

MINUTES OF: THE CABINET

Date of Meeting: Wednesday, 7th December 2005

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

**IN ATTENDANCE: Owen Williams, Chief Executive
Carolyn Wilkins, Deputy Chief Executive
George Graham, Executive Director of Resources
Phil Seddon, Head of Financial Services
Liz Murphy, Head of Human Resources
Carole Todd, Head of Street Scene and Liveability
Angela Parkinson, Interim Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Anne Storah, Senior Forward Planning Officer
Heather Moore, Executive Office Manager**

**ALSO PRESENT: Councillors A. Barnes, Entwistle, Robertson, Sandiford,
Starkey
Councillor G Buckley, Rushcliffe Borough Council
2 Representatives from the Press**

1. BUSINESS MATTERS

1.1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Janet Farquharson.

1.2. MINUTES

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on the 9th November 2005 be signed by the Chair as a correct record.

1.3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members of the Cabinet were asked to consider whether they had an interest in any matters to be discussed at the meeting and the following interest was declared:-

Councillor Michael Ormerod declared a personal interest in Minute Number 16 (Plots at Futures Park) by virtue of his friendship with the Directors of a firm involved in the bidding for the sites.

2. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No questions were put to the meeting under this item.

3. PROGRESS ASSESSMENT REVIEW – SELF ASSESSMENT

The Cabinet considered the report of the Chief Executive seeking endorsement of the self assessment of the Council's position, which had been prepared to inform the Audit Commission's Progress Assessment Review.

The Leader, Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive made a presentation which looked at the process of the assessment, together with details of the progress made by the Council over the last 12 months and an outline of the Council's future plans.

The Chair of the Audit and Performance Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee reported that members of that Committee had considered the report and were encouraged by the overall progress and achievements to date.

Decision Made:

That the draft self assessment be endorsed.

Reason for Decision:

The Audit Commission is required to undertake an annual Progress Assessment Review and the self assessment is part of the ongoing development of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment system. It is an opportunity for the Council and citizens to understand the rate of progress within the organisation and how far it has to travel to achieve excellence.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

4. ROSSENDALE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration presented the report of the Deputy Chief Executive which outlined the key elements of the Local Development Scheme Annual Monitoring Report which was currently being prepared for submission to the Secretary of State.

The Chair of the Policy Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee reported that the Committee had considered the report and noted its contents.

Decision Made:

That the responsibility for the Annual Monitoring Report be delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration.

Reason for Decision:

The Annual Monitoring Report is required to be submitted to the Secretary of State by 31st December 2005 therefore it was considered that delegated authority was the appropriate course of action in order to meet the statutory deadline.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

5. FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Risk Management presented the report of the Head of Financial Services which outlined General Fund estimates for 2005/06 and progress on capital spend and disposals together with the Housing Revenue Account.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Risk Management reported that Development Control income was currently £63k adverse against its end of October budget. He further highlighted that a new Business Reserve Account had been opened which exceeded rates offered by other bankers and he commended officers in obtaining the account.

The Chair of the Policy Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee reported that the Committee had considered the report and noted its comments.

The Executive Director of Resources reported on the announcement of the Minister of State for Local Government in respect of the Revenue Support Grant Settlement. He informed the Cabinet that the settlement was broadly favourable and did not give cause to change the Council's longer term financial plans.

Decision Made:

That the contents of the report be endorsed.

Reason for Decision:

Monitoring is required to ensure the Council's budgetary targets are achieved.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

6. HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY AND COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

The Cabinet Member for Human Resources presented the report of the Head of Human Resources which outlined the Human Resources Strategy and Competency Framework.

The Cabinet Member for Human Resources reported that the Strategy established a framework to deliver increased productivity and greater customer focus in front line services by building capacity through partnership and the development of skills and competencies to improve service delivery and achieve value for money.

Decision Made:

That the Human Resources Strategy and Competency Framework be approved.

Reason for Decision:

The Council has to build capacity within the organisation to ensure that improvements are made and the Strategy establishes a framework to deliver increased productivity and greater focus in front line services. The delivery of consistent and effective service improvements relies on the skills and capacity of the workforce.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

7. RACE EQUALITY SCHEME

The Cabinet Member for Human Resources presented the report of the Human Resources Manager which outlined the revised Race Equality Scheme.

