

**MINUTES OF: THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE CABINET**

**Date of Meeting: Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> January 2011**

**Present: Councillor Swain (in the Chair)  
Councillors Challinor, Essex, Gledhill Smith and P. Steen**

**In Attendance: Mrs H Lockwood, Chief Executive  
Mr S Sugarman, Director of Business  
Ms F Meechan, Director of Customers and Communities  
Mr P Seddon, Head of Finance  
Mrs L Sandiford, Head of People and Policy  
Mr M Riley, Communities Manager  
Mr J Foster, Operations Manager  
Mrs J Cook, Committee Officer**

**Also Present: Councillors Aldred, A Barnes, Cheetham, Crawforth, Driver,  
Eaton, Evans, Farrington, Kenyon, Morris, Nuttall, Oakes, J  
Pilling, Robertson, Sandiford, Serridge, Stansfield, Thorne  
and Unsworth  
County Councillor Winder and Whitworth Town Councillor  
Chorlton**

**43 members of the public and 2 members of the Press**

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**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

No apologies were received; all Cabinet Members were present.

**2. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS**

The Leader of the Council reported that there were no urgent items of business.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME INCLUDING STATE OF THE BOROUGH DEBATE**

The Chair noted that the usual procedure for public speaking would be suspended for the evening and members of the public would be permitted to speak on each Appendix to the Report as it was taken.

The Chair invited questions on items not on the agenda; there were no questions.

## **5. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE 2011-2015**

5.1 The Leader of the Council outlined the reasons for the Special Cabinet Meeting. It was noted that the Council was required to present a balanced budget in February 2011 and savings of £2.4m had to be made over the next 2 years. It was noted that the Council was committed to protecting frontline services, however it was noted that the Council faced a significant financial challenge and difficult decisions would have to be made.

5.2 The Leader of the Council gave thanks to the Chief Executive and her Team for the work carried out in identifying potential savings and identifying smarter working practices to provide further savings.

### **5.3 Rossendale Markets**

5.3.1 The Leader of the Council noted that in the light of new information being received, the decision on the future of Rossendale Markets would be deferred to the meeting of the Cabinet on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2011.

### **5.4 Rossendale Ski Slope**

5.4.1 The Portfolio Holder for Leisure introduced the report and outlined the work undertaken to date to attempt to secure the future of the Ski Slope. Following the commencement of the Leisure Review in March 2009, an exercise was undertaken to explore the potential for private sector interest and 6 expressions of interest had been received. Following this, the Council invited tenders and received 2 submissions. These bids were assessed via a formal interview process in July 2010 and the panel were unable to select a preferred bidder, as none of the submissions offered a sustainable and suitable solution.

5.4.2 Options had been fully explored, ranging from the continuation of current services, reduction in services, focussing on other activities, however, none of the options explored were considered financially sustainable. Visitors to the facility were falling, with 108,000 visitors in 2006/7 to just under 43,000 in 2009/10. Additional financial support of around £100k per annum was required to keep the facility running and further capital investment, estimated at £1m was required to improve the facility.

5.4.3 The financial implications of closing the slope were noted.

5.4.4 It was noted that the Council would work with any company or social enterprise to generate a sustainable and suitable solution to enable the Ski Slope to remain open.

5.4.5 Members of the public were invited to ask questions and/or make comments on the report:-

Mr David Fuller had submitted 3 questions in respect of social enterprise, approaches from outside companies and lease conditions. Mr Fuller was not present at the meeting. Councillor Gledhill read out and answered Mr Fuller's Questions.

Additional questions and comments were as follows:-

- Requirement of 12 weeks notice of public consultation and clarification was given.
- Discussion regarding an apparent offer from Pro-Slope and the Chief Executive clarified that no tender had been submitted by this company.
- Resources required to make the facility viable - the Leader of the Council confirmed that this information was available in the KKP report carried out in March 2009 which was available on request or on the Council's website.
- Comments were made regarding the investment in the new swimming pool in Haslingden.
- Concerns were raised regarding the usefulness of the Ski Slope to the community and the use by children was highlighted.
- Clarification was sought and made regarding the financial information detailed in the report and the lease conditions of the site.
- It was confirmed that the Ski Slope received relief from Business Rates.
- The deadline for a decision was discussed and it was noted that the Council would continue to work with interested parties to secure a solution for the Ski Slope.

