

MINUTES OF: THE CABINET

Date of Meeting: Wednesday 7th March 2012

**Present: Councillor A Barnes (in the Chair)
Councillors Jackson, Lamb, MacNae, Marriott and
Serridge**

**In Attendance: Mrs H Lockwood, Chief Executive
Mr S Sugarman, Director of Business
Mr P Seddon, Head of Finance and Property Services
Mrs J Cook, Committee Officer
Mrs L Sandiford, Head of People and Policy**

**Also Present: Councillors Driver, Essex, Farrington, Gill, McInnes, Morris,
Pilling and Stansfield**

**1 member of the public
2 members of the press**

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence, all Cabinet Members were present.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15th February 2012 be approved as a correct record.

3. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Leader of the Council stated that no members of the public had given notice of their intention to speak. Questions were taken from the floor.

Mr Entwistle asked a question in relation to empty properties in the ownership of the Council and future plans to ensure their condition and any income earning potential. The Leader of the Council stated that a condition survey had been carried out which had identified a framework for managing stock. It was noted that current market conditions could make it difficult to achieve full market value for any assets. The Leader invited Mr Entwistle to submit ideas for any of the empty buildings to her.

Mr Entwistle asked a further question as to why the Council spent so much on accountancy. The Head of Finance and Property Services clarified that external audit cost the Council £100k, with internal audit costing £70k. This was unlikely to change considerably, however with changes to the Audit Commission there was potential to obtain more competitive fees. It was further clarified that any additional auditing as a result of the Audit Commission's inspection in 2002 had long ceased.

6. REVIEW OF FREEDOM OF INFORMATION PUBLICATION SCHEME AND GUIDE TO INFORMATION

- 6.1 The Portfolio Holder for Customers, Legal and Licensing introduced the report and noted that this was an update of an existing Policy which was a legal requirement. The Scheme and Guide ensured that the Council complied fully with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Information Commissioner's Office.
- 6.2 The Portfolio Holder noted that the Council published much of its information online, and only charged costs such as photocopying should members of the public request information, in line with the scheme. It was noted that freedom of information requests were responded to electronically, in the main, which provided an efficient service.
- 6.3 Members were invited to comment on the report and the following points were raised:-
- Concerns regarding officer time were raised. The Portfolio Holder for Customers, Legal and Licensing noted that requests had almost doubled over the past 2 years as follows:-
 - o 2009/10: 228
 - o 2011/12 (to date): 415
 - Concerns were raised regarding enquiries from Commercial businesses and those from the press. The Leader of the Council noted that a freedom of information request applied to recorded information only.
 - It was noted that all spend over £1 was published on the Council's website, which could assist those submitting requests.
 - It was clarified that the Council's scheme was based on the model scheme provided by the Information Commissioner's Office.
 - Clarification was sought regarding what documents were published Online by the Council under the scheme. It was noted that the Schemes and Act were open to interpretation by Councils and the Council employed its own Legal expertise to deal with these matters.
 - It was noted that for those members of the public who contacted the Council by telephone, who did not know which department to request information from, they could select option '6' from the menu to speak to the Operator who would direct them to the relevant officer, or the Freedom of Information Officer.

Resolved:

1. That the updated Freedom of Information Publication Scheme and Guide to Information be approved.
2. That all future minor amendments to the Freedom of Information Publication Scheme and Guide to Information be delegated to the Director of Business in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

Reason for Decision

To ensure that the Council fulfils its legal requirements.

