

MINUTES OF: THE CABINET

Date of Meeting: Wednesday 15th February 2012

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

**In Attendance: Mrs H Lockwood, Chief Executive
Mr S Sugarman, Director of Business
Ms F Meechan, Director of Customers and Communities
Mr P Seddon, Head of Finance and Property Services
Mr S Jackson, Head of Health, Housing and Regeneration
Mrs J Cook, Committee Officer**

**Also Present: Councillors Cheetham, Crawforth, Driver, Essex, Evans,
Farrington, Morris, Oakes, Pilling, Robertson, Sandiford, D.
Smith, Stansfield**

3 members of the public

3 members of the press

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence, all Cabinet Members were present.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 1st December 2011 be approved as a correct record.

3. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business. However the Leader of the Council announced the following regarding Cabinet Members and Portfolios:-

Cllr Alyson Barnes – Leader of the Council and Communities and Partnerships

Cllr Serridge – Deputy Leader, Customers, Licensing and Legal

Cllr MacNae – Regeneration, Tourism and Leisure

Cllr Marriott – Finance and Resources

Cllr Lamb – Operational Services and Development Control

Cllr Jackson – Housing and Environmental Health

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Leader of the Council stated that one member of the public had given advance notice of their intention to speak and that this question would be taken first.

Mrs Edith Freeman asked a question in relation to Item C2, specifically the Maintenance Plan for Council owned buildings created the Stock Condition Survey received by the Council in January 2012. It was noted that the anticipated cost of maintaining Haslingden Pool in a safe and useable condition for the next five years is included in the maintenance plan but that it was unclear whether that swimming pool, and its related offices and services, are classed as a Primary site or as a Secondary site. Mrs Freeman asked for confirmation that the Haslingden Pool was included in both the 'desired' and 'affordable' expenditure tables in Item C2, Appendix 1, and advise whether it is classed as Primary or Secondary and whether the status of a building affect the level of effort and/or money the Council will put into preserving a building in habitable and useable condition?

The Leader of the Council replied that the investment requirement for HS Pool has been included within the "primary" locations and has been spread evenly at a value of £286k per annum over the 4 year period 2013 - 2017. No allowance has therefore been included in either the "desired" or "affordable" capital programme for 2012/13. The Council has, during 2011/12, funded any immediate refurbishment issues and together with the Trust and structural engineers, would continue to monitor the facility. Future levels of investment will therefore be decided in future year budget considerations.

Mr Leonard Entwistle asked a question in relation to Leisure and asked whether the Council should be involved in leisure at all or pull out, as this was not a statutory requirement? In addition he queried the content of the accounting and reporting of the Leisure Trust in respect of the Council's monthly financial reports.

The Leader of the Council replied that the Council had a massive commitment to leisure in Rossendale and would continue the conversation with the Leisure Trust to ensure value for money. It was noted that the Leisure Trust were a separate organisation and it was therefore not appropriate to contain line-by-line financial information in the Council's report and this information was available from the Leisure Trust as a public body.

6. REVENUE BUDGET, COUNCIL TAX AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2012/13

- 6.1 The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources introduced the report and noted that the report required an additional recommendation at 1.4 that Full Council be recommended to approve the revised fees and charges schedule.
- 6.2 It was noted that the report was to enable the Council to recommend to Full Council the revenue budget and level of council tax for 2012/13, together with implications for the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. The Portfolio Holder noted that council tax was frozen for the second year running and the Council would receive a

one-off grant from central Government of £138k for 2012/13. Assumptions of a 3% rise for each of the following years thereafter had been made as per the previously agreed MTFs Strategy. The risk and forecast assumptions were outlined which could include a drop in Rate Support Grant of 39%. The localisation of council tax benefits and any liability implications for the Council as a collection authority, were not included in the MTFs. It was noted that fees and charges were in line with inflation, Trade Waste charges reflected the increases announced by Lancashire County Council and in particular Pest Control charges had been increased in order to reduce the current £20k annual loss.

6.3 Members were invited to comment on the report and the following points were raised:-

- Officers were commended for their hard work in delivering this budget.
- It was noted that approximately £1.3m of savings were still required to be found.
- Concerns were expressed regarding the decision at the previous Council meeting regarding council tax, without due consideration of all the facts.
- It was noted the Lancashire Police Authority would be increasing their element of Council tax
- the short term nature of the grant accepted from central Government will not be available in the coming years.
- Concerns were expressed regarding member allowances, mileage rates and the omission of a recommendation to approach the Boundary Commission to reduce the number of Councillors. The Leader noted that this would be brought to Cabinet in due course after consultation but would have little material impact on the Council's £1.3m savings target. .
- Continuation of PCSO funding was welcomed.
- Clarification was sought on the VAT Shelter for Green Vale Homes and it was noted that this would end in 2016 and that allowances were being made for this in the MTFs with reserves being built to compensate.
- The Band D council tax equivalent remaining at £253.40 was welcomed. It was also noted that this formed a small percentage of the annual council tax bill.
- Reference was made to a large council tax rise 9 years ago.
- Clarification was sought regarding page 12 of the Revenue Budget Book regarding Business Start Up and Valley Centre – the Head of Finance and Property Services agreed to send Councillor Morris a breakdown of this information.
- Clarification was sought whether money had been set aside for repairs for all swimming pools. It was noted that there was pressure on the budgets, however decisions would be taken on repairs as and when issues occurred. A summary of the structural reports would be made available to Councillors.