Members were invited to comment on the report and the following comments were made:-

- Concerns were expressed regarding the closure of an iconic facility in the Valley.
- It was noted that the Community Groups had been made aware of the issues facing the Ski Slope some time ago.
- It was confirmed that consultation with interested groups would continue.

#### **5.4.6 Resolved**

That Ski Rossendale should close at the end of the 2010/11 winter season and a further options review is undertaken in relation to the site.

### **5.5 Grant Funding**

5.5.1 The Leader of the Council outlined the report which, in the light of the Comprehensive Spending Review Settlement, recommended a new approach to the way in which grant funding was distributed by the Council. It was noted that the Council recognized the invaluable contribution that the voluntary and community sector makes to society in Rossendale. The current way in which grants were distributed was outlined and the current community grant allocation was confirmed as £254,200 for 2010/11.

5.5.2 In 2005 a 'Grants to Outside Bodies' policy was introduced which provided organisations with the option of applying for a one-off grant for the year or a three-year grant. The current three-year funding period comes to an end in 2011/12.

5.5.3 The way forward for the distribution of grants was outlined and it was noted that the role of the Council's Neighbourhood Forums and the Rossendale Forum would be essential in the distribution of grants.

5.5.4 Members of the public were invited to ask questions and/or make comments on the report:-

- The Chair of Bacup Consortium raised concerns regarding the timescale for decisions regarding the distribution of remaining grant funding. The Leader of the Council assured the meeting that Officers would make every endeavour to bring forward these timescales if at all possible.
- Concerns were raised regarding the communication of the proposed new grants process to affected groups and assurances were given regarding the openness and transparency of the grants application process.

5.5.5 Members were invited to comment on the report and the following comments were made:-

- Concerns regarding the level of cuts that the voluntary sector faced and the responsibilities of the Neighbourhood Forums and the Rossendale Forum.
- Assurances were sought that the application process would be brought forward if possible.
- Concerns were raised regarding the communication of this information to affected groups.
- The important work of the voluntary sector within Rossendale was noted.

#### 5.5.6 **Resolved**

1. The Communities Manager be requested to develop robust, open and transparent criteria including guidance for applicants, application form, scoring matrix and evaluation panel for the awarding and distribution of grant funding, which will also include applications for discretionary rate relief.
2. The Overview and Scrutiny Policy meeting on 8th March 2011 be tasked with overseeing the development of the actions outlined at point 1 and bring a report back to Cabinet on 17th March 2011.
3. That organisations and groups in receipt of grant through this transition period are supported. That funding is provided at the same level for 2011 – 2012 - Q1 as outlined in the table below.

Group / Society	Amount Agreed for 2011 – 2012 Q1
Three Year Grant	
Groundwork Pennine Lancashire – Heritage Walks	£687.50
Citizen’s Advice Bureau	£18,750
Haslingden and Helmshore Credit Union	£1,206.25
Bacup Credit Union	£1,625
Mid Rossendale Credit Union	£687.50
People Encouraging Enterprise in Rossendale (PEER)	£3,750
One-off– One Year Grant	
Bacup Family Centre	£3,125
The STAR Centre	£1,250
The Magdalene Project	£1,250
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£32,331.25</b>

4. Council be recommended that when setting the Council’s annual budget for 2011 – 2012, a ‘Localised Grant Budget’ of £125,900k per annum is ring-fenced, to be allocated under the new funding arrangements outlined in recommendation 1. In addition to the above, £70k would be devolved to neighbourhood forums and to recommend the same level of funding be secured for the years 2012/13 and 2013/14. The total allocation for 2011/12 will therefore be £195,900.
5. Organisations be invited to make a fresh application under the new arrangements to be considered in late May 2011 with the commencement of any funding to start in Q2 of 2011 -2012 (1st July 2011).

