

Executive Cabinet

Minutes of meeting held on Thursday, 18 February 2010

Present: Councillor Peter Goldsworthy (Executive Leader in the Chair), Councillor Pat Case (Deputy Leader of the Council) and Councillors Eric Bell, Kevin Joyce, Peter Malpas, Greg Morgan and John Walker

Also in attendance:

Lead Members: Councillors Harold Heaton (Lead Member (Development Control)) and Keith Iddon (Lead Member (Licensing))

Other Members: Councillors Alan Cullens, Mike Devaney, Dennis Edgerley, Pat Haughton, Anthony Gee, Roy Lees, Adrian Lowe, June Molyneaux, Mick Muncaster, Geoffrey Russell, Ralph Snape and Peter Wilson

10.EC.132 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Kenneth Ball, Henry Counce and Iris Smith.

10.EC.133 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

Councillor Peter Malpas declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 5 (Overview and Scrutiny Inquiry – Highways Issues) by virtue of his status as a Lancashire County Councillor. Councillor Malpas took no part in the discussion or voting on the agenda item.

10.EC.134 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive Cabinet held on 7 January 2010 were confirmed as a correct record for signature by the Executive Leader.

10.EC.135 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Executive Leader reported that there had been no requests from any member of the public to speak on any of the meeting's agenda items.

10.EC.136 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY INQUIRY - HIGHWAYS ISSUES

The Executive Cabinet received and considered a report on the findings and recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group that had been set up by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to examine highways issues.

The inquiry had, in particular, reviewed the effectiveness of the current service and considered ways in which two tier arrangements could be improved by more efficient service delivery, communication procedures and performance monitoring systems.

The Chair of the Task Group (Councillor Mike Devaney) thanked the Group's Members and Officers for their involvement and commended the findings report's recommendations for adoption by the Executive Cabinet.

Decision made:

That the findings and recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group be received and that the Executive's response to the recommendations be determined at a future meeting.

Reason for decision:

The decision will allow the Executive the opportunity to assess the inquiry's findings and recommendations before firm decisions on implementation are reached.

Alternative option(s) considered and rejected:

None.

10.EC.137 REVIEW OF COUNCIL MEETINGS CALENDAR FOR 2010/11

The Director of Transformation presented a report on a review of the Council's meetings calendar, with a view to the reduction of a relatively few number of meetings in 2010/11 and changes to the servicing arrangements for Chorley Partnership bodies and the Local Development Framework Working Group.

The review had been undertaken in the light of the proposal emanating from the recent Value for Money review of Corporate Support Services to reduce the staffing level of the Democratic Services Section, but had also taken account of the need to ensure both the continued good governance of decision making and the transaction of business as quickly and efficiently as possible.

During the Members' debate on the proposals, the following specific issues were raised in particular:

- There is likely to be a need to hold a number of informal Neighbourhood Working meetings during the year, which would not require servicing by the Democratic Services Section.
- The feasibility of the Council's partners providing more administrative support for LSP meetings should be examined.
- The status of the Informal Cabinet Briefings should be examined by the All Party Leaders' meeting.
- Meetings during school half-term weeks should be avoided whenever possible.

Decision made:

That the following changes in scheduled meetings be agreed, with the proviso that the issues raised by Members at the meeting on the meetings' timetable be discussed at the next meeting of the All Party Leaders:

- **Executive Cabinet, Informal Cabinet Briefing and Overview and Scrutiny Committee each reduce from 10 meetings a year to 8;**
- **Council meetings reduce from 7 meetings a year to 6, with the January meeting being removed from the calendar;**
- **Member Support Working Group to reduce from 5 meetings a year to 4;**
- **Support for the Rivington and Brinscall Local Advisory Group be reviewed with Lancashire County Council;**
- **The number of scrutiny reviews be managed within the resources of the Democratic Services Team;**
- **The Policy team, rather than the Democratic Services team, support both the Chorley Partnership Board and the Chorley Partnership Executive;**
- **The Policy team, rather than the Democratic Services Team, support any Task Groups established by the Equality Forum;**
- **The Planning team, rather than the Democratic Services Team, support the Local Development Framework Working Group, but the Democratic Services Team continue to support the Central Lancashire LDF Joint Advisory Committee (on a rotational basis) as at present;**

- In recognition of the importance of the neighbourhood working agenda to Councillors, the Democratic Services team support one Neighbourhood Tour and one Neighbourhood Area Action Planning Meeting for each Neighbourhood Area per year, with the dates being set in advance and included in the meetings' timetable.

