

Executive Cabinet

Minutes of meeting held on Thursday, 12 February 2009

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

Also in attendance:

Other Members: Councillors Dennis Edgerley, Anthony Gee, Harold Heaton, Roy Lees, Adrian Lowe, Debra Platt and Ralph Snape

09.EC.14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were recorded from Councillors Henry Caunce and Marie Gray.

09.EC.15 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

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

09.EC.16 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive Cabinet held on 8 January 2009 were confirmed as a correct record for signature by the Executive Leader.

09.EC.17 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Executive Leader reported that there had been no requests from any member of the public to speak at the meeting.

09.EC.18 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT - THIRD QUARTER OF 2008/09

The Executive Cabinet considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Policy and Performance) which set out and reviewed the Authority's performance both in respect of the 36 key projects included in the refreshed 2008/09 Corporate Strategy and against the new National Indicators for which the Council was responsible, during the third quarter of 2008/09 ending on 31 December 2008.

The report revealed an overall commendable performance on the delivery of the Corporate Strategy key projects, with 26 schemes progressing on, or ahead of, plan and 9 schemes in their planning and initiation stage but expected to be delivered within budget. The reason for the one remaining project to continue improvement of the green corridor of Chorley being forecast to overrun the programme was that adverse weather conditions had affected completion of the Duxbury Park Golf Course element of the project.

The report also revealed a good performance in respect of the national indicators that could be measured, with 8 out of 12 being on target and an improved performance in relation to 7 indicators. Action plans had been compiled and adopted in respect of the three indicators where performance had been lower than anticipated.

Questions were raised by Members in respect of the Duxbury Park project and the performance against the national indicators relating to the percentage of major planning applications processed within the timescale and the time taken to process new and altered claims for Housing and Council Tax benefits.

Decision made:

That the report be noted.

09.EC.19 CHORLEY PARTNERSHIP'S PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR THIRD QUARTER OF 2008/09

The Executive Cabinet considered an update report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Policy and Performance) on the activities of the Chorley Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), particularly through its delivery of 11 strategic projects and its performance in relation to the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and targeted key performance indicators from the Sustainable Community Strategy over the third quarter of 2008/09.

The report revealed that delivery of the LSP's projects remained on track and good progress was being achieved in relation to the delivery of the LAA targets.

While both the overall level of crime and the serious acquisitive crime rate in Chorley had increased over the past quarter period, the statistics compared favourably with those for neighbouring authorities.

Particular reference was also made to the increase in the percentage of vacant town centre floor space, caused primarily by the recent closure of a major town centre retailers' premises. In response to a Member's query on this issue, the Executive Member (Business) highlighted the marketing campaign being undertaken by the Council and the Chorley LSP to attract new businesses to the Borough. In this context an appendix to the submitted report outlined the range of measures and advice available from Chorley Council and other agencies presently being offered to companies and individuals affected by the current economic downturn.

Decision made:

That the report be noted.

09.EC.20 CENTRAL LANCASHIRE AND BLACKPOOL GROWTH POINT PROPOSAL - UPDATE REPORT

The Corporate Director (Business) presented a report seeking the Executive Cabinet's instructions on the Authority's commitment or otherwise to the Central Lancashire and Blackpool Growth Point initiative.

Following the Council's support of the submission of the Programme of Development, the Government had offered to allocate £5.27m to the initiative over the next two years, split between capital and revenue.

Chorley Council's participation in the Growth Point bid had been on the expectation that the accelerated growth would result in the provision of more affordable housing units for the Borough. In order to ensure that development was restricted to the suitable identified sites with associated infrastructure, it was essential that any accelerated growth be managed through the Local Development Framework Core Strategy. The projected revenue funding was currently insufficient to deliver the accelerated Core Strategy and the report suggested pursuance of a request for the allocation of part of the capital funding to revenue towards the cost of the accelerated Core Strategy.

The Executive Cabinet were reminded of, and accepted the benefits to be derived from the accelerated developments likely to accrue from the Growth Point initiative, but reiterated the qualification that its support was dependent on the amount of new housing development specified in the Regional Spatial Strategy (approximately 417 units per year) not being exceeded and no Green Belt land being developed.

Decisions made:

1. That the Council commits to the Growth Point initiative, but reserves the right to withdraw if insufficient funds are available to help accelerate the development of the LDF Core Strategy.
2. That the Council commits to the Growth Point initiative, subject to a satisfactory negotiation on the memorandum of understanding, including confirmation that:
 - sufficient revenue funds will be available to help accelerate the development of the LDF Core Strategy;
 - any housing development in Chorley will not exceed the amount set out in the Regional Spatial Strategy (approximately 417 per annum);
 - the Green Belt will be safeguarded;
 - sufficient capital funds will be available to assist the funding of the programme of development as set out in the submitted report.

Reason for Decisions:

To ensure that the Council benefits from participation in the Central Lancashire and Blackpool Growth Point initiative in terms of the provision of more affordable housing units, subject to satisfactory safeguards being put in place.

Alternative option(s) considered and rejected:

None.

09.EC.21 HIGHER DENSITY HOUSING - ACHIEVING HIGH QUALITY

The Corporate Director (Business) submitted a report recommending the approval, for consultation purposes, of a Guidance Note on the design of higher density housing developments, which had been advocated by the Government as a more sustainable form of development.