## **5.6 Alternative Arrangements for the Care of Animals**

- 5.6.1 The Leader of the Council introduced the report and it was noted that there were currently 96 animals and birds based at Stubbylee and Whitaker Parks, which were costing the Council £18,543.84 per annum. This cost was made up of staff costs for weekend care, food and bedding, veterinary fees and maintenance of enclosures. The facilities had been assessed by the RSPCA who had noted that the existing animal welfare conditions met minimal standards, however improvements were required to bring the animals’ enclosures up to an acceptable standard. The animals

feed was attracting vermin and the baby animals were at risk of attack by wild species. It was proposed that the animals be re-homed.

5.6.2 There were no comments or questions from members of the public on this item.

5.6.3 Members were invited to comment on the report and the following comments were made:-

- It was noted that the proposals were sad but necessary.
- The availability of farms and petting zoos in the area was noted.
- Concerns were raised regarding animal welfare and it was noted that the RSPCA considered the provisions acceptable and animals had received veterinary care when required.

#### **5.6.4 Resolved:**

That the animals be appropriately re-homed and taken out of the Council's responsibility and the target to re-home most, if not all, of the animals be set to the end of March 2011.

### **5.7 Review of the Farm Collections**

5.7.1 The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services introduced the report and outlined the current arrangements for farm properties. Currently 668 farm properties receive a weekly doorstep residual waste collection and only received a limited recycling service. Collections were currently undertaken by two specialist vehicles which had significantly less capacity than a standard refuse vehicle. The cost benefits of reviewing the farm collections were highlighted and it was noted that if farm properties started to recycle, then this would mean that 100% of Rossendale's residents would be able to recycle. The potential cost savings over 3 years were highlighted as £75,810 in 2011/12, £75,810 in 2012/13 and £87,000 in 2013/14.

5.7.2 Members of the public were invited to make comments on the report and the following comment was made:-

- It was confirmed that farms paid Council Tax.

5.7.3 Members were invited to make comments on the report and the following comments were made:-

- The benefits of allowing farm properties to recycle and the associated reduction in landfill costs.
- Consultation would play a key role in implementing this new facility for farm properties.

#### **5.7.4 Resolved**

That an 'end of lane' or roadside collection method be adopted for the affected properties.

## **5.8 Reduced Grass Cutting**

- 5.8.1 The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services introduced the report and outlined the current rota of grass cuts for the area. The frequency of these cuts was a guideline and could be varied in appropriate circumstances. It was noted that if the frequency of cuts was reduced by 2-3 cuts per annum, then this could generate a saving of £39,600 in year one and £45,600 in year two.
- 5.8.2 It was noted that there were no plans to reduce the frequency of cuts for cemeteries and memorial gardens.
- 5.8.3 It was noted that the Council was currently working with Lancashire County Council with regard to delivering a joined-up grass cutting service as part of the Public Realm Project.
- 5.8.4 Members of the public were invited to make comments on the report and the following comments were made:-
- Confirmation that the wildflower meadows would continue.
  - Comments were made regarding the difficulty of some of the decisions required to be made by the Council to achieve a balanced budget.
- 5.8.5 Members were invited to make comments on the report and the following comments were made:-
- It was suggested that the grass be left longer and it was noted that the Neighbourhood Forums were important in developing this approach and all Members had a role to play.
  - Suggestions were raised to use stone within the valley to cobble over roundabouts and the increased usage of shrubs.

### **5.8.6 Resolved:**

That the average number of grass cuts across the Borough be reduced by 2-3 per annum, generating a saving of £39,600 in year one and £45,600 in year two.

## **5.9 Changes to the Capita Contract**

- 5.9.1 The Portfolio Holder for Customer Services introduced the report and outlined the proposed changes to the Capita Contract.
- 5.9.2 It was proposed that the duties of the Visiting Officer be carried out by Fraud Inspectors, who were skilled benefits assessors, which would provide a cost saving of £20,634 per annum if implemented by April 2011. More use would also be made of STAN and the expertise of its staff.

