

# Executive Cabinet

## Minutes of meeting held on Thursday, 25 May 2006

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

**Also in attendance**

**Lead Members:** Councillors Peter Baker, Francis Culshaw, David Dickinson, Mrs Marie Gray, Harold Heaton and Geoffrey Russell

**Other Members:** Councillors Terence Brown, Dennis Edgerley, Anthony Gee, Keith Iddon, Roy Lees, Adrian Lowe and John Wilson

### 06.EC.77 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of personal or prejudicial interests by any of the Executive Members in any of the agenda items.

### 06.EC.78 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive Cabinet held on 30 March 2006 were accepted as a correct record for signature by the Executive Leader.

### 06.EC.79 APPOINTMENT AND COMPOSITION OF AD-HOC EXECUTIVE CABINET COMMITTEES

The Executive Cabinet was requested to confirm the re-appointment and composition of a number of ad-hoc Cabinet Committees.

**Decision taken:**

**That the following Committees/Sub-Committee of the Executive Cabinet be appointed to comprise the membership indicated:**

(a) **Human Resources Appeals Committee (4 members)**

**Councillor J Walker (Chair) and Councillors A Cain, M Lees and M Muncaster.**

(b) **Indoor Leisure Committee (3 members)**

**Councillor M Perks (Chair) and Councillors A Gee and Mrs I Smith.**

(c) **Special Sub-Committee on Waste Recycling Contract**

**Councillors E Bell, P Goldsworthy and S Smith**

**Reason for decision:**

To establish the bodies responsible for the implementation of a number of executive functions.

**Alternative option(s) considered and rejected:**

None.

## **06.EC.80 IMPLEMENTING E-GOVERNMENT (IEG) STATEMENT NO. 6**

The Executive Cabinet received a report of the Head of Information and Communication Technology seeking endorsement of the Council's e-Government Statement 2006 submitted to the Government Office for the North West. The statutory return detailed the Council's progress in terms of the Government's defined Priority Outcome programme, the Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) for corporate electronic service delivery and efficiency targets.

The Statement confirmed that the Council had achieved the BVPI target of delivering 100% e-enabled services by 31 December 2005. Significant progress had also been made in the achievement of all other targets, particularly in relation to the achievement of 27 of the 29 required Priority Outcomes. Of the two outstanding outcomes, one was the responsibility of the County Council and the second was being considered with the Shared Services Contact Centre project.

The report intimated that, although it was unlikely that any further Government grants would be available, work would need to continue on the achievement of all Priority Outcomes and ensuring that the IT infrastructure was 'fit for purpose'.

In response to comments at the meeting, the Members accepted the need to review and revise the Council's website in order to simplify and encourage greater use and improve facilities for on-line transactions. The IEG Statement did, in fact, recognise that a redesigned website would be key to the delivery of the strategy.

### **Decision made:**

**That the Council's Implementing e-Government Statement No 6, as now presented, be approved.**

### **Reason for decision**

The Borough Council is statutorily required to produce an annual e-Government Statement for submission to the Government.

### **Alternative option(s) considered and rejected:**

None.

## **06.EC.81 DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS**

The Director of Finance presented a report seeking endorsement of the procedures and criteria to be applied in relation to applications for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) in the light of amended housing benefit/Council tax benefit regulations.

The Discretionary Finance Assistance Regulations 2001 gave local authorities the discretion to make discretionary housing payments to claimants whose housing/Council tax benefit was less than their full liability.

The Council's current policy allowed the disregard of the first £3,000 capital savings of claimants under 60 years of age and the first £6,000 capital savings of claimants over 60 years of age in the calculation of DHPs. New regulations recommended that the first £6,000 of any savings held by benefit claimants of all ages should be disregarded in calculations. The report, however, recommended the Council to disregard only the first £3,000 of all claimants' capital in order to achieve a more equitable distribution of the available monies and a consistent approach for all applicants.