She reported that there was a legal requirement to review the Race Equality Scheme every three years; accordingly the scheme had been reviewed and updated. She informed the Cabinet that the Scheme would be subject to further consultation with the communities of Rossendale.

The Head of Human Resources reported that a three year action plan had been developed which outlined the Council's approach to promoting race equality.

The Chair of the Policy Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee reported that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had considered the Race Equality Scheme at its meeting in August and its recommendation to the Cabinet was that the Scheme be approved.

Decision Made:

That the Race Equality Scheme be approved.

Reason for Decision:

The Council is committed to promoting equality and the Race Equality Scheme sets out the Council's role in securing racial equality in Rossendale.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

8. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

The Cabinet considered the report of the Head of Customer Services and E-Government which outlined the Council's draft Communications Strategy.

The Deputy Chief Executive reported that improved communication was a key element of the improvement and change process. She outlined a number of actions taken to develop communication within the Council and with customers and residents as detailed below.

Staff Newsletter and Daily Message
Redesigned and Improved Web Pages
New Corporate Brand/Identity

She informed the Cabinet that an Action Plan to support the delivery of the Communications Strategy had been developed, a copy of which was submitted to the Cabinet for their consideration.

The Cabinet considered the five main communication challenges outlined in the Strategy as detailed below.

Key Challenge 1	Improving the profile of the Council
Key Challenge 2	Improving customer satisfaction
Key Challenge 3	Engaging with communities
Key Challenge 4	Promoting Rossendale
Key Challenge 5	Engaging with Staff

Decisions Made:

1. That the draft Communications Strategy be approved for consultation subject to the amendment to key challenge 5 by way of the inclusion of engaging with members in addition to staff.
2. That the Strategy be submitted to the Policy Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee to enable them to submit recommendations to Cabinet.

Reasons for the Decisions:

The development of a Communications Strategy is one of the identified tasks within the Corporate Improvement Plan to improve the communications infrastructure within the Council.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

9. PROCUREMENT STRATEGY

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Risk Management presented the report of the Head of Financial Services which outlined the development of a Procurement Strategy.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Risk Management highlighted that the development, implementation and monitoring of the Strategy was one of the Council's key outputs and outcomes for 2005/06 in the Corporate Improvement Plan.

The Chair of the Policy Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee reported that members of that Committee had considered the report and endorsed the Strategy. The Committee welcomed cost savings however concerns were raised in respect of the impact of the Strategy on small to medium enterprises.

The Executive Director of Resources reported that the East Lancashire ePartnership had undertaken a project to engage with small to medium enterprises through electronic market places. He outlined the additional work which would be undertaken in the next financial year to support and provide opportunities for small to medium enterprises.

Decision Made:

That the Procurement Strategy be approved.

Reason for Decision:

The Strategy will ensure that a corporate approach to procurement is adopted and it will be used to support the delivery of priorities set by local people.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

10. STREET SCENE AND LIVEABILITY REVIEW OF FRONTLINE SERVICES PARTNERSHIP OPTIONS

The Cabinet Member for Street Scene and Liveability presented the report of the Head of Street Scene and Liveability which outlined the findings of a review undertaken in respect of Environmental Services, specifically refuse and recycling collections, street cleansing and grounds maintenance.

The Cabinet Member for Street Scene and Liveability reported on the options appraisal undertaken to explore methods of service delivery, the outcome of which was to explore building capacity through the development of a strategic partnership.

The Cabinet considered the Service Improvement Plan for street cleansing, refuse collection and grounds maintenance which would be required to be undertaken prior to entering into future arrangements.

Cabinet Members acknowledged the dedication of the workforce within the Service.

The Deputy Chief Executive further highlighted the improvements made in respect of recycling targets.

Decision Made:

1. That the Service Improvement Plan be approved.
2. That the Audit and Performance Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee be requested to review the Service Improvement Plan to ensure delivery of the tasks within the Plan.
3. That the Council commences a procurement process to secure a strategic partner for the provision of the service.

Reasons for Decisions:

The Council needs to build capacity to ensure continuous improvement in the efficiency and effectiveness of the services.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

Current methods of service delivery cannot be sustained. Performance needs to be improved to ensure that the standard and quality of the service is enhanced.