- 5.9.3 Slight modifications of existing working practices within the One Stop Shop would achieve a saving of over £11,000, for example updating of the switchboard to include voice recognition technology.
- 5.9.4 It was proposed to increase court charges to £95 which covers costs incurred from the council tax and business rates recovery process. This increase compared favourably with other Lancashire Authorities.
- 5.9.5 Changes to the Coventry Call Centre were outlined and it was proposed that the service level be reduced from 90% to 80% to answer calls within 20 seconds. This still represented a good industry standard and would generate a saving of £20,000 per annum if implemented from April 2011.
- 5.9.6 Members of the public were invited to make comments on the report and the following comments were made:-
- The number of fines recovered by the Council was queried and the Portfolio Holder agreed to respond directly to the member of public on this matter.
  - The closure of Rossendale Magistrates Court was noted.
- 5.9.7 Members were invited to make comments on the report and the following comments were made:-
- The effectiveness and good work of STAN, and it was confirmed that consultation would be taking place on the locations that STAN could visit in April, May and June. Members were encouraged to submit suitable locations.
  - It was noted that information on STAN's work had been included in the Members Bulletin and an additional Member's Briefing Note circulated in January 2011.
  - Concerns were raised regarding sending Fraud Investigators to assess benefits in vulnerable households and it was noted that this would be done sensitively.
  - Concerns were raised regarding court appearances and it was noted that it was advisable for someone who had been summonsed to Court for non-payment of council tax and/or business rates to appear in Court.
  - It was noted that STAN would be involved in Bacup Carnival and it was intended to send STAN to high profile events in the Borough.

#### **5.9.8 Resolved:**

That the changes identified within the report be approved.

#### **5.10 Reduction in Repairs and Maintenance Budgets**

- 5.10.1 The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources introduced the report which outlined the current buildings repairs and maintenance budget. It was proposed that this is reduced by 7.5% in 2011/12 and 15% thereafter. The rationale for this proposal included the disposal of Bacup Leisure Hall and proposals involving the future use of

the Ski Slope, improvements to leisure facilities and capital improvements of various buildings, such as the Henrietta Street Depot.

5.10.2 Members of the public were invited to make comments on the report and the following comments were made:-

- The date of the next Rating Valuation was queried and it was noted that this was set by central government and no information was available.

### **5.10.3 Resolved**

That the overall repairs and maintenance budget be reduced by 7.5% for 2011/12 resulting in a budget saving of £15.2k in 2011/12, which would rise to £30.2k per annum thereafter.

## **5.11 Reduction in the Training Budget**

5.11.1 The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources introduced the report and noted the importance of raising staff morale by providing effective training, in view of the current financial climate. It was noted that training was essential to ensure staff were able to carry out existing and new duties safely and efficiently. It was noted that the Member Training budget was provided out of this budget. The Council was identifying more effective ways of working such as partnership training with other Councils, internal training and accessing external funding. It was proposed to reduce the overall training budget from £72,220 to £58,000.

5.11.2 Members of the public were invited to comment on the report and the following comment was made:-

- It was confirmed that the Council explored all avenues of funding for training.

### **5.11.3 Resolved:**

That the training budget is reduced from £72,220 to £58,000.

## **5.12 Weekend Supervision of Sports Facilities**

5.12.1 The Portfolio Holder for Leisure introduced the report which noted that the Council currently provided staff who would open and close some weekend leisure facilities such as Marl Pits Sports Centre and the Maden Recreation Ground. This was currently costing £9,000 per annum. It was noted that whilst staff did control access to changing rooms, Parks Staff were not formal supervisors for young people and weren't CRB checked or trained accordingly.

5.12.2 It was proposed that existing Rossendale Leisure Trust staff be utilised with regards to the Marl Pits site and that clubs using the Maden Recreation Ground be consulted to open and close the facilities whilst using them. Clubs would be expected to leave the facilities in the condition in which they found them.

- 5.12.3 It was noted that parks staff would continue to clean and maintain the facilities throughout the course of the working week.
- 5.12.4 Members of the public were invited to comment on the report, however no comments were made.
- 5.12.5 Members were invited to comment on the report and the following comments were made:-
- Concerns were raised regarding whether clubs would look after the facilities. It was suggested that clubs could be asked to pay a bond at the beginning of the year to ensure they maintain the facilities in a suitable manner.

