

MINUTES OF: THE CABINET

Date of Meeting: Wednesday, 4th July 2007

**PRESENT: Councillor Challinor (in the Chair)
Councillors Essex and Tickner**

**IN ATTENDANCE: George Graham, Executive Director of Resources
Linda Fisher, Head of Planning, Legal and Democratic
Services
Ilona Snow-Miller, Head of Community and Partnerships
Andrew Buckle, Head of Customer Services and E-
Government
Liz Murphy, Head of Human Resources
Phil Seddon, Head of Financial Services
Jenni Cook, Committee Officer**

**ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Aldred, Lamb, Neal, Robertson and Sandiford
2 Members of the Public
2 Representatives from the Press**

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been submitted by Councillor Ruddick, Councillor Graham and Councillor Driver.

2. MINUTES

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 6th June 2007 be signed by the Chair as a correct record.

3. URGENT ITEM OF BUSINESS

The Deputy Leader of the Council reported that there were two urgent items, one of which would be taken at the end of the meeting which related to the deletion a post. The item was a confidential item as it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information under Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

The Executive Director of Resources reported on the other urgent item, being the closure of My Travel, based in Helmshore, and the subsequent loss of over 200 jobs. It was confirmed that the Council, including a representative from the Cabinet, would be meeting with My Travel staff and Lancashire County Development Ltd on 5th July 2007 to discuss the impact on employment within Rossendale. Contact had also been made with Job Centre Plus and Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council to ensure that a holistic approach to the issue is taken.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations made.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No questions were raised during Public Question Time.

6. AMENDMENTS TO CURRENT SCHEME OF DELEGATION FOR PLANNING AND CALL-IN PROCEDURES

The Portfolio Holder for Regenerating and Promoting Rossendale presented the report of the Head of Planning, Legal and Democratic Services in relation to amendment of the current Scheme of Delegation for Planning and Call-in Procedures. The Portfolio Holder outlined the need for the Scheme of Delegation to be updated in order to continually improve the performance of the Development Control Team and to allow the Team to offer improved customer service in dealing with determining planning applications.

The Head of Planning, Legal and Democratic Services outlined that the proposed amendments sought to clarify the authority delegated to herself and to provide clearer guidance for Elected Members in respect of the call-in procedure and to ensure that minor applications could be dealt with as expeditiously as possible.

It was noted that previous use of the call-in procedure had resulted in the Planning Department failing to meet BVPI targets. It was agreed that a form would be designed in consultation with all parties, which would assist Members in calling in applications in a correct manner and this would be circulated to Members.

In response to a question by a Member, the Head of Planning, Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that training in respect of attending Planning Hearings and Inquiries would be added to the training plan.

Decision Made:

That the amendments detailed within the report be agreed and Full Council be recommended to amend the Scheme of Delegation as set out in the report.

Reason for Decision:

The decision will enable the Development Control Team to improve performance and to offer an improved customer service in dealing with planning application determinations, and it will also provide Elected Members with clear guidance in respect of the procedure for Member Call-ins.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

7. REVISION OF THE EQUALITIES STRATEGY

The Portfolio Holder for a Well Managed Council presented the report of the Head of Human Resources which outlined proposals to agree the revision of the Equalities Strategy and the Equalities Policy in light of changes in legislation and the Equality Standard.

The Portfolio Holder outlined the need for the changes in order to eliminate discrimination and make equality practice an integral part of all the Council's processes and services. It was further noted that the Council had a legal requirement to meet the obligations of the Equality Standard and equality legislation.

The Portfolio Holder congratulated the Head of Human Resources and her team in completing this piece of work.

In response to a comment made by a Member, it was noted that all Members should be encouraged to attend the equalities training.

Decision Made:

1. That the revision to the Equalities Strategy be agreed and that any future changes be delegated to the Head of Human Resources in consultation with the Portfolio Holder and the Chief Executive.
2. That the changes to the Equality Standard be noted.
3. That equality issues be integrated into the decision making processes of the Council.

Reason for Decision:

The Council has a legal requirement to meet the obligations of the Equality Standard and equality associated legislation.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

8. REVISION OF THE PAY AND WORKFORCE STRATEGY AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The Portfolio Holder for a Well Managed Council presented the report of the Head of Human Resources which outlined proposals for the revision of the Pay and Workforce Strategy and Workforce Development Plan.

The Portfolio Holder outlined the key features of the approach, being that the Council had a need to build capacity and a model of Neighbourhood Management to improve the quality of services to the community by developing a more local,

integrated approach to delivery in key service areas and to assist the Council in achieving real and lasting change.

The Portfolio Holder stated that the Human Resources Team had already made significant progress, in particular, sickness absences had decreased from 13.5 days to 6.9 days, being one of the best in England and he reminded Members that the Council had recently been awarded Investors in People status.

The Portfolio Holder congratulated the Head of Human Resources and her team in completing this piece of work and for their support in the Council achieving Investors in People status.

Decision Made:

1. That the contents of the Workforce Plan and Pay and Workforce Strategy be agreed.
2. That any further amendments to the Workforce Plan and Workforce Strategy be delegated to the Head of Human Resources in consultation with the Portfolio Holder and Chief Executive.

