

MINUTES OF: THE CABINET

Date of Meeting: Wednesday 5th September 2012

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

**In Attendance: Mrs H Lockwood, Chief Executive
Mr S Sugarman, Director of Business
Ms F Meechan, Director of Customers and Communities
Mrs J Crawford, Finance Manager
Mr S Jackson, Head of Health, Housing and Regeneration
Mr A Smith, Principal Planner (Forward Planning)
Mrs C Sharples, Committee and Member Services**

**Also Present: Councillors Aldred, Ashworth, Cheetham, Crawforth,
Evans, Farrington, Gill, Hughes, Knowles, McInnes, Milling,
Morris, Oakes, Pilling, Robertson, and D. Smith.**

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

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Serridge.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 27th June 2012 be approved as a correct record.

3. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Marriott declared a personal interest in minute 9 as his immediate family were friends of Rossendale Museum.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Leader of the Council stated that public questions could only be asked at this point in the meeting.

Mr Entwistle referred to an advert in the Free Press on 15th June inviting Council Tax payers to examine the Council's finances. He had made representation in time but stated he had not had a reply. The Chief Executive clarified whether it was following the meeting that officer had had with himself and a colleague. Mr Entwistle clarified he had attended an initial meeting and followed it up but putting his questions in a letter, however, he had not yet had a response to this letter. The Chief Executive confirmed that the Council would respond shortly.

6. ABOLITION OF COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT AND REPLACEMENT WITH A LOCAL SCHEME

6.1 The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources introduced the report which provided members with an update on the current progress regarding the abolition of Council Tax and the replacement with a local Rossendale scheme.

6.2 The Council had published its preferred scheme together with a number of other options and their financial impact, and the Portfolio Holder detailed the background to the replacement with the local scheme.

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

- Disincentive to work.
- Not clear how universal credit impact.
- Working with partners to deal with people in Rossendale relying on food parcels.
- Policy forced on us.
- Benefit cap and impact on those not earning enough money.
- This was part of a consultation.
- 12% of Council Tax claimants are working, there will be an adverse effect on the poorest in the Borough.
- Foster parents being charged for having a bedroom they were deemed not to need.
- Finding extra money out of Job Seekers Allowance if Council Tax Benefit sees 20% cut.
- Option A preferred?
- The consultation is on-going and no decisions have yet been made.

Resolved:

1. That members note the contents of the report and current progress in this matter.
2. That following public consultation a further report is brought back to Cabinet later in the year (November) on which a final recommendation by Cabinet is made to Full Council (December 2012).

Reason for Decision

To update members on the consultation in relation to the abolition of Council Tax and replacement with a local scheme.

Alternative Options Considered

Options A,B,C,D and E as detailed in the report will be considered as part of the consultation.

7. BUSINESS RATES RETENTION SCHEME

- 7.1 The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources updated members on the central government proposals for changes to the financing of local government and the retention of business rates as from 1st April 2013.
- 7.2 The Council would have no influence over the scheme and it would transfer both upward and downward risks in business rate trends to the Council. It was also not yet clear how the scheme would work. Once it was possible to get a clear forecast there would be a need to look at long term trends.
- 7.3 Members were invited to comment on the report and the following comments were made:-
- Details were not yet complete at 5.7.
 - Definition of new renewable energy project.
 - Council will lose against the base rate if a company closes or moves.
 - Competition element between billing authorities.
 - Damaging for small authorities, could become vulnerable areas.
 - Does not take into account the virtual economy.
 - Focus on the business community and becoming more business friendly.
 - Connectivity with Manchester.
 - Develop more business friendly policies.
 - May need a £400k buffer.

Resolved:

1. That Members note and consider the report.
2. That Members are updated as and when further information is received as to the final impact on Council finances.

Reason for Decision

To update members on the business rates retention scheme.

Alternative Options Considered

None.

8. REFUSE, RECYCLING AND STREET CLEANSING REVIEW

- 8.1 The Portfolio Holder for Operational Services and Development Control outlined the report which updated members on consultation proposals to review refuse, recycling and street cleansing services. The Portfolio Holder detailed various parts of the consultation which covered refuse and recycling, street cleaning, garden waste collections and clinical waste collections.
- 8.2 Members were invited to comment on the report and the following comments were made:-
- Good example of consultation.
 - More economical and move to locality working.
 - Focus on saving money at front end services.

- Flooding areas still not cleared.
- Sensitivity regarding changes to clinical waste.
- Consultation with DIY bin men?
- Need to save 40% of budget.
- Types of clinical waste that could be disposed of in the green bin.
- Garden waste is not collected from every household.
- Concerns regarding clinical waste, need to retain dignity.
- Lancashire County Council provide garden bags for green waste which rots down.
- Hazardous waste as defined on Department of Health web site – the Leader asked the Councillor to meet with the Portfolio Holder to discuss.