Reason for decision:

Along with other more minor changes in working practice, the proposals will allow a sufficient reduction in the workload of the team to allow the deletion of one post of Democratic and Member Services Officer.

Alternative option(s) considered and rejected:

There remains an option to retain a similar calendar of meetings with no fundamental changes but this would not allow the reduction in staffing and therefore costs in the Democratic Services team.

10.EC.138 CHORLEY COUNCIL PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT - THIRD QUARTER OF 2009/10

The Executive Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Partnerships, Planning and Policy, which set out and reviewed the Authority's performance both in respect of the key projects included in the refreshed Corporate Strategy and against the National Indicators for which the Council was responsible, during the third quarter of 2009/10 ending on 31 December 2009.

The report referred to the key outcomes from the seven projects that had been completed during the third quarter period and which, therefore, had not been carried over into the new Corporate Strategy. The 33 projects included in the new Corporate Strategy had all been rated as "green", which was indicative of the project performance being on or ahead of schedule, with costs falling within or under budget.

In addition, the report confirmed that 11 of the 15 national indicators that were able to be measured during the third quarter had matched or exceeded target and that certain plans had been prepared to reduce the four performance indicators that had missed their targets by more than 5%.

Information on data comparing Chorley's performance against other authorities would be provided to Members when the data became available.

A Member referred to the seasonal implications on the processing of Housing and Council Tax Benefits and the cleaning of streets and suggested that the Council's operational processes should be reviewed to take account of the seasonal impact.

Decision made:

That the report be noted.

10.EC.139 CHORLEY PARTNERSHIP - PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT FOR THIRD QUARTER OF 2009/10

The Executive Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Partnerships, Planning and Policy on the activities of the Chorley Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), particularly through the delivery of the objectives of the Lancashire Area Agreement and the Sustainable Communities Strategy over the third quarter of 2009/10.

The Executive Member (Policy and Performance) highlighted the following significant statistics and trends revealed in the report.

- Crime figures had reduced, on average, by 0.8% over the past year, and whilst there had been a 7.5% overall decrease in violent crime, the number of acquisitive crimes (eg burglary and vehicle crime) had increased.
- The number of primary fires in Chorley had fallen below target.
- The number of households in Chorley living in temporary accommodation had fallen below target to 8.
- Street cleanliness (eg clearance of litter, detritus and graffiti) had fallen below target, but action plans had been put in place to improve performance.
- The number of benefit claimants had reduced over the last quarter period and the number of new business startups had exceeded the target figure.
- All the LSP's proposals for 2009/10 were underway and on track for the quarter period.

Decision made:

That the report be noted.

10.EC.140 GYPSY ROMA TRAVELLERS - ILLEGAL ENCAMPMENT PROCEDURE

The Director of People and Places presented a report seeking endorsement and adoption of a multi-agency response procedure for dealing with illegal Gypsy Roma Traveller encampments developed by a task team of the merged Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership.

The recommended procedure would ensure that the action taken by the different agencies was fair and consistent. The urgent welfare needs of persons in the encampments would be assessed and early communication procedures with both members of the encampment and appropriate Members would be established.

Members welcomed the introduction of the new procedure and the Deputy Leader of the Council suggested the posting of the procedure on an appropriate Gypsy Roma Traveller website.

Decision made:

That the multi-agency response procedure for dealing with illegal Gypsy Roma Traveller encampments developed by a task team of the merged Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, as outlined in the submitted report, be approved and adopted.

Reason for decision:

To ensure that the action in dealing with illegal encampments is undertaken in a fair, systematic and consistent way and that the settled community is kept informed of developments.

Alternative option(s) considered and rejected:

Retention of the existing ad hoc system for dealing with encampments.

