

Executive Cabinet

Minutes of meeting held on Thursday, 13 September 2012

Present: Councillor Alistair Bradley (Executive Leader in the Chair), Councillor Peter Wilson (Deputy Leader of the Council) and Councillors Beverley Murray, Terry Brown, Dennis Edgerley and Adrian Lowe

Also in attendance:

Lead Members: Councillors Marion Lowe and Julia Berry

Other Members: Councillors Eric Bell, Henry Counce, Jean Cronshaw, John Dalton, Alison Hansford, Harold Heaton, Steve Holgate, Kevin Joyce, Paul Leadbetter, June Molyneaux, Greg Morgan, Mick Muncaster, Pauline Phipps, Geoffrey Russell, Rosie Russell and John Walker

12.EC.136 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were submitted.

12.EC.137 MINUTES

RESOLVED - The minutes of the meeting of the Executive Cabinet held on 16 August be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Executive Leader.

12.EC.138 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

No Members declared an interest in respect of items on the agenda.

12.EC.139 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

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

12.EC.140 LOCALISATION OF COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT 2013/14

The Executive Member (Resources, Policy and Performance) presented a report outlining the options for the development of a draft council tax support scheme to be put in place from April 2013. The report sought approval for a proposed scheme to be presented to Council on 25 September and sought approval for the approach to consultation to be undertaken.

The Government had determined that Council Tax benefit would be abolished from April 2013 and the Council, as the billing authority, must design a new localised scheme of support for Council Tax. In addition, the grant currently received to fund council tax benefit would be reduced.

The proposed approach was to amend the current council tax support scheme to introduce a graduated reduction in support for claimant groups not statutorily protected. In 2013/14, the reduction proposed was 7.5% because the timescales involved in changing the scheme for 2013/14 did not allow for a response to be developed and implemented that incentivises work and would be properly targeted at the relevant claimant groups.

Implementing larger reductions for claimants who were not protected statutorily but were on a low income might have unforeseen and adverse consequences which could not be properly understood in the time available. The aim of the scheme was to encourage people to pay and Members noted that collection rates in Chorley were traditionally good.

In response to a query the Executive Leader advised that the approach favoured by the County Council and the majority of the other Lancashire district and unitary councils was to apply a percentage reduction to current support. This would result in a basic amendment to the current scheme so benefit was calculated in accordance with current rules but with a percentage reduction in benefit applied at the end of the calculation. This meant that a 30% reduction would need to be applied universally as an 'equal pain' approach to all claimants, other than those protected by legislation (such as pensioners), to deliver the required saving, assuming a collection rate of 83% collection rate could be achieved.

Members noted the table on agenda page 10 which set out the Average Weekly reduction in support for residents based on those assumptions and it was felt that this was not a fair approach and that one approach did not fit all Districts. Members noted that parents of children under 5 were impacted heavily by these proposals.

It was clarified that new powers provided in the Local Government Finance Bill from April 2013 would give the Council the ability to reduce some of the council tax exemptions currently available, which included unoccupied dwellings and second homes. It was noted that 254 properties had been empty for the two years and were claiming the Class C - vacant dwelling exemption. Members commented that there were occasions where empty properties that weren't maintained had a negative impact on the wider area and it was felt that there ought to be less empty properties. The proposed changes would apply to Registered Social Landlords.

In response to a query Members noted that the figures were based on a collection rate of 50%, but it was hoped that the rates would be higher than this.

There major changes to the welfare system planned by the Government. The proposed scheme would give the Council the opportunity to develop a scheme based on insight about the claimants and enable the council and partners to develop programmes that support people into work as their benefits were reduced. A multi-agency working party had been put together to ensure a co-ordinated response and to identify any gaps in provision.

The Executive Leader advised he would be meeting with Lancashire County Council to discuss the proposals.

Consultation on the proposals would last for at least eight weeks, and include a survey sent to a representative sample of the population, of residents in receipt of council tax benefit and of those currently in receipt of exemptions. There would also be an online survey available for all residents to have their say hosted prominently on the council's website. The full consultation results would presented to Members prior to a decision being made on a final scheme at Council 8 January 2013.

Decision made

- 1. Recommendation to Council to consider the options, information available and approve a draft scheme to be presented for consideration by Council on the 25 September.**
- 2. Recommendation to Council to approve the approach to consultation for consideration by Council on the 25 September.**

Reason(s) for decision

In accordance with the legislation and guidance, the council must approve and then consult on a draft scheme prior to taking a final decision. The approval for the new scheme of local council tax support must be given before the end of January 2013.

All approaches have advantages and disadvantages. However, the proposed approach has a lower risk in terms of collection, meets the design criteria and has the

ability to fully offset the funding reduction, having the minimum impact on vulnerable groups.

Alternative option(s) considered and rejected

Different options for the new scheme of support for 2013/14 have been considered and are outlined in the report.

12.EC.141 SAFEGUARDING ADULTS - POLICY AND PROCEDURE

The Executive Member (People) presented a report which sought approval for the adoption of a policy and procedure relating to dealing with adult safeguarding issues that representatives of Chorley Council might encounter.

