

MINUTES OF: THE CABINET

Date of Meeting: Wednesday, 21st March 2007

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

**IN ATTENDANCE: Carolyn Wilkins, Chief Executive
Helen Lockwood, Deputy Chief Executive
George Graham, Executive Director of Resources
Linda Fisher, Head of Planning, Legal and Democratic Services
Phil Seddon, Head of Financial Services
Ilona Snow Miller, Head of Community and Partnerships
Andrew Buckle, Head of Customer Services and E-Government
Jon Sharples, Head of Economic Regeneration and Strategic
Housing
Bill Lawley, Interim Legal and Democratic Services Manager
Heather Moore, Committee Services Manager
Jason Foster, Street Scene Manager
Philip Mepham, Interim Environmental Health Manager
Tracy Brzozowski, Licensing Manager**

**ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Dickinson, Hancock, Haworth, Lamb,
Robertson and Sandiford
2 Members of the Public
2 Representatives from the Press**

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Smith.

2. MINUTES

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 21st February 2007 be signed by the Chair as a correct record.

3. URGENT ITEM OF BUSINESS

The Chair reported that there were no urgent items of business.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations made.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions raised under this item.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY

Councillor Driver, Portfolio Holder for Street Scene and Liveability, presented the report of the Head of Street Scene and Liveability which outlined the results of the recent public consultation on the Council's draft Environmental Strategy.

Councillor Driver reported that six responses had been received and comments made within those responses had been reflected in the current version of the Strategy.

Councillor Sandiford, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, informed the Cabinet that the Policy Scrutiny Committee had considered the responses and the amended Strategy and were recommending that the Cabinet approve the Strategy.

The Cabinet discussed the aims of the Strategy, specifically Aim Four, to encourage greater use of sustainable modes of transport and Aim Ten, to encourage the sustainable use of land within Rossendale. It was suggested that the Development Control Committee should be encouraged to be mindful of the Strategy when considering planning applications.

Decision Made:

1. That the Environmental Strategy be adopted and implemented.
2. That progress be monitored and reported to the Performance Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis.
3. That Officers be requested to produce a delivery plan in line with programme management techniques.

Reasons for Decision:

The Strategy sets out the framework by which the Council will work with partners including the Local Strategic Partnership to safeguard and improve the environment.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

7. PLAY STRATEGY

Councillor Driver, Portfolio Holder for Street Scene and Liveability, presented the report of the Head of Street Scene and Liveability which outlined the draft Play Strategy including the key findings, priorities and future directions relating thereto.

Councillor Driver reported that the Play Strategy had been developed to provide clarity on the Council's role in play provision and the areas in which funding may be sought. She highlighted that in 2005, the Council were allocated £200k from the Big Lottery Fund to invest in children's play and the Council had provided a capital improvement programme of £250k over 5 years from 2006/07.

Councillor Driver further reported that additional external funding opportunities would be sought to deliver the Play Strategy and she referred to the establishment of a Play Partnership which was a cross cutting partnership between the Council, the community, voluntary and faith sectors and other service providers that would oversee and deliver the Play Strategy.

Councillor Sandiford, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, informed the Cabinet that the Policy Scrutiny Committee had considered the Play Strategy and were recommending its approval to the Cabinet.

Councillor Essex, Portfolio Holder for Policy and Performance and Children and Young Peoples' Champion informed the Cabinet that the Strategy would extend the choice and control that children and young people had for play opportunities and he highlighted that the Play Partnership had the determination to gain future funding.

In response to a question from Councillor Hancock in respect of the priorities for improvement, Councillor Driver reported that a priority matrix was produced using population and deprivation figures, the availability of free facilities and whether there was any coverage in that area by an existing play facility.

Decision Made:

1. That the draft Play Strategy be approved as a way forward for improving children's play.
2. That Officers be requested to produce a delivery plan in line with programme management techniques.

Reasons for Decision:

The Strategy will raise awareness of the importance of 'free play' within Rossendale and will ensure a co-ordinated approach to improving means of play for children and young people.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

8. ENFORCEMENT POLICY

Councillor Driver, Portfolio Holder for Street Scene and Liveability, presented the report of the Head of Street Scene and Liveability which outlined proposals to approve the draft Enforcement Policy for consultation purposes.

Councillor Sandiford, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, informed the Cabinet that the draft Policy had been considered by a Task and Finish Group and further development of the Policy would be undertaken by that Group during the consultation process.

Decision Made:

That the draft Enforcement Policy be approved for publication and for consultation with stakeholders over the next 3 months in relation to its application to specific services.

Reasons for Decision:

The Council undertakes a range of enforcement activities involving a wide range of legislation. The policy explains how enforcement decisions are made and in what circumstances.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

9. POLICY STATEMENT ON GUIDELINES TO CONVICTIONS

Councillor Ormerod, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Risk Management presented the report of the Head of Planning, Legal and Democratic Services which outlined proposals to adopt a Policy Statement on Guidelines to Convictions.