11. FUTURE PROVISION OF INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICES

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Risk Management presented the report of the Head of Financial Services which outlined proposals for the provision of Internal Audit Services for the Council.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Risk Management reported that the provision of internal audit services was currently carried out through a management arrangement with Lancashire Audit Services (LAS) and two internal audit staff employed by the Council.

He outlined changes within the Council which afforded the opportunity to extend the current arrangements with Lancashire Audit Services.

Decisions Made:

1. That standing orders be waived.
2. That it be approved that the provision of internal audit services be undertaken by Lancashire County Council's Lancashire Audit Service on an initial three year agreement, as soon as is practical, with the option for a further two year extension.

Reasons for Decisions:

The Council has a current existing arrangement with Lancashire Audit Service and the rate offered by LAS for the proposed new arrangement is considered to be equivalent to those offered by similar organisations in the professional financial sector.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

12. CONSULTATION ON THE LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration presented the report of the Deputy Chief Executive which outlined the current position in respect of the second Local Transport Plan which the County Council was currently consulting on.

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration reported that the second Local Transport Plan would cover the period 2006/07 to 2010/11 and was a county-wide document that was produced by Lancashire County Council. He outlined the priorities that had emerged through consultation on the provisional plan which had principally been undertaken through the Transport and Highways Group of the Local Strategic Partnership together with a meeting of the Lancashire Local.

The Chair of the Policy Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee reported that members of that Committee had considered the report and made a number of comments in respect of new developments and their impact on congestion together with the importance of public transport in ensuring access to health services particularly provision of adequate service to Queens Park Hospital, Blackburn.

Decisions Made:

That the priorities detailed in the report be endorsed and the Deputy Chief Executive be given authority to provide a response for submission to Lancashire County Council.

Reasons for Decision:

The Local Transport Plan will set out where and how the County Council will direct and deploy its transport related resources over the five year period of the plan and it is important therefore that Rossendale's requirements and priorities are adequately articulated and represented.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

13. LANCASHIRE LOCALS

The Cabinet considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive which outlined a proposal by Lancashire County Council to introduce local committees (Lancashire Locals) in each of Lancashire's 12 Districts.

She reported on the pilot arrangements in place from July 2004 to July 2005 and pointed out that Rossendale was one of the four pilot areas together with Hyndburn, West Lancashire and South Ribble.

The Chair of the Audit and Performance Management Committee reported that members of that Committee had considered the report and supported the proposal to continue Lancashire Local in Rossendale.

Decision Made:

That the proposal to extend the Lancashire Local Initiative be supported and the continuation of the Lancashire Local for Rossendale be welcomed.

Reason for Decision:

Lancashire Locals provide an opportunity for joint working in relation to delivery of local government services.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

14. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

Decision Made:

That the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 7 and 9 of Part 1 of schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

15. WRITE OFF OUTDATED HOUSING BENEFITS OVERPAYMENTS

The Cabinet considered the report of the Head of Customer Services and E-Government which outlined outdated debts from the Housing Benefit Sundry Debtor Account.

The Executive Director of Resources reported that write-off of such debt would have no impact on the revenue budget.

Decision Made:

That the outstanding Housing Benefit overpayments, where all recovery options have been exhausted, be written off and that they be resurrected if the debtor has future benefit entitlement.

Reason for Decision:

All recovery options have been considered.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

16. PLOTS AT FUTURES PARK

The Cabinet considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive which outlined marketing arrangements in respect of plots at Futures Park.

Decisions made:

1. That members agree to the Deputy Chief Executive via the client side support of Trevor Dawson, Chartered Surveyors advising Firm A that they have preferred developer status for Plots 1, 4 and 5.
2. That members agree to give delegated authority to the Deputy Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council to progress via Trevor Dawson the development of the Expression of Interest submitted by Firm A into a building agreement which will ensure commencement on site of an agreed scheme within a 9-12 month period from January 2006.

3. That members agree that if Firm A fail to develop an agreed scheme that meets with the use, design and layout criteria or adhere to the timescales to develop their full schemes and commit to development within the 9-12 month period, then the preferred developer status will be removed, and the relevant plots will be made available to the market.

Reasons for the Decisions:

The proposed actions to release the sites will move towards achievement of the North West Development Agency's specified outputs to satisfy the terms and conditions of the grant.

Alternative options considered and rejected:

None.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 8.30pm)