The Council's current adult safeguarding arrangements and documentation was limited to activities and services provided at Cotswold House. A recent external audit of the Council's provisions had identified a gap in policy and procedures across the rest of the Council where officers and Members might come across adult safeguarding issues or receive disclosures of abuse from adult victims.

The purpose of the document was to safeguard vulnerable adults who were defined as "a person who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness: and who is or may be unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation".

Members supported briefings for officers and Councillors to ensure they are fully aware of their responsibilities and the reporting mechanisms in place.

The Executive Leader stressed the importance of working with the Police, as Councillors and Council officers have, at times, greater access to people and their homes than the Police.

If additional guidance was needed a Councillor or officer could ask for advice from a Designated Safeguarding Officer. If required advice could be requested without giving the name of the person involved. Assurances were given that an investigation would be undertaken discreetly before any action was taken.

There were several typographical errors within the document that would be corrected before it was published.

Decision made

Approval granted to the policy and procedures for ensuring concerns raised by Council representatives in relation to adult safeguarding were properly dealt with.

Reason(s) for decision

To ensure there is a coherent policy and documented procedure for dealing with concerns relating to adult safeguarding.

Alternative option(s) considered and rejected

None.

12.EC.142 SELECTMOVE EVALUATION

The Executive Member (Homes and Business) presented a report providing information regarding lettings of properties through the sub-regional Choice Based Lettings system, Selectmove, through which the majority of social housing in Chorley had been allocated since 27 March 2011.

Choice Based Letting systems were designed to allow the applicant to have more choice over where they live by proactively bidding on properties they want to live in rather than waiting to be allocated a property on a traditional waiting list.

South Ribble and Preston City Council had been jointly operating a choice based lettings system since 2007. At the time of making the decision the Council recognised the benefits of giving people in the area more choice, however, it was considered important that people with a local connection to Chorley accessed a significant number of the Chorley properties.

Throughout the last financial year there had been 405 lets in Chorley and 80.2% of the lets were to households living in Chorley or with a Chorley connection (e.g. employment, previously lived in the area, or to give or receive support). Therefore inward migration from other council areas with no local connection was 19.8%, however when the households in Chorley who chose to move to Preston or South Ribble the net inward migration was 10.4%.

In order to increase the supply of social housing to households with a local connection and ensure that the 10% threshold was not exceeded going forward a review of the current policy options is being undertaken working with partners in the Select Move scheme as a matter of urgency. In the interim a number of actions would be undertaken and these were outlined in the report. They included pro-active promotion of Select Move to Chorley residents, including a press release, posters and a new quick reference guide which would also inform applicants who need assistance how Chorley Council can help them bid for properties.

There would also be close monitoring of migration on a monthly basis so early interventions can take place and a new Selectmove application form would make it easier to monitor and report on local connection, in conjunction with changes to the online forms. It was clarified that the application form was currently in paper format, but the bidding process was online. Different options were being investigated on how to best assist residents who did not have access to the internet to bid on properties.

One of the benefits of the system was the ability to drill down into the detail which would assist with future policy development. All new build and newly acquired social housing would be covered by a new Local Connection Policy.

An issue was raised in relation to the banding of properties. This would be reviewed separately.

Decision made

The findings of the report and future actions outlined within it be noted.

Reason(s) for decision

It is important that Executive Cabinet is aware of the migration situation in the first 5 quarters for which Selectmove has been operating.

Alternative option(s) considered and rejected

None.

12.EC.143 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED – To exclude the press and public for the following item of business on the ground that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

12.EC.144 SHARED FINANCIAL SERVICES - BUDGET REVIEW 2012/13

The Executive Member (Resources, Policy and Performance) presented a report which sought approval to implement the recommendation proposed following the Shared Financial Services Budget Review and in the light of feedback received during the consultation process. The report also followed on from, and was consistent with, the Shared Services Joint Management Committee recommendation made on 26 March 2012.

Decision made

Approval of the report for implementation and specifically the eight proposals post the consultation period.

Reason(s) for decision

The proposals are aimed at achieving the following:-

- Succession planning and staff development.
- Review resources to match the service's future work programme.
- Responding to changing customer needs linked to achieving continued value for money through efficiencies.
- Review into the two tier grading structure for Accountant's posts in the accountancy functions.

Alternative option(s) considered and rejected

1. The restructuring proposals put forward are considered to be the optimum solution to achieve the objectives of the review and have been amended, where considered to be appropriate, after consideration of the responses received from staff during the consultation process.
2. The amendments made to the original proposals and subsequent recommendations are highlighted in each of the proposals below.

12.EC.145 STREETSCENE REVIEW

The Executive Member (Places) presented a report which sought approval to consult on changes to the structure of the Streetscene and Leisure Contracts team

Decision made

1. **Approval of the proposed structure detailed in the report and shown in Appendix 2 for consultation.**
2. **That following consultation, subject to only minor alterations, the final decision to implement the proposals be delegated to the Executive Member for Places and supported by the HR team.**

Reason(s) for decision

To support the delivery and implementation of the Streetscene Modernisation Strategy to develop future organisational structures appropriate to future service delivery methods

Alternative option(s) considered and rejected

None.

Executive Leader