Councillor Ormerod reported that Policy would support the Licensing Committee in determining whether to issue a licence to a taxi driver.

Decision Made:

That the Policy be approved.

Reasons for Decision:

The Policy provides clarity and guidance and will ensure consistency throughout the decision making process.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

10. CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Councillor Ormerod, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Risk Management presented the report of the Head of Planning, Legal and Democratic Services which outlined the results of the review of the Code of Corporate Governance.

Councillor Ormerod referred to the detailed evidence that the Council had to support compliance with the Code together with the actions required to strengthen corporate governance procedures.

Decision Made:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive be authorised to sign a Statement of Assurance on the basis of the contents of the report.

Reasons for Decision:

The Code promotes the high ethical standards required and maintained by the Council and demonstrates the Council's commitment to corporate governance.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

11. HEALTHY BUSINESS SCHEME

Councillor Driver, Portfolio Holder for Street Scene and Liveability, presented the report of the Head of Street Scene and Liveability which provided an update on the development of the Healthy Business Scheme.

Councillor Driver reported that progress was being made, in consultation with local businesses, to develop the Healthy Business Scheme. Two large local employers were supportive of the Scheme and had expressed an interest to be involved in its development together with a number of other agencies and further consultation was being undertaken as the concept was taking shape.

Decision Made:

1. That the concept of a Healthy Business Scheme be supported and the progress towards the development of the Scheme be noted.
2. That the Head of Street Scene and Liveability be requested to submit a further report to the Cabinet outlining the overall health promotion offer delivered in the Borough.

Reasons for Decision:

The development of a Healthy Business Scheme will contribute towards delivering one of the Council's priorities; improving the Health and Wellbeing across the Borough

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

**12. PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING RENEWAL EQUITY RELEASE SCHEME
PROGRESS AND REVIEW REPORT**

Councillor Challinor, Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, presented the report of the Head of Economic Regeneration and Strategic Housing which outlined the progress of the implementation of the Private Sector Housing Renewal Equity Release Scheme known as the Decent Homes Assistance together with proposals to change the delivery mechanism for implementing the Scheme.

Councillor Challinor reported that the review of the delivery agents highlighted a difference in their approach to delivering the Equity Release Scheme and this was reflected in the number of clients progressing through to completion.

In response to a question from Councillor Hancock who had indicated that there had been limited success with the Scheme, Councillor Challinor reported that increased promotional activity was required to ensure residents were aware of the opportunities that the Scheme provided. He further reported that the Scheme had been received positively through the Audit Commission's recent Housing Inspection.

Councillor Sandiford, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee reported that the Performance Scrutiny Committee had considered the report and were recommending that the Cabinet approve the changes to the delivery mechanism. The Committee were pleased to note that St Vincents would remain as the delivery agent for the Council's Homecare and Repair Agency which assisted older residents to improve and repair their homes through private funding, charitable trusts and the Handyperson Service. Councilor Sandiford informed the meeting that the Performance Scrutiny Committee would continue to monitor performance of the Scheme.

Decision Made:

1. That the progress of the implementation of the Private Sector Housing Renewal Equity Release Scheme (Decent Homes Assistance) be noted.
2. That the changes in the delivery mechanism of the Equity Release Scheme as set out in the report be approved and West Pennine Housing Association be appointed as the delivery agent for a period of two years.

Reasons for Decision:

West Pennine Housing Association have demonstrated that they have the experience necessary to deliver an improved Equity Release Scheme on behalf of the Council.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

To maintain existing arrangements which would result in no improvement of the service with subsequent lack of outputs.

13. GRANTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES

Councillor Ruddick, Leader of the Council, presented the report of the Head of Community and Partnerships which outlined the impact of the Council grants allocated to outside bodies in 2006/07 together with the proposed grant allocations for 2007/08.

Councillor Sandiford, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, reported that the Performance Scrutiny Committee had considered the report and were recommending that the Cabinet approve the allocation of grants as set out in the report. The Committee also recommended that the organisations that had not completed spend by the end of the financial year should be asked to report back to the Grants Advisory Group to account for spend.

The Head of Community and Partnerships reported that since the meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee all organisations had spent the grants awarded to them and had submitted receipts to the Head of Community and Partnerships for auditing purposes.

Decision Made:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the grants for 2007/08 as set out in Appendix 4 of the report be approved.

Reasons for Decision:

The grants awarded to organisations have played a key part in helping to improve the lives of people in the Borough and the achievements compliment the objectives of the Council and the Local Strategic Partnership.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

14. ANNUAL EFFICIENCY STATEMENT 2007/08 FORWARD LOOK

Councillor Ormerod, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Risk Management, presented the report of the Executive Director of Resources which detailed the Forward Look Annual Efficiency Statement for 2007/08.