**5.12.6 Resolved:**

That Rossendale Leisure Trust fulfil weekend duties as specified within the report for Marl Pits, and a Service Level Agreement to be agreed with local clubs for the Maden Rec Site.

**5.13 Introduction of a Transaction Fee for the use of Credit Cards when paying for Council Tax and other Council Services**

- 5.13.1 The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources introduced the report and noted that the Council currently collects over £2.5m of its income electronically by phone and the internet with customers using their credit/debit cards. Of this, £432k was collected by credit card. The Council has previously absorbed the costs charged by credit card companies which was currently £7.5k over the last 12 months.
- 5.13.2 It was proposed to charge for the use of **credit** cards as the Council was within its statutory rights to do so. The charges would not make any profit and would only recover costs. Two options had been put forward for the Cabinet to consider:
- Option 1 – a set fee of £2.50 per transaction  
Option 2 – a percentage charge at 1.8%
- 5.13.3 It was noted that to attempt to mitigate any negative effect on Customers, Officers would actively encourage customers to take up direct debit payments or to use their debit cards instead of credit cards.
- 5.13.4 Members of the public were invited to comment on the report and the following comments were made:-
- Payment by credit cards and interest charges.
  - The Council were asked to consider charging for council tax over 12 months instead of 10.

### **5.13.5 Resolved:**

1. That credit card fee based on a 1.8% charge per transaction be introduced for each credit card transaction.
2. That any changes in future rates are delegated to the Head of Finance in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources.

### **5.14 Communications Strategy**

5.14.1 The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources outlined the report and noted that this had been delegated to the Cabinet from Full Council on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2010 in order to investigate the costs of immediate cessation of the production of Rossendale Alive.

5.14.2 The Portfolio Holder confirmed that immediate cessation would result in a cost of £791, however no printing costs would be incurred.

5.14.3 Members of the public were invited to comment on the report, however no comments were made.

### **5.14.4 Resolved:**

1. That Members agree the arrangements for the March 2011 edition of Rossendale Alive.
2. That Members agree to cease production of the Rossendale Alive Newsletter with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011.
3. That Members agree the Communications Strategy which was considered at Full Council on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2010.
4. That future minor amendments to the Communications Strategy are delegated to the Head of People and Policy in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources.

## **6 OVERALL RESOLUTIONS TO ITEM C1 – MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE 2011-15**

### **Resolved:**

1. That Members note the contents of the report.
2. That Members approve the priorities as noted in para 2.2
3. That Members concur with the MTFs assumptions as noted in para' 4.2

4. That Members confirm the preferred option for each saving as noted in para 4.6 of the report and continue the consultation process.
  1. That any decision on the future of Rossendale Markets be deferred to the Cabinet meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2011 to enable new information to be fully investigated.
  2. That the resolutions detailed in these Minutes at 5.3.1, 5.4.6, 5.5.6, 5.6.4, 5.7.4, 5.8.6, 5.9.8, 5.10.3, 5.11.3, 5.12.6, 5.13.5 and 5.14.5 be agreed.
5. That Members confirm a nil rise in Member Allowances for 2011/12.
6. That Members confirm their recommendations in respect of Appendix 12 as follows:-
  1. That Members agree to cease production of Rossendale Alive with immediate effect.
  2. That Members agree to cease production of the Rossendale Alive Newsletter with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011.
  3. That Members agree the Communications Strategy which was considered at Full Council on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2010.
  4. That future minor amendments to the Communications Strategy are delegated to the Head of People and Policy in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources.

### **Reason for decision**

To enable the Council to consider the impact of the 2010 CRS and to enable it to continue to deliver its priorities following a considerable reduction in resources both in the immediate and medium term

### **Alternative Options Considered**

The alternative options considered by the Cabinet are outlined in the Appendices to the Committee Report.

**The meeting commenced at 6.35pm and closed at 8.45pm**

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CHAIR