Alternative Options Considered

None

7. LEE QUARRY TRAIL HEAD CENTRE

- 7.1 The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Tourism and Leisure introduced the report which sought Cabinet approval to carry out a procurement exercise to appoint a suitable developer for the creation of a trail head centre at Plot 5, Futures Park, Bacup. The Portfolio Holder noted that the current facilities at Lee Quarry were considered to be some of the best in the UK and a trail head centre would support the bike trails and facilities currently in place and was intended to assist the economy in Bacup by increasing jobs and spend within the whole area. A feasibility study had been carried out by LCDL which had indicated strong private sector interest.
- 7.2 Members were invited to comment on the report and the following comments were made:-
- It was noted that it was good to see work going on in other areas of the Valley.
 - Clarification of how the trail head centre could benefit the whole Bacup area was sought and it was noted that this would be something that would be picked up via developers' plans during the procurement exercise and the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Tourism and Leisure cited several examples of successful projects in other areas.
 - The potential ripple effect on tourism and other areas was noted and positive feedback had been received by Councillors from users of the bike trails.
 - Timescales for the project were requested and it was noted that subject to Cabinet approval, the timescales on this would be quick; however care would be taken to ensure that the correct process was followed and the best developer was appointed. It was further noted that promotion of this opportunity in the press was essential.
 - It was noted that British Cycling had indicated their desire to be involved in the project and it was hoped to create an ongoing legacy for both local people and top-level elite to use.
 - It was noted that there was potential to increase tourism by ensuring that the trail head centre appealed to families and that camp sites could be considered in the future to ensure a base for the users. It was also noted that B&B accommodation would need to be promoted.
 - It was confirmed that best value would be sought for any land/assets.

- It was noted that opportunities to link up with other quarries in the area were being considered in the long term and that links already existed with Crag Quarry in Whitworth. It was also noted that other areas such as Haslingden could be linked in via other facilities such as walking and the cycle links in the longer term.

Resolved:

1. That the Cabinet approve a procurement exercise to appoint a suitable developer for the creation of a trail head centre based on Plot 5, Futures Park, Bacup.
2. That agreement to the terms of the lease of sale of the site are delegated to the Director of Business in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.
3. That all future minor amendments to project be delegated to the Head of Health, Housing and Regeneration in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

Reason for Decision

To bring forward the development of a trail head centre to support the Lee Quarry Mountain Bike Trials.

Alternative Options Considered

None

8. OLYMPIC TORCH RELAY UPDATE

- 8.1 The Leader of the Council introduced the report which updated the Cabinet on arrangements for the Olympic Torch Relay event on 23rd June 2012. The event was being organised by the London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (LOCOG). The torch was being transported via two modes, being torchbearer (carried by local people) mode and convoy mode (carried out of sight on a vehicle) and the convoy would be in torchbearer mode when it passes through Crawshawbooth, Reedsholme and Rawtenstall.
- 8.2 It was noted that an events were being planned which included dressing up, lining the route and the promotion of street parties to celebrate the torch passing through the area. In addition, decking and bunting was being sourced, with the bunting hoping to be obtained from areas where the torch had already passed through. Resources were required for the event, which were outlined at paragraph 5.25 of the committee report.
- 8.3 It was also noted that Neighbourhood Forum funding was available for Olympic Torch street parties and Jubilee street parties of up to £75. Bigger Olympic based events could attract funding of up to £500.
- 8.4 Members were invited to comment on the report and the following comments were made:-
 - It was noted this was a good example of where the Council needs to be a facilitator rather than an organiser.

- Concerns were expressed regarding the capacity/resources of the Communities Team and the impact of time off in lieu (TOIL) on Council services. It was noted that this would be managed.
- It was confirmed that the impact on Neighbourhood Forum funding was not expected to be large and that the resources to fund the Olympic Torch Relay event did not come out of Neighbourhood Forum funding.
- It was noted that this was an opportunity to show off Rossendale and its surrounding countryside.
- It was noted that the Olympic Torch Relay was so strictly timed that it was not possible to incorporate the Relay for Life event at Marl Pits.

Resolved:

1. That the Cabinet acknowledges the honour that the London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (LOCOG) has given by bringing the 'Olympic Torch Relay' to Rossendale on 23rd June 2012, notes the work undertaken by the Community Task Force and looks forward to working with the community to ensure that the occasion showcases what is best about the valley and its people.
2. That the allocation of resources shown at paragraph 5.25 of the committee report is supported and allocated.

Reason for Decision

To showcase the Rossendale Valley during the Olympic Torch Relay event.

