormerod, J Pawson, S Pawson, Robertson, Ruddick,
Starkey, H Steen, P Steen, Swain, Thorne, Unsworth
and Young.

IN ATTENDANCE: Owen Williams, Chief Executive
Carolyn Wilkins, Deputy Chief Executive
George Graham, Executive Director of Resources
Lynne Hurrell, Director of Housing Management
Services
Julian Joinson, Democratic Service Manager
Heather Moore, Executive Office Manager
Wendy Oliver, the Mayor's Chaplain

APOLOGIES: Councillors Atkinson, A Barnes, D Barnes, L Barnes,
Marriott and Pilling.

BUSINESS MATTERS

1. MINUTES

Resolved:-

That, subject to the inclusion of the following wording in relation to a question about the programme of Member Development, the minutes of the Council meeting held on 19th October 2005 be signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

Before: "The net cost to the Council..." at paragraph 3 of page 6, insert: "The total cost of the I&DeA Member Development Programme was £38,000."

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Mayor and Councillors Graham and Robertson declared a prejudicial interest in respect of Agenda Item F1 (Prudential Borrowing) in the light of their appointments to the Leisure Trust Board.

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

The Mayor reported that there had been two bereavements in the last few weeks of former Mayors of the Borough, Donald Valentine and Paddy Navin. The Mayor had written to the respective families to express the condolences of the Council.

The Leader reported that he had attended a meeting last Friday with Steve Brookhead, the Chief Executive of NWDA, concerning the Housing Stock Transfer and the Masterplan. Mr Brookhead had been very impressed with the achievements to date and was looking forward to working with the Council on the delivery of its priorities.

The Leader also reported that the result of the vote on the transfer of housing stock had recently been announced. A turnout of 62.6% had been achieved, 82.5% of whom had voted in favour of the transfer. Accordingly, the housing stock would be transferred. The result was a clear endorsement of the Council's vision for the future and would lead to around £40M of investment over 5 years which would bring the premises up to a high standard. The transfer should be completed by 1st April 2006. Members acknowledged the hard work undertaken by the Director of Housing Management Services and her Team.

There were no communications from the Chief Executive.

4. MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME

Councillor Neal asked the following question:-

When downloading information from our laptops to our printers by default settings the current system only allows for reading this information, but does not permit members to print this or any information. Can the Leader look into providing a facility for information to be printed more easily?

The Leader replied that the Temporary Contract Manager (Vivista), Stewart Yohn, had given an undertaking to discuss the matter personally with Councillor Neal and invited Councillor Neal to contact him directly at his earliest convenience.

Councillor Neal asked the following question.

The Remembrance Sunday Service Sheets used at Bacup on 13th November 2005 were unsophisticated. In contrast, Whitworth Town Council had provided professionally printed cards for the Service in Whitworth. An example of the card was provided to the Leader. Can the Leader indicate whether the Council will consider producing 5,000 copies for all local remembrance services in order to assist the British Legion?

The Leader replied that there were four other official services in Rossendale

on Remembrance Sunday, but that they were not formal Council functions. The Mayor was an invited guest at a programme of services organised by the British Legion. The events were organised by the volunteers and, accordingly, it would not be appropriate for a standard Service Sheet to be provided by the Council. However, the Council commends the British Legion for their hard work.

On a related point, the Rolls of Honour previously sited at Haslingden Public Hall would be relocated to Haslingden Library. An unveiling ceremony was due to be held on Friday, 25th November 2005.

Councillor Neal asked the following question:-

The use of Futures Park for formal Committee meetings has led to a number of problems, including the adjournment of a recent meeting of the Development Control Committee before all the applications had been heard and the lack of refreshments for some meetings. Given that the Council has transacted a lot of business with Futures Park, can the Leader explain what is being done to remedy this situation?

The Leader accepted that there had been some teething problems regarding the use of accommodation at Futures Park, but considered that the relationship between the Council and its new landlord was in its infancy. The Council currently used a number of external venues for its Committee meetings, to allow work to progress on the proposals for the redevelopment of Rawtenstall Town Centre. Meetings of the Development Control Committee were usually held at Bacup Leisure Hall. However, that venue had been unavailable on 10th November 2005 and Futures Park had been booked as an alternative venue. On that date the meeting there had to be adjourned due to the closure of the accommodation at 9.00pm, causing two agenda items to be deferred to a later date.

An apology had been offered to the applicants concerned and those parties who attended the meeting. They had now been informed that a special meeting would be convened on 22nd November 2005 at Haslingden Library in order to consider the outstanding applications.

The Council had written to Kingfisher, which operated the facilities, asking them to investigate the circumstances of the closure. In addition, a meeting was being arranged between George Graham (Executive Director of Resources) and a representative of Kingfisher to discuss accommodation issues in general. It was anticipated that the future arrangements for meetings at Futures Park would be made easier once Council staff began to relocate there.