Resolved:

That members note the progress made to date on work to review the refuse, recycling and street cleansing services.

Reason for Decision

Customer and staff consultation is on-going in relation to proposed changes to refuse, recycling and street cleansing services.

Alternative Options Considered

None

9. CONTRACT REVIEW – WHITAKER PARK MUSEUM

- 9.1 The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Tourism and Leisure outlined the report which updated members on the current management arrangements for Rossendale Museum and to develop options for potential cost savings.
- 9.2 The Council currently pays Lancashire County Council £106k per year to run the museum, which has limited opening times. There were on-going discussions about future possibilities and improvements.
- 9.3 Members were invited to comment on the report and the following comments were made:-
 - Were the Arts Council involved?
 - Good to include on visitor economy strategy.

At this point Councillor Knowles declared an interest as he was appointed to the Museum Advisory Panel.

Members continued to discuss the following:-

- Well supported by volunteers.
- Valuable contribution to history, culture and education.
- Finding a social enterprise to provide museum service – Big Society.
- Vital museum is kept open.
- Lancashire County Council have to make savings as well.
- Difference in the size of the organisations.
- Museum attracts people in especially through workshops.

- Museum was bequeathed to the Council.
- Retain as long as possible.

Resolved

That the contents of the report be noted.

Reason for Decision

Whilst the museum is a valued asset for the Borough there remains scope to review the operational costs to achieve savings to contribute to the requirements of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Alternative Options Considered

None

10. COMMISSIONING AND GRANTS

- 10.1 The Leader of the Council introduced the report which updated members on the consultation on the review of grant funding allocation and the aspiration to move from the present grant funding arrangement to a commissioning model.
- 10.2 The Council would be talking to relevant organisations working on a consultation with Overview and Scrutiny overseeing the process.

Resolved:

That Cabinet note the consultation to date in relation to reviewing its grant funding, through the Rossendale Council Grants and Neighbourhood Forum grants, and replace it with a commissioning model, based on reduced available resources.

Reason for Decision

To update members on the consultation on the review of grant funding allocation.

Alternative Options Considered

None

11. CORPORATE PROJECTS UPDATE

- 11.1 The Leader of the Council introduced the report which updated members on the progress of the Council's Corporate Projects.
- 11.2 All members were encouraged to attend the Valley Centre opening event on 6th October. Members were updated on the signage programme, the Vocational Training Centre, Bacup Trail Head Centre, Marl Pits and the Preferred Development Partner.
- 11.3 The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Tourism and Leisure informed members that after an 18 month process Barnfield with Together Housing had been selected as the preferred development partner subject to full council approval on 26th September. The Leader of the Council encouraged members to attend the session on 12th September where there would be more information.

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

- Project plan and costings breakdown.
- New centre would increase visitor numbers.
- Concern that Marl Pits pool was closed during summer holidays as part of the building works.
- Visitor numbers up at the Trail Head Centre.
- Can old signage be cleaned also?
- Still a few vacancies on Construction course at the vocational centre.
- There would have been disruption no matter when Marl Pits was closed (e.g. school swimming lessons).
- Pools busiest in summer.
- There were 2 other pools to use.

Resolved:

That the contents of this report be noted

Reason for Decision

To update Members on the progress of the Council's Corporate Projects.

Alternative Options Considered

None

12. COUNCIL TAX DEBTS

12.1 The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources introduced the report which requested member authority to write-off £62,693.95 in respect of irrecoverable National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) debts which are above the delegated limit of £5,000.

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

- Was it a higher level than previous? The Finance Manager confirmed it was about the same.

Resolved:

That Cabinet approve the write-off of £62,693.95 in respect of irrecoverable debts.

Reason for Decision

The write-offs are within the provisions available and the recommendation to write-off is made within the grounds of prudence before the financial year-end.

Alternative Options Considered

None

13. WIND ENERGY APPLICATIONS SUPPLEMENTARY VALIDATION POLICY

- 13.1 The Portfolio Holder for Operational Services and Development Control outlined the report which informed members on the intended purpose of the Wind Energy Applications Supplementary Validation Policy.
- 13.2 The policy was important to prevent delays in processing applications by providing more detailed guidance.
- 13.3 Members were invited to comment on the report and the following comments were made:-
- More robust process.
 - Like to see something with a cap on wind farms, both individual and commercial.
 - Unable to introduce blanket ban.
 - Looking at training.
 - Landscape and visual impact.

Resolved:

1. To adopt the Wind Energy Applications Supplementary Validation Policy for Development Control use.
2. That all future minor amendments to the policy to be delegated to the Director of Business in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

Reason for Decision

To provide a clear and transparent set of guidelines to applicants regarding the types and level of information required for Council planning officers to determine applications in line with national guidance and the Core Strategy.