10.EC.141 PROCESS FOR APPROVING THE CENTRAL LANCASHIRE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK CORE STRATEGY

The Director of Partnerships, Planning and Policy submitted a report requesting the Executive Cabinet's agreement to a timetable of future meetings aimed at ensuring Member engagement in the development and approval of a revised Publication Version of the Preferred Core Strategy for Central Lancashire as part of the overall Local Development Framework process.

The recommended approach entailed a series of additional meetings of both the Local Development Framework Working Group and the Central Lancashire LDF Joint Advisory Committee, culminating in a joint meeting of the Cabinets of Chorley, Preston and South Ribble Councils to endorse the first Core Strategy for approval by the respective Councils.

Decision made:

That the approach and timetable to ensure Member engagement in the production of the Publication version of the revised Central Lancashire LDF Core Strategy in line with the Project Plan, as outlined in the submitted report, be approved.

Reason for decision:

To ensure that Members are engaged in the development of the Core Strategy whilst ensuring that the LDF timetable and Project Plan remain on track.

Alternative option(s) considered and rejected:

None.

10.EC.142 UPDATE ON TRANSFER OF HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY

The Director of Partnerships, Planning and Policy presented a report updating the Executive Cabinet on the current progress of the procedures being taken to effect the transfer of the Chorley Home Improvement Agency back to the Council from Anchor in accordance with the Cabinet's decision in November 2009. The Cabinet had authorised the instigation of proceedings to establish an in-house Home Improvement Agency offering Disabled Facility Grants, Home Repair Assistance and Energy Efficiency grants and advice.

A project team had been set to oversee and agree measures for the transfer on 1 April 2010, including an examination of the procedures and systems used, procurement of contractors and TUPE matters.

It was envisaged that one member of staff would be transferred to the Council under the TUPE regulations, in addition to the two Technical Officers originally seconded to Anchor.

The report indicated that no additional revenue costs were likely to be incurred by the Council.

Decision made:

That the report be noted.

10.EC.143 LANCASHIRE REVIEW OF HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCIES

The Executive Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Partnerships, Planning and Policy on a review of the Home Improvement Agency network in Lancashire undertaken by Consultants, The Housing Quality Network Consultancy, commissioned by Lancashire County Council.

The review had been commissioned in order to advise future commissioning decisions by the Supporting People Commissioning Body which provided funding to the Lancashire HIA's and whose contracts were due to expire in 2010 and 2011. The outcome of the review would also support the attraction of funding from other partners.

The report indicated that the key recommendations emerging from the review were that the number of HIA services in the County should be reduced and that a new approach to funding agencies as based on needs should be adopted.

The report also contained suggested responses to the Consultants questions and requested feedback on the review's recommendations.

Decision made:

That the proposed responses to the recommendations contained in the report findings of the Consultants commissioned to review the provision of Home Improvement services across Lancashire, as outlined in the submitted report, be approved for submission to the Consultants and the Lancashire County Council.

Reason for decision:

To ensure the provision of a full and considered response to the review, aimed at influencing decisions of the Lancashire County Council and other partners which affect Chorley's services.

Alternative option(s) considered and rejected:

None.

10.EC.144 SUB-REGIONAL ALLOCATIONS POLICY AND CHOICE-BASED LETTINGS PROCEDURE

The Executive Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Partnerships, Planning and Policy proposing the adoption of a Sub-Regional Housing Allocations Policy and a choice-based lettings procedure, following a consultation exercise with various bodies and stakeholders.

The choice-based lettings scheme, operated on a sub-regional basis, would allow people to apply for social housing vacancies advertised through various mediums, rather than waiting for an organisation to identify their needs and preferences through the waiting list.

The Council had collaborated with Preston and South Ribble Councils and local registered landlords on the development of an allocations policy that could be applied across the three Council areas, utilising the transparent 5 band allocations policy currently applied by Chorley Council.

Decision made:

That, subject to consultation, the Sub-Regional Allocations Policy and Choice-based lettings scheme, as outlined in the submitted report, be approved in principle for adoption as Chorley Council's allocations scheme and procedure.

Reason for decision:

The introduction of a Sub-Regional Choise-based lettings scheme will provide greater choice and access for persons to housing. It will be a simpler, more comprehensible system, allowing greater transparency and choice of living location. It will simplify application processes, enabling one application to be made for all partners.

Alternative option(s) considered and rejected:

Retention of the current system, or developing a localised choice-based scheme.