The lack of refreshments on two occasions had now been brought to the attention of management.

Councillor Neal asked the following question:-

Does the Leader accept that when the new Council Chamber is built within Whitworth Civic Centre, Whitworth Town Council will be solely responsible for furnishing the Council Chamber and may wish to relocate the previous furniture and past Councillor boards.

The Leader indicated that refurbishment of the Council Chamber would be included in the overall cost of the project. Rossendale Borough Council was working with CLAW (Community Leisure Association of Whitworth) in agreeing final building design and the furnishing of the new Whitworth Civic Hall. Councillor Neal expressed the view that the Town Council was a partner in the project and its officers and Members should be included in any discussions.

Councillor Young asked the following question:-

Further to my previous question on this matter, can the Leader advise why when NEAT Teams have been appointed, fly posters (many of which are ripped) show no signs of being removed? When will they be removed and what are the Leader and officers doing about it?

The Leader reminded Cllr Young that he should bring any specific sites of posters to the attention of the Head of Street Scene and Liveability. However, he also undertook to make enquiries on this matter and to respond to Cllr Young.

Councillor Young asked the following question:-

I understand that around 900 residents of Helmshore have expressed concern that Lancashire County Council have sought to fence off Helmshore Community Primary School without consultation with the residents. Can the leader use his influence to ensure that this situation does not occur again?

The Leader responded that any fence would be the subject of a planning application. It would be a matter for the Development Control Committee to determine whether, or not, to grant planning permission.

Councillor Forshaw asked the following question:-

Since a number of teething problems with venues for Council meetings were being experienced, including poor attendance by the public and inadequate heating, could the Leader arrange for meetings to be held in the old Council Chamber at the Town Hall until a more viable plan has been developed.

The Leader responded that all of the options had been carefully considered. However, staff would commence the transfer to Futures Park within the next few weeks. It would be uneconomical to keep open the Town Hall just for meetings in the old Council Chamber. He reminded Members that they had approved the Accommodation Strategy some months ago and that some small inconveniences would need to be tolerated in the short term to enable long term benefits soon to be realised.

Councillor Forshaw asked whether officers frequently failed to turn up at meetings because they were unclear about the venue, or had not been properly informed.

The Leader replied that he was not aware of any such problems, but that to err on occasion was only human. Councillor Sandiford explained that the unexpected absence of one officer at a recent Overview and Scrutiny Committee was due to the sudden illness of a family member.

Councillor Swain asked about the background to recent correspondence between the Leader and the Leader of the County Council.

The Leader indicated that the correspondence from Lancashire County Council was about their decision to cease to service meetings of the Lancashire Chief Executives and Leaders Group. District Leaders and Chief Executives had become increasingly concerned about a perceived unilateral approach taken by the County Council to certain issues, including the termination of the Highways Partnership and the extension of the Lancashire Locals. The situation had been brought to a head at a recent meeting of the Lancashire Chief Executives and Leaders.

The Leader had written to the County Council in a positive fashion, to seek agreement to monthly meetings being held in order to maintain a dialogue between Rossendale and the County Council.

Councillor Hancock expressed his concern at the letter received from the County Council and stressed the importance of a good working relationship with Lancashire colleagues. Relations with Rossendale had been good over recent years and the decision about the Highways Partnership in Rossendale had been initiated by this Council. The Council also needed to continue to work with Lancashire on the bus station issue and our recovery programme. He asked the Leader if a dialogue could be maintained.

The Leader agreed that it was important to talk and that, accordingly, he had sought more frequent meetings with representatives of the County Council.

Councillor Steen asked whether the Leader could ensure that a dictatorial approach or intransigence did not carry over into the Lancashire Local in Rossendale.

The Leader indicated that the Agenda of the Lancashire Local was not directly under his control. He added that Rossendale had successfully participated in the pilot scheme. However, it was acknowledged that some of the other Lancashire Boroughs had found the pilot or the proposed extension of the Lancashire Locals difficult.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Mr C Balchin asked the following question:-

Mr Mayor, I would like to ask the following question of the Leader of the Council. I would ask that my question and the Leader's response are recorded in the minutes of this meeting, as they may be referred to by others in the near future.

Do you agree that one of the principal duties of Council officers is to implement and act upon in a timely manner the democratically arrived at decisions and resolutions of their employer, the Council? Or do you think that actioning such decisions should be considered an "optional extra" entirely at the whim or discretion of officers depending, for example, upon whether or not they agree with the Council's decision?

I would appreciate, if possible, in addition to the minute record, a written response to my enquires.

The Leader responded that he did agree with the first part of the question that one of the principal duties of Council officers was to implement and act upon Council decisions in a timely manner.