Resolved:

1. That Cabinet recommends to Council a net budget requirement for Rossendale Council for 2012/13 of £9,829,000.

2. That Cabinet recommends to Council a 0% increase in Council Tax and that the Band D equivalent for 2012/13 remains at £253.40.
3. That Cabinet recommends to Council that the Head of Finance and Property Services be instructed to prepare the technical resolutions necessary to give effect to these proposals.
4. That Full Council be recommended to approve the revised fees and charges schedule.

Reason for Decision

To ensure that the Council has a balanced budget in place for 2012/13.

Alternative Options Considered

None

7. CAPITAL RESOURCES 2012-2015 AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2012/13

- 7.1 The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources introduced the report and noted that much of this had been discussed in the previous item.
- 7.2 Members were invited to comment on the report and the following comments were made:-
 - Concerns were expressed regarding the Capital Programme and the financial status of the Council in general and whether the Council was considering merging with another authority. It was noted that the Council was consulting with nearby Councils regarding some shared services.
 - Assurance was sought regarding the Council's assets and it was noted that best value would be obtained as a matter of course.

Resolved:

1. That the potential resources for 2012/13 are noted.
2. That the affordable capital programme for 2012/13 is recommended to Council.
3. That the additional capital programme requirements are noted, especially the results of the Stock Condition Survey and a priority list for further investment be determined should additional resources materialise during 2012/13.
4. That Cabinet recommends to Council the allocation of any additional resources, up to £400k, during 2012/13 to the Head of Finance and Property Services and the Portfolio Holder, having regard to the Stock Condition Survey, the desired programme and the capital receipts available. Any additional allocations to be reported to Members via the Council's regular financial reporting framework.

Reason for Decision

To ensure that resources are available to meet the capital programme for 2012/13.

Alternative Options Considered

None

8. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT PRACTICES (UPDATES FOR 2012/13)

- 8.1 The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources introduced the report and noted that this was a statutory report in respect of the Council's treasury management strategy and practices.
- 8.2 Members were invited to comment on the report; no comments were made.

Resolved:

1. That the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Treasury Management Practices are recommended to Council.

Reason for Decision

To reduce the Council's exposure to financial risk.

Alternative Options Considered

None

9. CORPORATE PROJECTS

- 9.1 The Leader of the Council introduced the report provided an update on the Council's main corporate projects.
- 9.2 Valley Centre
Demolition was due to start within the next 1-2 weeks, after which landscaping would commence. The Council was seeking a preferred development partner at a valley-wide level. It was noted a bid for the Mary Portas Pilot Scheme would be submitted and that a meeting had taken place with business leaders that day. The Leader hoped that the Valley's MP would support the process.
- 9.3 Bacup Trail Head Centre
This project had been made public and a business case was being considered with reports to come forward to the March Cabinet.
- 9.4 Marl Pits
Utilities work was coming to an end on the site and handover was anticipated for October 2012.
- 9.5 Members were invited to comment on the report and the following comments were made:-

- It was noted that the Mary Portas Pilot meeting had been successfully held and the bid was being lead by Rawtenstall Business Leaders. It was noted that the Valley's MP had attended the meeting and expressed support.
- It was noted that the Vocational Training Centre had held a public event to engage with park users and residents. Clarification was given on what a 'studio school' was. It was confirmed that no formal plan had been submitted for the Vocational Training Centre to be a 'studio school' and should any plan be submitted it would be responded to appropriately.
- The cost of the Valley Centre demolition was queried and it was noted that the project had a budget of £2.5m and would be contained within this budget.
- Clarification was given of any traffic issues on Kay Street with regard to the Valley Centre demolition and it was noted that the businesses were being liaised with directly.

Resolved:

1. That the contents of the report are noted.

Reason for Decision

To continue to deliver the Council's key priority projects.

Alternative Options Considered

None

10. ROSSENDALE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT

10.1 The Leader of the Council introduced the report which asked the Cabinet to consider the development of an Armed Forces Community Covenant which would provide a framework to support forces veterans and their families.

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

- The importance of supporting forces families and veterans and the issues that they face, such as depression, unemployment and homelessness.
- Support from community groups was already being provided and that this covenant would facilitate additional resources.
- It was noted that the Armed Forces Champion would be appointed in due course via a future Cabinet Report.
- Examples were given of the work being carried out by Lancashire County Council in respect of supporting the Armed Forces.
- It was noted that young persons' groups such as the Sea Cadets and the Air and Army Core could benefit from this covenant in the future as they were often future recruits for the Armed Forces.
- It was noted that veterans were of all ages and often young with appalling injuries and that the covenant would provide a framework around which additional support could be given.
- It was noted that the British Legion had been consulted.