Alternative Options Considered

None

14. PROPOSAL TO INSTALL FURTHER SOLAR PANELS ON THE ROOF OF THE BUSINESS CENTRE, FUTURES PARK

- 14.1 The Portfolio Holder for Operational Services and Development Control introduced the report which was to seek authorisation for capital expenditure of £176,500 on 100kw of solar panels for the roof of the Business Centre plus associated survey charges and maintenance costs for a ten year period.
- 14.2 The pilot scheme in 2010 had been successful and there were triple benefits of generating income, reducing electricity and reducing CO2 emissions. Three companies would tender for the work.
- 14.3 Members were invited to comment on the report and the following comments were made:-
- Price certainty was an added benefit.
 - Invest to save approach.
 - Council is looking for savings but spending on solar panels.
 - Invest to make money long term.

- Financed by internal borrowing.

Resolved:

1. Installation of additional solar panels on the roof of Futures Park is a cost effective way to reduce the Council's energy costs and to ensure long term energy security in a period of increasing volatility. It is agreed that authorisation be given to purchase 100kw of solar panels and secure an on-going maintenance contract.
2. All future minor amendments to implementing the decision be delegated to the Director of Business in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

Reason for Decision

The project presents a good opportunity for the Council to secure financial benefits and environmental gains with a low level of risk.

Alternative Options Considered

None

15. ROSSENDALE LEISURE TRUST – EFFICIENCIES UPDATE

- 15.1 The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Tourism and Leisure introduced the report which updated members on work done to date in identifying efficiencies with Rossendale Leisure Trust.
- 15.2 Rossendale leisure Trust had agreed to reduce the subsidy by 2014 and there was an additional aspiration to be self-reliant. The Council would be working closely with the Leisure Trust and consulting with the Pool Panel and pool users in relation to Haslingden Pool.
- 15.3 Members were invited to comment on the report and the following comments were made:-
 - Working with people to look at all options.
 - Not about efficiencies but closing Haslingden Pool.
 - Diverting money allocated to Valley Centre.
 - Local authorities will only be able to fund statutory activity, not discretionary activity.
 - Olympic legacy.
 - Sponsors of paralympic games.
 - Passionate about facilities to support sport.

Resolved:

1. That members note the progress made to date on work to identify savings and efficiencies in relation to Rossendale Leisure Trust.
2. That members agree consultation to continue in relation to the options identified and for a report to be presented to Cabinet and Full Council in due course.
3. That members note a grant reduction between the ranges of £100k to £200k has been agreed with the Leisure Trust to be achieved by 2014.

Reason for Decision

To update members on work done to date in identifying efficiencies with Rossendale Leisure Trust.

Alternative Options Considered

None

16. DISCRETIONARY BUSINESS RATES RELIEF

16.1 The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources introduced the report which summarised the present funding arrangements in relation to discretionary Business Rates relief and detailed the progress on the consultation.

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

- Not always appropriate for social enterprises to become charities.
- The Council is not encouraging all social enterprises to become charities.

Resolved:

1. That Cabinet considers the contents of the report in light of the challenges identified in the Council's updated Medium Term Financial Strategy.
2. That Cabinet notes progress to date on consultation with regards to reviewing the discretionary rate relief currently provided to organisations in relation to National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR – "Business Rates"), in view of the Council having to save £1.3m as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Reason for Decision

To update members by summarising the present grant funding arrangements in relation to discretionary Business Rates relief.

Alternative Options Considered

None

17. FINANCIAL MONITORING 2012/13

17.1 The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources introduced the Financial Monitoring report.

17.2 Members commented on the report as follows:-

- Disabled facilities grants and whether the full amount allocated in 2011/2012 had been spent and works complete. The Finance Manager confirmed that £700k of works had been completed last year.
- £100k was carried over.
- Task and Finish Group recommended that it was important to catch up on some minor works as well.

Resolved

That the contents of the report are noted.

Reason for decision

To continue to monitor the council's finances.

Alternative Options Considered

None

18. INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 4

- 18.1 The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources introduced the report and asked members to note recommendations 1.2 and 1.3 to delegate the Quarterly Report and on-going monitoring to the Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 18.2 Performance Overview and Scrutiny would report back to Cabinet if they had any serious concerns.

Resolved:

- 1. Cabinet considered the levels of performance and risks detailed in the report Quarter 4 Report January to March 2012.
- 2. Cabinet agreed that the review of the Quarterly Performance Reports will be delegated to the Overview & Scrutiny Performance Committee, who will refer to the Cabinet where there are serious performance issues or areas of concerns as appropriate.
- 3. Cabinet agreed to delegate to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee the review and changes of the Performance Indicators Set.

Reason for Decision

To update members on the Quarter 4 report and delegate future monitoring to the Council's Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Alternative Options Considered

None

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 8.25pm

_____ CHAIR

_____ DATE