CONSTITUTIONAL MATTERS

6. ELECTION OF COUNCILLORS

Members were informed that Councillor Ruth Alcroft had been elected Councillor on 20th October 2005 in respect of the Hareholme Ward and that she had made the necessary Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

The Mayor welcomed Councillor Alcroft to her first meeting of the Council. The Leader and Leader of the Opposition also extended their best wishes.

Resolved:

To note the election of Councillor Alcroft as a Member for the Hareholme Ward and that she has made the Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

Cabinet – 9th November 2005

NOTE:- The Mayor and Councillors Graham and Robertson left the meeting during consideration of the following item of business. The Deputy Mayor, Councillor P Steen, took the Chair for the duration of this item.

7. PRUDENTIAL BORROWING

Members had received a copy of a report of the Head of Financial Services outlining proposals to borrow under the Prudential Code in order to support the Rossendale Leisure Trust in its Plan to extend and redevelop Haslingden Sports Centre to create a Lifestyle Centre.

The Deputy Mayor informed the Members that the Cabinet on 9th November 2005 had determined not to make a recommendation to Council at this time and asked whether Members wished to withdraw the item from the Agenda. Members were informed that the Cabinet had decided to refer the matter to the Policy Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee for further detailed examination of the business case and to request that Committee to submit detailed recommendations to the Cabinet for consideration. The Cabinet would then make any necessary recommendation to the Council.

Councillor Hancock, indicated that in the light of the above decision the matter should be discussed at Council tonight. The Leader concurred that a full discussion might be useful. Accordingly, Members agreed to allow further debate.

Councillor Ormerod commented that a full and frank discussion had taken place on the report at Cabinet, but that more information on the business case had been requested.

The Leader, Councillors Hancock, Sandiford and Young spoke in connection with this matter. The debate focussed on the need to balance an understanding of the nature of the Council's relationship with the Leisure Trust and support for its services, against the potential risks involved in providing financial support for the proposals through the Council's borrowing powers. It was considered that before exposing the Council to significant financial risk it was necessary to be certain about the business case for the proposals. Members also heard that future improvements were anticipated in respect of Marl Pits and the Ski Slope and that similar questions were likely to arise at that time.

Resolved:

To note the comments made by Council and feed these into the review to be held through Policy Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

8. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Councillor Graham presented a report of the Acting Head of Legal and Democratic Services recommending the adoption of a Member Development Strategy. The report had been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 8th August and the Cabinet on 9th November 2005.

Councillor Graham highlighted the background to the development of the Strategy, which was based upon weaknesses identified in the Audit Commission's Corporate Governance report of 2002 and the Comprehensive Performance Assessment of 2003. In 2005 the Council had adopted Member Development as its second corporate priority and had agreed to a package of support from the I&DeA. A Member Development Working Group had been established to oversee production and implementation of the Strategy and a programme of Personal Development Planning for Members had been

undertaken in July/August 2005. Councillor Graham thanked Democratic Services Officers for their hard work in producing the Strategy.

Councillor Neal raised a question in connection with the need to ensure that Members serving on regulatory committees had received the appropriate training and the possibility of utilising cross party substitutes. The Leader undertook to look into this matter and ensure that a reply was sent to Councillor Neal. Councillor Lamb expressed a preference for any training provided to commence after 6.00pm and it was suggested that the matter of the timing of training provision be referred to the Member Development Working Group. Councillor Swain requested that IT drop-in sessions referred to at paragraph 43 of the I&DeA report be set up as soon as possible. He also highlighted the statement at paragraph 61 which recognised that elected Members lead busy lives.

Resolved:

1. To note the reasons for the production of a Member Development Strategy;
2. To approve the revised terms of reference of the Member Development Working Group; and
3. To adopt the Member Development Strategy for 2005/06 and associated Member Development Action Plan 2005/06.

9. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT – FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT 2005/06

Councillor Ormerod presented a report of the Head of Financial Services on the General Fund Estimates for 2005/06 and progress on capital spending and disposals, together with the Housing Revenue Account. The report had been considered by the Cabinet on 9th November 2005, who had noted the report and agreed that £10,000 from the current year under spend be earmarked to mitigate the effects of the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) amending reports. The Cabinet had also made one recommendation to the Council.

Councillor Ormerod highlighted the key elements of the report and outlined the Cabinet's recommendation to Council concerning increases to the Capital Programme 2005/06. Members discussed the reasons for the RSG amending reports and the need to begin construction of Whitworth Civic Hall as soon as possible.

Resolved:

1. To note the Financial Monitoring report; and
2. To increase the 2005/06 Capital Programme by £227,000 as detailed below:-

- £20,000 for the shared contribution to restoration and repairs to East Lancashire Railway Clock Tower
- £27,000 to repair drains and sewers at Lea Bank estate
- £180,000 to fund additional resources required following full costing exercise for Whitworth Civic Hall.

(The meeting started at 7.00pm and concluded at 8.30pm)