10.EC.145 PROPOSED HOUSING CAPITAL PROGRAMME FOR 2010/11 AND ALLOCATION OF REPOSSESSION GRANTS

The Executive Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Partnerships, Planning and Policy recommending the allocation of grant funding to prevent property repossessions; the introduction of a standard repossessions policy; and approval of a draft housing capital programme.

The Council had received in 2009/10 three non-recurrent grant sums to be expended on measures and schemes to be targeted to assist persons most affected by the “credit crunch” and at risk of property repossessions. The report put forward for support a number of principles and initiatives to which the grant funding could be applied.

The report also highlighted the likelihood of the Council’s proportion of the regional housing pot, which was used to finance the housing capital programme, being reduced to £397,000 (excluding Disabled Facility Grant monies) in 2010/11, as a result of the introduction of a new regional allocation methodology. In order to target the reduced capital resources more strategically to areas of need, the proposal revised priorities and respective budget allocations for 2010/11, which maintained new affordable housing development projects as its principal priority, were set out in the report.

A Member present queried the amount and source of funding on the Cotswold house refurbishments.

Decisions made:

That the Council be recommended to:

- 1. approve the allocation of the grant funding resources received in 2009/10 to the various initiatives identified in the submitted report;**
- 2. approve the introduction of the Chorley Repossession and Eviction Prevention Fund Policy, as attached to the submitted report;**
- 3. approve the draft Housing Capital Programme, subject to confirmation of the allocation of the capital grant.**

Reasons for decisions:

1. The grant funding available is intended to be used to prevent homelessness caused by repossessions, either through the provision of education material or marketing.
2. To enable the Council’s promotion of housing and the policies and procedures applicable to the newly established in-house Home Improvement Agency to be communicated to the public.

Alternative option(s) considered and rejected:

1. That the funding is not used for repossession measures.
2. That the Capital Programme is not set until the findings of the private sector stock condition survey are published.

10.EC.146 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING, 2009/10 - THIRD QUARTER OF 2009/10

The Executive Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Transformation monitoring the Council's financial performance during the third quarter of 2009/10 in comparison with the budgetary and efficiency savings targets for the financial year.

The report revealed that the expected overall target savings of £410,000 in 2009/10 had already been achieved and that the projected outturn envisaged an underspend in the region of £169,000 at the year end. However, expenditure would need to be continually monitored in order to offset lower than anticipated income levels in the financial year. In particular, major income streams (eg car parking and building control fees and concessionary travel and benefits costs) would be monitored closely.

The report also referred to the factors that were likely to influence the envisaged increase in the level of working balances.

Decisions made:

- 1. That the report be noted.**
- 2. That all non-committed revenue expenditure budgets be identified, with a view to any possible savings being made to reduce the impact on the use of general balances in 2009/10.**

Reason for decisions:

To ensure that the Council's budgetary targets are achieved.

Alternative option(s) considered and rejected:

None.

10.EC.147 2010/11 BUDGET PRINCIPLES

The Director of Transformation presented a report on the progress being made towards the preparation of the Council's budget for 2010/11, following the recent confirmation of the expected Government funding allocation.

As a result of the measures taken during the current financial year, the savings target previously expected in order to achieve a balanced budget in 2010/11 had already been achieved.

The report highlighted the following principles around which the Executive Cabinet expected the budget framework for 2010/11 to be constructed:

- containing Council Tax increases;
- protecting businesses from the on-going impact of the recession;
- continuing to provide value for money;
- protecting front line services;
- preparing for the future and the uncertainty over public finances.

The Leader of the Labour Group expressed his disappointment that more specific spending plans had not been revealed, particularly for assessment by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In response, the Deputy Leader of the Council indicated that the need for the Council to plan effectively for a three year period required the Council to monitor its financial position continually and make regular forecasts and adjustments during each financial year in order to achieve balanced budgets.

Decision made:

That the information and budget principles for 2010/11, outlined in the submitted report, be approved for consultation purposes.

Reason for decision:

In order to update Members of the current budgetary forecast position in 2010/11 in advance of the budget setting Council meeting on 2 March 2010.

Alternative option(s) considered and rejected:

None.

Executive Leader