Resolved:

1. That the Cabinet agrees to the signing of a Rossendale Armed Forces Community Covenant to be agreed by stakeholders from across all sectors.
2. That the Cabinet agree to appoint a Councillor as the Council's Armed Forces Champion.
3. That the proactive work already undertaken by Rossendale Enterprise Anchor Ltd (REAL) is noted and the Cabinet further notes that it looks forward to working with them developing the Community Covenant.

Reason for Decision

To meet the needs of armed forces personnel, veterans and their families.

Alternative Options Considered

None

11. GREEN DEAL AND ENERGY COMPANY OBLIGATION

- 11.1 The Portfolio Holder for Operational Services and Development Control introduced the report which sought Member approval to consult with other Lancashire authorities in response to the Government's Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation proposals.
- 11.2 The Portfolio Holder noted that the Green Deal was the governments proposed approach to energy efficiency and carbon reduction in existing domestic and non-domestic properties which was a loan to be repaid via utility bills. This would follow the 'golden rule' that savings should be greater than the cost paid by the consumer. In addition the Energy Company Obligation was outlined, which was a requirement on energy companies to improve the energy efficiency of hard to treat houses, for example solid wall properties similar to the traditional housing in Rossendale.
- 11.3 The Portfolio Holder outlined the 3 options for the Council which were to become a 'Green Deal' providing including acting as a loan provider or as a registered installer, being a partner of a registered provider or installer (the approach most authorities are expected to take) or to act as a 'signpost' to green deal and ECO opportunities. It was noted that more investigation and information was required before the Council could take a decision on which approach to take and consideration must be given to protecting vulnerable customers.
- 11.4 Members were invited to comment on the report and the following comments were made:-
 - The importance of protecting vulnerable customers.
 - It was noted that the Council needed to proceed cautiously with a signposting approach to ensure the Council was not discredited.
 - It was noted that there may be an opportunity for income generation, should existing Building Control Officers undertake independent surveys.

- Concerns were expressed regarding the visual impact and architecture of existing properties.

Resolved

1. That the contents of the report are noted and investigation of options and engagement with other Lancashire authorities to develop a response to the Green Deal continues.
2. That all future minor amendments to the policy approach be delegated to the Planning Manager in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

Reason for Decision

To positively improve the performance of building stock in the Borough and address fuel poverty.

Alternative Options Considered

None

12. PENNINE LANCASHIRE EMPTY HOMES PROJECT

12.1 The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Tourism and Leisure introduced the report which outlined the development of a project bid for the Empty Homes Fund, which would see the Council be the lead body on this project. It was noted that this bid fell in line with the Council's existing Vacant Property Strategy and was a good scheme intended to bring vacant properties back into use. It was noted that the Council had an ambitious target to bring 50% of Rossendale's vacant properties back into use.

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

- The potential for apprenticeships and up-skilling people through this project.
- The work of officers was noted.
- Clarification was sought as to how many empty homes had been brought back into use since May 2011. The Head of Health, Housing and Regeneration agreed to provide this information to Councillor Essex.
- It was noted that a decision on this bid was expected in mid-March with a start date of April, if successful.

Resolved

1. That Rossendale Borough Council be approved as the accountable body for this project.
2. That all future minor amendments to the project be delegated to the Head of Health, Housing and Regeneration in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

Reason for Decision

To try to address the levels of long term empty homes across Pennine Lancashire and enable greater integration with existing local housing strategies and delivery plans.

Alternative Options Considered

None

13. FINANCIAL MONITORING 2011/12

13.1 The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources introduced the report and noted that council tax collection rates were positive, despite the squeeze on families' resources.

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

- Clarification was sought regarding a sum of £37k which had been received following the construction of Free Lane Apartments in Helmshore, which was not apparent within the report. It was noted that this was money received from a Section 106 agreement and recorded on page 35 of the Appendix to the financial report. Clarification was sought regarding the usage of this money and the timescale from receipt. It was agreed that the information regarding the Snig Hole project would be sent to Councillor Evans.
- The Leader of the Council noted that Councillors could approach Officers at any time to ask for information regarding these matters.
- It was noted that the £42k noted regarding Edgeside Play Area was not expenditure by the Council, but was grant money which the Council was holding on the residents' behalf and acting as project Manager.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

Reason for Decision

To enabled continued management of the Council's finances.

Alternative Options Considered

None

14. INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT – QUARTER 2 (JULY TO SEPTEMBER 2011)

14.1 The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources outlined the report.

14.2 The Leader of the Council noted that acquisitive crime figures were up, and there was a lower rate of return in non-domestic rates.

14.3 Members were invited to comment on the report; no comments were made.

Resolved:

1. That the levels of performance are noted.
2. That Cabinet will continue to monitor performance of those indicators that are under-achieving targeted levels of performance and may wish to request further information on this from the relevant Manager.

Reason for Decision

To continue to monitor the Councils' performance against its targets.

Alternative Options Considered

None

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 8pm

_____ CHAIR
_____ DATE