

Executive Cabinet

Minutes of meeting held on Thursday, 9 August 2007

Present: Councillor Peter Goldsworthy (Executive Leader in the Chair), Councillor Pat Case (Deputy Leader of the Council) and Councillors Eric Bell, Alan Cullens, Mark Perks and John Walker

07.EC.80 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor P Malpas.

07.EC.81 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest by any of the Executive Members in any of the agenda items.

07.EC.82 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive Cabinet held on 26 June 2007 were confirmed as a correct record for signature by the Executive Leader.

07.EC.83 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Executive Cabinet had not received any requests from members of the public to ask a question(s) on any of the meeting's agenda items.

07.EC.84 PROPOSED NEW CHORLEY REGISTER OFFICE

The Executive Leader welcomed Ms G Greeson (Superintendent Registrar for Lancashire), who had been invited to attend the meeting on behalf of the Registration Services Manager with Lancashire County Council to present the proposals for the development of the new Chorley Register Office on part of the West Street Car Park area.

Ms Greeson circulated sketch plans of the new facility to replace the current offices at St Georges Street, which were not now 'fit for purpose'. The new premises would be fully accessible by disabled persons, with separate entrances and waiting areas for wedding parties and persons registering births and deaths.

It was envisaged that the construction of the new Register Office would necessitate the loss of approximately 40 car parking spaces on the West Street Car Park, but the Executive Cabinet was advised that the Officers were currently reviewing the situation regarding town centre car parking to identify means of mitigating the anticipated loss of current spaces to the Register Office and the Market Walk extension.

The Cabinet was reminded that the application for planning permission for the new facility would be determined by the County Council and that the Borough Council would be invited to make appropriate representations on the proposal.

The Executive Cabinet and other Members present questioned Ms Greeson on a number of pertinent aspects of the plans, but generally welcomed and supported the new facility, which would improve the customer service and complement the Council's Corporate Strategy.

The Executive Leader thanked Mrs Greeson for her attendance at the conclusion of her address and debate.

07.EC.85 FIRST QUARTER PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT FOR 2007/08

The Director of Policy and Performance (Assistant Chief Executive) presented a report which set out and reviewed the Authority's performance on the delivery of key projects in the Corporate Strategy and against national Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI) during the first quarter of 2007/08 ending on 30 June 2007.

The report revealed an overall commendable performance on the delivery of the Corporate Strategy's key projects, 66% of which had been completed and a further 25% progressing on course. Only four projects were currently behind schedule for completion, owing to varying degrees of over-run on time, but the Officers were optimistic that the projects would be delivered ultimately.

The Council's performance against the Best Value Performance Indicators also continued to improve, with only limited instances of deteriorating performance which were being carefully monitored, 66% of the indicators had showed improvement or consistent performance, and action plans had been developed to bring back on target the four BVPIs where performance was 5% or more below target.

In response to Members' enquiries, the Executive Member for Corporate Policy and Performance confirmed that mechanisms had been put in place to ensure that regular reports monitoring the performance of the Chorley Local Strategic Partnership in its delivery of identified key projects would be presented to future Executive Cabinet meetings.

Decision made:

That the report be noted.

07.EC.86 REVENUE BUDGET, 2007/08 - MONITORING

The Executive Cabinet received a report of the Director of Finance monitoring the Council's financial performance during the first quarter period of 2007/08 in comparison with the budgetary and efficiency savings targets for the current financial year in respect of the General Fund.

The report revealed a forecast overspend of £103,000 and highlighted the need for close scrutiny of a small number of budget areas, including housing benefit payments and the concessionary travel budget.

The Council's Officers were examining means of ensuring that budget spending and savings targets were achieved and were confident that further savings, particularly through staff turnover, would help to deliver a balanced budget at the financial year end.

Decision made:

That the report be noted.

07.EC.87 PLANNING FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE - WHITE PAPER

The Executive Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Development and Regeneration on the principal features of the Government's White Paper 'Planning for

a Sustainable Future' and outlining the likely implications of the proposals for the Borough Council.