Reason for Decision:

The implementation of the Workforce Development Plan can further assist the Council in progressing and responding effectively to change by building capacity and capability within the workforce.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

9. CONSULTATION ON LEISURE WHITE PAPER

The Head of Community and Partnerships reported on the results of the consultation carried out on the Leisure White Paper between 28th February and 18th June 2007, which contained a series of suggestions for the improvement of facilities and the development of physical activity in the Borough.

The Head of Community and Partnerships reported that the comments were supportive of the proposals outlined in the White Paper. The comments of the Head of Financial Services were noted in that the Council's financial implications had not changed materially from those identified in the report to Council on 28th February 2007.

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and Performance Scrutiny Committee informed Members that the report had been considered by the Policy Scrutiny Committee and that wording within the document had been endorsed by the Committee.

In response to a question from a Member, the Head of Community and Partnerships noted that a performance award grant had been awarded to the Rossendale Sports and Physical Activity Alliance which would allow additional match funding of up to £150,000 to be drawn down from Sport England. This would be further discussed later in the meeting.

Decision Made:

That the continued approach of improving the facilities within the Borough be agreed.

Reason for Decision:

The Leisure White Paper contributes significantly to the Council's priority of improving health and wellbeing across the Borough, supporting the Council's ambition of increasing participation in physical activity to 30% by 2012.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

10. RESTRUCTURE OF THE LANCASHIRE PARTNERSHIP

The Head of Community and Partnerships reported on the proposed restructure of the Lancashire Partnership and she outlined that the Lancashire Partnership had been operating under an interim structure for some time and was in the process of consulting its partners on a permanent structure for the future, which would ensure that the Partnership was fit for purpose and able to meet the challenges of the Local Government Act and the new Local Area Agreement.

The Head of Community and Partnerships asked Members for their views on the proposed structure in order that she could prepare a response by 5th July 2007.

In response to questions raised by Members, the Executive Director of Resources agreed that this was a complex issue, however it was important to ensure that Rossendale's voice is heard within the Partnership. Discussion took place on the involvement of Blackburn with Darwen and Blackpool Councils and Members agreed that observer status for those two Councils would be the preferred option.

Decision Made:

That the Head of Community and Partnerships be requested to prepare a response in respect of the proposed restructure of the Lancashire Partnership, taking into account the comments made by Members.

Reason for Decision:

It is important to review partnership arrangements to ensure that they are fit for purpose and operate efficiently.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

11. WALL AT HIGHTOWN, WHITEWELL BOTTOM

The Portfolio Holder for a Well Managed Council presented the report of the Head of Planning, Legal and Democratic Services which outlined the Council's role in relation to the repair of a wall at Hightown, Whitewell Bottom. It was noted that the Council had carried out remedial works to make the wall safe, however the Council was under no obligation to carry out full repairs to the wall. Negotiations with residents in respect of funding had been ongoing since 2000, however these had been unsuccessful. It was recommended that the Council formally withdrew its offer of contribution towards the repair.

In response to questions by Members it was confirmed that the residents would be contacted and advised of the decision made by the Cabinet.

Decision Made:

That the Council formally withdraws its offer of 50% contribution (£8,000) towards the repair of the wall and remove the funding from the capital programme.

Reason for Decision:

The Council does not own the wall and it is considered that the Council is under no liability to repair it. The matter has been outstanding since 2000 and agreement has not been reached with residents in respect of securing a 50% contribution.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

12. SUNDRY DEBT MANAGEMENT POLICY

The Portfolio Holder for a Well Managed Council presented the report of the Head of Financial Services which proposed the adoption of a Sundry Debt Management Policy.

The Portfolio Holder reported that the Policy would help the Council to maximise cash flows and had been recommended by the Council's Internal Auditors.

In response to a question by a Member it was confirmed that the policy in respect of Council Tax and National Non-Domestic Rates would be circulated in due course. It was noted by a Member that the Sundry Debt Management Policy was necessary and it was important that debtors were clear on what procedures would be implemented upon non-payment of debts to the Council. Further questions were

raised about the role of bailiffs and the Head of Customer Services and E-Government confirmed that bailiffs were required to sign up to the Council's customer service standards and he advised Members to contact him directly with any specific concerns.

Decision Made:

1. That the Sundry Debt Management Policy be approved by Members.
2. That any future revision of the Policy be delegated to the Head of Financial Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

Reason for Decision:

The adoption of the Policy adheres to best practice and further strengthens the Council's financial management arrangements.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

13. REVIEW OF TRUST OFFICER POSITION – EAST LANCASHIRE RAILWAY TRUST

The Deputy Leader of the Council introduced the report of the Head of Community and Partnerships which outlined the work programme of the Trust Officer to date and which sought approval for the continuation of the Council's contribution to the post for 3 further years, which equated to £1,500 per annum. It was noted that contributions were also provided towards this post by Bury Metropolitan Borough Council and Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council.

The Head of Community and Partnerships outlined the history of the post and noted that it was expected that the railway would develop greatly within the next few years and that the £1,500 per annum represented excellent value for money.

