

Minutes of: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 2 February 2011

PRESENT: Councillor Sandiford (Chair)
Councillors A Barnes, L Barnes, Crawforth, Jackson, Kenyon, Lamb, Milling, Morris, Oakes, C Pilling, Stansfield, H Steen and Thorne.

Irene Divine (Co-opted Member)

IN ATTENDANCE: Phil Seddon, Head of Finance
Rebecca Lawlor, Health and Housing Manager
Councillor Essex, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources
Councillor Robertson
Pat Couch, Scrutiny Support Officer

1 member of the public

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Keith Pilkington (co-opted Member).

2. MINUTES

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2010 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Morris declared a personal interest as a Member of Rossendale Leisure Trust.

Councillor Jackson declared a personal interest as Chief Executive of the Horse and Bamboo.

Councillor A Barnes declared a personal interest as she was employed by a national co-ordinating body for home improvement agencies.

4. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items for discussion.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair agreed to deviate from the Procedure for Public Speaking and allow members of the public to ask questions as the reports were discussed.

6. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair provided Members with the following information:

- A response had been received from Alder Grange School indicating that the development of the outdoor area was continuing and should be ready to launch the community element in late Spring and they would update the Council in May.
A member indicated that the official opening day of the new facility at the school was to take place from 6.30pm on 15th February. The Chair indicated that at their presentation to the Committee in September, Alder Grange offered an invite to the Council to the official opening. It was agreed that contact should be made asking if the Council could attend the opening on 15th February.
- A response had been circulated from the Home Officer following a letter sent by Scrutiny regarding the delay in funding for the STAR Centre. The response implied that any payment in advance would have to be agreed with the application for funding. It was agreed that a letter should be sent to LCC, including a copy of the letter from the Home Office asking that future applications should request payment in advance.
- With regard to the Disabled Facilities Grant Task and Finish Report, a response had been received from LCC to the recommendations and these had been circulated. The Chair asked the Health and Housing Manager for comments on the response and she gave a brief overview of the significance of these, indicating that it provided a good opportunity for working with LCC around the DFGs. Concern was raised about the need for re-cycling of equipment and the amount of medical equipment that is given out and not collected back by the PCT or Social Services,
- Confirmation that the Service Assurance Team had been in contact with Accrington and Rossendale College to promote further education on STAN (Services to a Neighbourhood)
- Following a regular meeting with the Rossendale Commissioning Lead in health, it was agreed that a special meeting of Overview and Scrutiny be arranged for 7 March 2011 at 6.30pm.

7. ENFORCEMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT

Councillor Stansfield, as Chair of the Enforcement Task and Finish Group presented the report and its findings.

Rebecca Lawlor, Health and Housing Manager, gave a brief explanation of the recommendations and indicated that there was an opportunity for work to be done internally together.

Members raised a number of questions regarding 'shutters' and it was agreed that there was a need for a realistic Policy to be produced which informs businesses of type of shutters to be used. The Policy should include a start date for when this should be implemented.

Members also asked for additional wording to be included in recommendation 8, which asks for a press release to raise the profile of the Hyndburn Used Furniture Service, which should include 'other relevant agencies.'

Resolved:

That the report, with amendments agreed above, be sent to Cabinet asking them to respond to relevant recommendations within two months.

8. 2011/12 REVENUE BUDGET AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The Head of Finance informed Members 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. There was a need not to just focus on 2011/12 as there were implications of declining resources over the next 4 years.

Members discussed each of the appendices separately as follows:

Appendix 1 – Review of Farm Collections

Members were informed that Officers were going out to all remote properties to discuss the best way of collection of their waste.

The Council felt that the most cost effective way to deal with farm collections would be to allocate these properties a number of drop off and collections points near to the main roads, removing the need to operate smaller vehicles transferring waste and recycles onto larger vehicles.

Resolved:

That the Council need to factor in the costs of these bins.