The report summarised the main provisions of the White Paper which included plans for:

- a new policy framework for encouraging sustainable economic development;
- an independent Infrastructure Planning Commission to decide major infrastructure schemes and mechanisms to allow more opportunities for public engagement and Parliamentary scrutiny of the process;
- greater freedoms and flexibilities for minor extensions to homes, businesses and micro generation projects;
- the streamlining of the planning application process;
- the possible discretion for Councils to set planning application fee rates.

An appendix to the report contained the Director's suggested responses to the White Paper's consultation.

Whilst much of the White Paper concentrated on the streamlining of the processes required to deliver major physical infrastructure projects, few, if any, such schemes were likely to be undertaken in the Borough. The extension of permitted development rights would reduce the processing workload, but the need to respond to an increased number of enquiries into the types of development that would require permission, and more applications for lawful development certificates, would necessitate fees being charged to cover the advisory service. The possible discretion to allow local planning authorities to fix their own scale of fees for planning applications was also welcomed, provided that the current income source was not jeopardized.

Decision made:

That the report be noted and that the recommended responses to the consultation questions on the 'Planning for a Sustainable Future' White Paper be endorsed.

Reason for decision:

To ensure that the Borough Council's views and suggestions on the Government's plans to streamline aspects of the planning system are communicated to the Government.

Alternative option(s) considered and rejected:

None.

07.EC.88 NORTH WEST REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY - KEY POINTS FROM THE EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC PANEL'S REPORT

The Executive Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Development and Regeneration on the key recommendations of the Panel appointed to hear and consider evidence on topics contained in the draft Regional Spatial Strategy for North West England produced by the North West Regional Assembly, in so far as the recommendations related to the joint representations of Chorley, Preston and South Ribble Councils to the draft Strategy. The new Regional Strategy, which would replace the current North West Regional Planning Guidance, would set out the strategic planning policies and issues for the region.

The report summarised the Panel's responses to the three authorities' joint representations, a number of which had been accepted and some of which had been rejected. The Officers highlighted in particular the Panel's reply to the

Councils' contention that the target for the proportion of new housing in brownfield land within the three Boroughs should be reduced from at least 80% to 75%, which had recommended a lower proportion of 70%.

The Panel had identified a number of weaknesses in the draft Strategy (summarised in the submitted report), which it considered could only be rectified through a further partial review. There was no formal opportunity for representations to be made on the Panel's findings, which would be considered by the Secretary of State prior to his publication of Proposed Changes to the Regional Spatial Strategy, expected in October 2007. The Local Development Framework was required to conform generally to, and derive much of its strategic content from, the Regional Strategy. Therefore, as the deficiencies in the draft Regional Strategy were likely to delay the production of the Local Development Framework if a further review of the Regional Strategy was required, the Officers were anxious for the Council's expressed concerns on the Panel's findings to be communicated immediately to the Government Office for the North West.

Decision made:

That representations be made to the Government Office for the North West expressing concern about the Panel's findings of deficiencies in the draft Regional Spatial Strategy and its recommendations concerning a partial review of the Strategy, urging the Secretary of State to find ways to bridge the deficiencies so that the Local Development Framework production can process on schedule on a firm, strategic policy foundation.

Reason for decision:

In order to ensure that the Government Office for the North West fully appreciates the Borough Council's concerns and, hopefully, increases the chances of a more complete Regional Spatial Strategy being produced.

Alternative option(s) considered and rejected:

The Council could await the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes, but this would preclude the implications of the Panel's recommendations at the local level from being expressed in an effort to identify present solutions.

07.EC.89 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

Decision made:

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the ground that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

07.EC.90 A CUSTOMER FOCUSED COUNCIL - IMPLEMENTING THE OUTCOMES OF CHORLEY'S BUSINESS PROCESS ARCHITECTURE PROJECT

The Chief Executive presented a report on the outcome of a recent major exercise to review the whole of the Council's business processes.

The project has resulted in recommendations to alter the Authority's top level management structure, entailing the disestablishment of one post and the pursuance of shared financial services with South Ribble Borough Council.

Decision made:

That the report be noted and the revised organisational structure set out in Appendix 2 to the submitted report be approved.

Reason for decision:

The new structure will assist the Council's endeavours to become an 'excellent' rated Council by ensuring that priority is focused on services being tailored to the needs of customers.

Alternative option(s) considered and rejected:

None.

Executive Leader