The Head of Community and Partnerships also invited all Members to attend the 20th Anniversary of the re-opening of the railway which would take place at 10am on 25th July 2007 and she advised all interested Members to contact her.

Decision Made:

That the funding be approved for the next three years, equating to £1,500 per annum.

Reason for Decision:

The Trust Officer provides a much valued support for the Trust to continue to grow and this work would be required to be picked up by Officers of the three local authorities, should funding cease.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

14. PERFORMANCE REWARD GRANT AND ACHIEVEMENT AGAINST THE LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT

The Head of Community and Partnerships presented a report on reward grants in relation to increasing the participation in leisure activities of children and young people with disabilities. It was noted that the target had been achieved which had resulted in Rossendale being eligible for a reward grant of £21,000. Members considered the allocation of the reward grant to the Rossendale Sports and Physical Activity Alliance, which would allow additional match funding of up to £150,000 to be drawn down.

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and Performance Scrutiny Committee commented that the Policy Scrutiny Committee had reviewed this matter and supported the proposal to award the £21,000 to the Rossendale Sports and Physical Activity Alliance.

The Portfolio Holder for Quality Services to Customers requested that the Head of Community and Partnerships submit the Council's thanks to the Rossendale Sports and Physical Activity Alliance for their hard work in exceeding targets and also to the Rossendale Leisure Trust for their support.

Decision Made:

That the £21,000 reward grant be allocated to the Rossendale Sports and Physical Activity Alliance to deliver against the Sports and Physical Activity Strategy considered by Policy Scrutiny Committee on 12th June 2007.

Reason for Decision:

Allocation of the grant to the Rossendale Sports and Physical Activity Alliance will enable delivery of the LSPA target of getting 520 young disabled people into physical activity.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

15. 2006/7 END OF YEAR PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Portfolio Holder for a Well Managed Council presented the report of the Head of Policy and Change Management which informed Members of the progress and achievements contained within the Council's Corporate Improvement Plan for 2006/7 and the Key Success Indicators shown in the plan. The Portfolio Holder outlined the areas which had achieved significant improvements and noted that areas which were failing to meet targets would be monitored closely.

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and Performance Scrutiny Committee asked Members to note that 26 commendations had been issued to service areas in respect of significantly improved targets and no significant underperformances had been identified which would usually result in a call-in to Performance Scrutiny Committee for the first time in approximately 18 months.

Decision Made:

1. That the levels of performance detailed within the report be noted.
2. That the Cabinet continue to monitor performance of those actions that are not achieving targets and to request further information on this from the relevant Head of Service.
3. That in those service areas that have shown significant improvement, Heads of Service be asked to convey the Cabinet's commendation to teams.
4. That letters of commendation sent by the Scrutiny Committee be copied to Cabinet Members for information.

Reason for Decision:

The Council's Performance Management Framework continues to ensure that the Council remains clear about the targets it has set itself and the actions it intends to take to achieve its stated priorities. It is important that performance is continually monitored in order to enable the Council to continue to provide high quality services to satisfy the needs of its customers.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

16. FINANCIAL MONITORING

The Portfolio Holder for a Well Managed Council presented the report of the Head of Financial Services which updated Members on the General Fund estimates for 2007/8, the Capital Programme and Treasury matters.

The Portfolio Holder reported that the Council was generally working to budget, however it was noted the concessionary travel was expected to have significant impact on the budget.

The Portfolio Holder thanked the Head of Financial Services and his Team for their support and work in respect of the preparation of the budget.

Decision Made:

1. That the contents of the report be noted.
2. That the further use of the Change Management Reserve be authorised as follows:
 - Job Evaluation Project, extension of secondment - £20,000
 - Health and Safety project work in operational services – staff appointment for 12 months – £29,000.

Reason for Decision:

To assist the Council in supporting its corporate priorities and to ensure the effective management of the Council's resources to enable the provision of value for money services.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

17. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

Decision Made and Reason for Decision:

That the public and press be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve disclosure of exempt information relating to both an individual and to the financial or business affairs of any particular person as defined in Paragraph 1, 2 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

18. E-GOVERNMENT TEAM RESTRUCTURE

The Portfolio Holder for Quality Services to Customers presented the report of the Head of Customer Services and E-Government which outlined a proposed restructure of the E-Government Team.

Decision Made:

That the recommendations as set out in the report be agreed.

Reason for Decision:

The decision will represent a saving in revenue costs and will allow delivery of the ICT Strategy.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

19. DEBTOR WRITE-OFF

The Portfolio Holder for a Well Managed Council presented the report of the Head of Financial Services relating to the write off of a sundry debt.

Decision Made:

That the recommendations as set out in the report be agreed.

Reason for Decision:

The debtor has gone into liquidation and the Council is unable to recover the debt. Provision for non-payment of this debt has been previously made in the accounts of the Council.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

20. DISESTABLISHMENT OF A POST

The Executive Director of Resources presented a report which detailed the need for the disestablishment of a post.

Decision Made:

That the recommendations as set out in the report be agreed.

Reason for Decision:

The decision to disestablish the post will bring the ongoing financial and human resource commitments in line.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 8.20pm