Appendix 2 – Reduced Grass Cutting

A number of ideas were provided by Members as follows:

- The need for more frequent cuts at the start of the Season

- Need for clear guidance to enable residents to cut their own grass if they wish to do so – What they can and cannot do
- Alternatives to grass should be explored ie Stone
- Need for an examination on how to maintain green areas

Appendix 3 – Changes to Capita Contract - No comments

Appendix 4 – Rossendale Markets

The Chair indicated that this item had been deferred as more evidence had been received on the day the Cabinet met. Members were still given the opportunity to comment.

A member clarified the situation regarding Haslingden Market and the fact that following investigation into the high water bills from Haslingden Market, United Utilities had identified a water leak. The Haslingden Market traders would look at productive ideas for the Market once the problem had been sorted.

Members made the following comments:

- Why the Council had not picked up the high water bill which was almost £2,000 more than each of Rawtenstall and Bacup Markets
- Possibility of a rebate from United Utilities for the leak
- People need the three markets to enable them to turn round their fresh food –as many stallholders have stalls on each of the markets
- Bacup Flea Market operates on a seasonal basis and if it wasn't there on a Friday, other market traders would lose out
- Timescales not realistic for Haslingden market traders to do their development work due to hold-ups with water leaks

Resolved:

That Cabinet agree that due to recent problems, a more realistic timescales be approved to enable Haslingden market traders to develop a social enterprise for the running of the Market.

Appendix 5 – Grant Funding

Members were concerned over the timescales within the report and wanted organisations to be informed much earlier – possibly May

Appendix 6 – Reduction in Repairs and Maintenance Budget – no comments

Appendix 7 – Reduction in Training Budget

Members agreed that there was a need to undertake more in-house training.

A member felt that whilst staff are asked to do more and more work, there was a limit as to how much the training budget could be cut without it having an impact on staff performance.

There was also a suggestion that there was a need to work in partnership with other local authorities, especially for Member training.

Appendix 8 – Alternative Arrangements for the Care of Animals

No specific comments, other than the Council asking local people if they would like to home any of the animals.

Appendix 9 – Weekend Supervision of Sports Facilities

No specific comments.

Appendix 10 – Introduction of a transaction fee for the use of credit cards when paying for Council Tax and other Council services

A member of the public felt that customers were being victimised for charging the 1.8% fee for use of credit cards for payment of Council Tax. The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources explained the reason for this indicating that Rossendale was the collection authority for LCC, Police and Fire and any charges made in the process of collection these funds fall to Rossendale Borough Council.

Appendix 11 – Ski Rossendale

A number of comments were raised by Members as follows:

- The slopes are referred to as an iconic site and it would be a shame if we had to lose them
- They should have been monitoring some 8-10 years ago as to how the facility was being run
- If we had invested, the potential to be income generated would be there for all to see now
- Difficult for a local authority to give the focus it needed

The Head of Finance explained the costings for securing the site, making it safe and decommissioning. A member asked whether the costs for securing the site and other additional money needed for decommissioning etc, could be given to anyone submitting a viable proposal to sustain/support the Ski slope.

The Head of Finance responded to a question raised by a member of the public as to what the Council was putting into the Leisure Trust in 2011/12.

Members asked that the Council encourage dialogue with any interested social enterprise and also asked that there be clarification on a proposed closure date.

Appendix 12 – Communications Strategy

Members indicated that as the Rossendale Alive had ceased production, there was a need to look seriously as to how the Council business goes into the public domain. Better use of the area notice boards was important.

Medium Term Financial Strategy Report (MTFS)

A member commented on the size of the cuts and whilst some of the efficiencies had improved systems ie the telephony system, some were invariably linked to individual members of staff.

A number of questions were raised as follows, to which the Head of Finance responded.

- Where does the Council stand with the Capital Programme?
- Will there be any member input on the Capital Programme and will this be presented to Overview and Scrutiny prior to Cabinet?
- Top up for Disabled Facilities Grants
- Does the £137k cover the one year loss of Council Tax?
- What is Plan B regarding area based funding by LCC
- Members need to know the extent to which LCC cuts would affect Rossendale

A Member thanked staff and Officers for their intense hard work that had gone into presenting the report.

Concern was expressed that the Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy had been presented to Cabinet prior to Scrutiny.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions during the meeting.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and finished at 9.15pm

Signed
(Chair)

Date