The Guidance Note set out guidelines and advice on issues such as design standards, density, landscaping and car parking, together with other criteria against which development proposals would be assessed.

The guidance aimed to address relevant concerns and design issues connected with each potential development site to ensure that higher density housing schemes respected the characteristics of the surrounding areas.

Decision made:

That the Guidance Note entitled 'Higher Density Housing – Achieving High Quality Design', as now presented, be approved for consultation purposes, with a view to its ultimate use as a development control tool when judging the merits of higher density housing applications, including back garden developments.

Reasons for decision:

The Higher Density Housing Guidance Note directly supports the Corporate Strategy aims of developing the character and feel of Chorley as a great place to live, and strengthening Chorley's economic position in the Central Lancashire sub-region.

It updates previous guidance notes relating to this subject area and responds to Government Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development and

Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing. These require local authorities to create more sustainable residential environments.

Alternative option(s) considered and rejected:

None.

09.EC.22 ST. GEORGE'S STREET CONSERVATION AREA - APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS

The Corporate Director (Business) presented a report on the main findings of the St George's Street Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Proposals Document and seeking the Executive Cabinet's endorsement of its principal recommendations.

A detailed analysis of the St George's Street Conservation Area, whilst revealing the special, key characteristics of the area, had also identified a number of negative aspects and causes of concern. The analysis had led to the compilation of a number of management proposals which highlighted the opportunities for associated projects and actions aimed at enhancing the appearance of the Conservation Area. These proposals included:

- an updating of the Council's 'Shopfront Design Guide' and the introduction of an 'Area of special advertisement control';
- exploring the potential for grant aid to assist with improvements to shopfronts, the reversal of inappropriate alterations to buildings; and repairs and appropriate improvements, including the reinstatement of original features for buildings within the Conservation Area;
- the introduction of an Article 4(1) Direction to protect buildings not otherwise protected from inappropriate alteration;
- changes to the Conservation Area boundary to enhance and further protect its setting.

The Appraisal and Management Proposals document included a summary of the responses to the comprehensive consultation exercise that had been undertaken on the plans.

The Corporate Director also referred to the potential sources of external funding that could be attracted to fund conservation projects, which in turn was likely to enhance the vibrancy of the area.

Decisions made:

- 1. That the St George's Street Conservation Area Appraisal, as now presented, be endorsed.**
- 2. That the Management Proposals, as now presented, be adopted as the basis for future improvement and control in the area, subject to the availability of sufficient funding.**
- 3. That the introduction of a Direction under Article 4(1) of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 to increase control over additions and alterations in the Conservation Area be supported.**
- 4. That the necessary statutory procedures to introduce an area of Special Advertisement Control and to implement the proposed boundary changes to the Conservation Area be endorsed.**

Reasons for Recommendations:

Section 71 of the Town and Country Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the Council to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of their Conservation Areas.

The planned programme of actions evolving from the review instigated under the Council's Heritage and Conservation Strategy is expected to improve both the appearance of the Conservation Area and the vitality of business within the area.

09.EC.23 REVENUE BUDGET, 2008/09 - MONITORING REPORT

The Executive Cabinet considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Business Transformation) monitoring the Council's financial performance during the third quarter of 2008/09 in comparison with the budgetary and efficiency savings targets for the current financial year.

The report confirmed that the Council was on course to achieve its overall savings target of £320,000 by the end of the financial year, and the projected budget deficit at the year end had been reduced over the past quarter period to £63,000.

The report indicated that close monitoring of a number of budget areas (ie major income streams; concessionary travel costs; benefits costs) would be necessary throughout the final quarter period.

The report also commented on the potential overspend on concessionary travel costs, with the current budget overspend forecast to be in the region of £143,000. Consequently, it would be necessary to identify non-committed expenditure to ensure that all feasible savings were made in order to reduce the impact on general balances. In this context, Members debated differing opinions on whether past and current Government grants had been made specifically to compensate for the Authority's proportion of concessionary travel costs, and the Executive Leader confirmed the intention for a delegation to meet the Government Minister to support action to ensure a more equitable distribution of costs throughout the County.

Decision made:

That the report be noted and that non-committed revenue expenditure budgets be identified and savings implemented, where possible, in order to reduce the impact of potential overspending on concessionary travel costs and to bring the budget to a more balanced position.

Reason for decision:

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

Alternative option(s) considered and rejected:

None.

09.EC.24 GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET FOR 2009/10 - FEEDBACK ON CONSULTATION EXERCISE

The Assistant Chief Executive (Business Transformation) circulated at the meeting a report which summarised the responses received by the Borough Council to its consultation on the draft budget proposals for 2009/10.

A wide variety of consultation methods had been undertaken, with the majority of respondents being broadly in support of the budget proposals, considering that Council Tax rises should be contained, whilst protecting the delivery of core services.

The respondents also favoured the use of any possible additional investment in the improvement of the town centre and initiatives both to counteract the impact of the economic downturn and provide activities for young people.

Decision made:

That the report summarising the responses to the consultation on the draft budget proposals for 2009/10 be noted and taken into account in the compilation of the final draft budget proposals.

Reason for decision:

To ensure that the representations received in relation to the Council's draft budget proposals for 2009/10 are given due consideration in the compilation of the final budget plans.

Alternative option(s) considered and rejected:

None.

Executive Leader