Alternative Options Considered

None

9. FINANCIAL MONITORING 2011/12

- 9.1 The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources introduced the report and noted the following:-
- The forecast for the General Fund activity as at the end of January compared to the budget for 2011/12 showed a favourable variance of £120k.
 - The Business Directorate had achieved an under-spend allowing a forecast £23k to be transferred to the Directorates Reserve.
 - There had been minor changes to the Housing Market Renewal capital which would result in £20k being carried forward at the end of March to fund costs early in the new financial year.
 - There had been a 4% reduction in staffing levels.
 - There was rise in predicted investment incomes due to a deposit placed with Lloyds at the end of February.
 - Council tax collection rates were predicted to be in line with the 97.8% target.
- 9.2 Members were invited to comment on the report and the following comments were made:-
- Concerns were expressed regarding the Dog Warden service and it was noted that the Leader would pick this up at her next portfolio meeting.

- It was noted that discussions needed to continue to ensure that Children's Trust monies were pursued, and it was noted that this money had made a significant difference with good outcomes for projects. The Leader agreed that any potential reduction in funding needed to be carefully monitored.
- It was queried why on Page 25 of the Financial Report named 'Cost Bacup Leisure Hall/Ski Slope' and the Head of Finance would provide Councillor Jackson with this information.
- It was queried whether any potential parking on the Valley Centre site had taken into account that parking attracts NNDR. The Leader of the Council stated that this information had come from a political leaflet and there were no further plans of this matter.
- It was queried why the pest control costs for rat/mice infestations had risen and it was noted that this was to cover the cost of providing the service.
- It was enquired whether the costs of the mayoralty would be examined and the Leader confirmed that no stone would be left unturned when it came to providing cost savings.
- It was queried whether a decision had been made on the future viability of Haslingden Pool. The Leader noted that discussions were currently ongoing with the Rossendale Leisure Trust.
- The Leader of the Council thanked Officers for their work on this report.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

Reason for Decision

To enabled continued management of the Council's finances.

Alternative Options Considered

None

10. IRRECOVERABLE DEBT REPORT

- 10.1 The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources introduced the report which sought Cabinet approval to write off 2 debts which were considered to be irrecoverable:-
- £14,467.49 which had arisen from Focus DIY in Rawtenstall going into liquidation. It was noted that this would not have a financial impact on the Council, as NNDR write off costs would be absorbed by central government via the national pooling arrangement.
 - £7,070.00 which had arisen from works carried out in default at Albert Mill in Whitworth. This debt would remain on the Local Land Charges Register and should the property be sold, the Council would recover the funds.
- 10.2 Members were invited to comment on the report; no comments were made.

Resolved

1. That the write-off of £14,467.49 in respect of irrecoverable Non-Domestic Rate debts be approved.
2. That the write-off of £7,070.00 in respect of irrecoverable sundry debts be approved.

Reason for Decision

To enabled continued management of the Council's finances.

Alternative Options Considered

None

11. INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT – QUARTER 3 (OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2011)

- 11.1 The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources outlined the report which noted the levels of performance during Quarter 3. It was noted that acquisitive crime figures had risen, which required monitoring. It was also noted that the Communities Team had been working with the Lancashire Young People's Service, Rossendale Leisure Trust and the Voluntary and Community Sector to deliver a range of projects for young people, via funding from the Children's Trust. The Team were also looking to develop a youth project at Crawshawbooth to support the White Horse Project at Waterfoot and the Trinity Baptist Church.
- 11.2 Members were invited to comment on the report and the following comments were made:-
- It was noted that the projects carried out by the Communities Team for Young People were evidence of the Council responding to the needs of the community.
 - It was queried whether the Police had indicated if they intended to have a presence in Futures Park and the Chief Executive agreed to investigate this.
 - It was noted that a Development Control Committee had been scheduled for April, which was within the 'purdah' period. It was noted that this had been scheduled in after legal advice and that no major applications would be taken to this meeting.

Resolved:

1. That the levels of performance are noted.
2. That Cabinet will continue to monitor performance of those indicators that are under-achieving targeted levels of performance and may wish to request further information on this from the relevant Manager.

Reason for Decision

To continue to monitor the Councils' performance against its targets.

Alternative Options Considered

None

At the end of the meeting Councillor Morris noted that Rossendale Radio had recently closed and the Leader agreed that thanks should be given to the staff of Rossendale Radio.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 7.40pm

_____ CHAIR
_____ DATE