Councillor Ormerod reported that the Council's annual efficiency target was 2.5%, however the Council had been able to significantly over achieve the target set by the Government, with the figure achieved representing 3.67%. He informed the Cabinet that this was reflected in the Council's budget and contributed positively to the achievement of the objectives in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Decision Made:

That the submission of the Annual Efficiency Statement be approved.

Reasons for Decision:

The Annual Efficiency Statement reflects a significant over achievement of the Council's externally set efficiency targets and in particular a very significant over achievement of the target for cashable efficiency gains.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

15. AUDIT COMMISSION HOUSING INSPECTION

Councillor Challinor, Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, presented the report of the Head of Economic Regeneration and Strategic Housing which detailed the outcome of the inspection of the Council's Strategic Housing Services undertaken by the Audit Commission in December 2006.

Councillor Challinor informed the Cabinet that the Audit Commission had assessed Rossendale as providing a fair service with promising prospects for improvement and he congratulated those officers involved in the assessment.

Councillor Challinor further reported that the recommendations for improvement had been included in the Economic Regeneration and Strategic Housing business Plan and would be monitored through the business plan process.

Decision Made:

That the report be noted.

Reasons for Decision:

The Housing Inspection provides both a learning opportunity and the opportunity to continue to improve services for local people.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

16. FINANCIAL MONITORING

Councillor Ormerod, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Risk Management, presented the report of the Head of Financial Services which provided an update on the General Fund estimates for 2006/07, the Capital Programme and Treasury matters together with progress on delivering budget savings and growth.

Councillor Ormerod reported that in respect of Capital Receipts the current forecast indicated a surplus of £962k assuming that receipts were received by the year end. The General Fund revenue forecast was showing a full year deficit of £46k and included provision for the Council's current known risk areas.

Decision Made:

That the report be noted.

Reasons for Decision:

Financial monitoring ensures that strong financial management is embedded throughout the organisation.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

17. RISK MANAGEMENT

Councillor Ormerod, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Risk Management, presented the report of the Head of Financial Services which provided an update on the status of the Council's identified risks, both strategic and business plan risks.

Councillor Ormerod informed the Cabinet that the report had been prepared using Covalent and showed some significant favourable movement in the risk profile. It was noted that some areas remained with a risk profile of red and Heads of Service would ensure that all risks were reviewed, updated and captured in the business planning process for next year.

In response to a question from Councillor Hancock about customer satisfaction, Councillor Ruddick reported that Rossendale's levels of customer satisfaction had increased whereas other Councils had seen a decline in satisfaction rates.

Decision Made:

That the report be noted.

Reasons for Decision:

Effective risk management ensures effective management of the Council's resources, which in turn ultimately enables the provision of value for money services.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

18. QUARTER 3 2006/07 BVPI PERFORMANCE

Councillor Essex, Portfolio Holder for Policy and Performance, presented the report of the Head of Policy and Change Management which outlined those Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) that were collected monthly and quarterly and which were not currently on track to achieve the targets set against them for Quarter three.

Councillor Essex reported that 67% were on target, 7% marginally below target and 26% below target. He informed the Cabinet that for every indicator not achieving targeted levels of performance an action plan had been prepared, a copy of which was appended to the report for the Cabinet's consideration.

Decision Made:

That the report be noted.

Reasons for Decision:

The Council is committed to developing a performance culture through embedding a Performance Management Framework that is robust, transparent and accountable.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

19. WRITE OFF OF IRRECOVERABLE NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES (NNDR) DEBTS

Councillor Farquharson, Portfolio Holder for Customer Services presented the report of the Head of Customer Services and E-Government which outlined proposals to write off irrecoverable National Non Domestic Rates (NNDR) debts.

Councillor Farquharson reported that a total sum of £52,785.56 was regarded as irrecoverable due to, amongst other causes, bankruptcy, liquidation and no forwarding address. She informed the Cabinet that accounts had been checked thoroughly by contacting other Local Authorities, landlords, solicitors and new occupiers.

Decision Made:

That the write off totalling a sum of £52,785.56 in relation to National Non Domestic Rates be approved.

Reasons for Decision:

It is prudent practice to clear any debts from the ledgers which are deemed to be irrecoverable prior to closing down the accounts for the year.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

20. DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF

Councilor Ruddick, Leader of the Council presented the report of the Head of Customer Services and E-Government which outlined proposals to award Discretionary Relief against National Non Domestic Rates to various charitable organisations.

Decision Made:

That Discretionary Rate Relief be awarded as outlined in Appendix 1 of the report, the total sum to be awarded being £14,122.53.

Reasons for Decision:

The Discretionary Rate Relief will provide financial support from the Council to charitable organisations.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 8.25pm)