**Decision made:**

**That the first £3,000 of the capital savings of all claimants for Discretionary Housing Payments, irrespective of age, be disregarded in the calculation of the payment, and the relevant policy be amended accordingly.**

**Reason for decision:**

The revision of the policy will ensure that available grant monies are distributed equitably and the scheme is applied consistently for all applicants.

**Alternative option(s) considered and rejected:**

An increase of the capital disregard to £6,000 for all applicants would impact on the number of DHP applications that could be paid, owing to the overall cash limit applied to the scheme.

**06.EC.82 INTRODUCTION OF BANKRUPTCY, CHARGING ORDER AND WINDING UP PROCEEDINGS TO RECOVER LARGE DEBTS**

The Executive Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Finance recommending authorisation of the introduction of bankruptcy, charging orders and winding up proceedings for unpaid Council Tax, Business Rates and other large debts owed to the Council.

The recovery methods currently in use were deemed unsuitable and ineffective to recover arrears from a number of debtors, such as self-employed persons or unemployed persons not claiming relevant benefits. In these cases, the instigation of bankruptcy proceedings against debtors owing more than £750 or applications for a charging order against debtors owing in excess of £1,000 might be expedient.

The Director of Finance indicated that, mindful of potential costs to the Authority, all potential cases would be selected after careful vetting with the Land Registry and a credit reference agency. The results of the first test cases would be subjected to a cost/benefit analysis before any additional bankruptcy proceedings were instigated.

The Executive Cabinet was also requested to consider an approach to other precepting Authorities to ascertain if they would share the risks and costs of introducing the new recovery method.

**Decisions made:**

- (1) That approval be given to the introduction of bankruptcy, charging orders and winding up proceedings in appropriate cases to recover unpaid Council Tax, Business Rates and other debts.**
- (2) That appropriate publicity be afforded to the introduction of the new debt recovery methods.**
- (3) That other precepting authorities (ie Lancashire County Council, the Police Authority and the Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service) be requested to contribute to the costs of implementing the new debt recovery proceedings.**

**Reason for decision:**

The introduction of additional debt recovery methods will assist the Council in maximising outstanding income.

**Alternative option(s) considered and rejected:**

None.

## **06.EC.83 HUMAN RESOURCES POLICIES AND PROCEDURES - FLEXTIME POLICY**

The Executive Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Human Resources seeking approval of the implementation of a revised Flexitime Policy for Council employees.

The proposals for the amended policy had emerged from the Staff Forum set up in October 2005 to examine and advise on all employee policies and procedural issues.

The report outlined the major projected changes within the proposed new scheme, highlighting the proposals to abolish core working time; alter the band width within which staff are allowed to work from 8.00am - 6.00pm to 8.00am - 7.00pm; and allow two days flexi leave to be taken in one four week period (subject to a maximum of 13 days per annum).

The scheme had been revised in order to modernise staffs' flexible working arrangements in line with other organisations' successful policies and the Director of Human Resources assured the Members that efficient management and monitoring of the new scheme would not affect service delivery.

It was proposed to introduce the scheme for a trial period of six months, at the expiry of which the scheme would be analysed from a cost/benefit viewpoint to determine whether the scheme should be made permanent.

### **Decisions made:**

- (1) That approval be given to the implementation of the revised Flexi time policy, as now presented, on a six months trial basis.**
- (2) That the new policy be monitored through the measurement of reductions in staffs' time off in lieu, overtime and sickness absence.**
- (3) That information on potential savings be made available to Members following the six months trial period.**

### **Reasons for decision:**

In order to comply with best practice; ensure that all Directorates are operating in a fair and consistent manner; and ensure that agreed policies and procedures are in place.

### **Alternative option(s) considered and rejected:**

None.

## **06.EC.84 REGIONAL AND SUB-REGIONAL STRATEGY - UPDATE**

The Executive Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Development and Regeneration seeking endorsement of the Central Lancashire City Sub-Regional Strategy and the Central Lancashire City Vision.

The Central Lancashire City Sub-Regional Strategy had been commissioned by the Chorley, Preston and South Ribble Councils to provide a spatial framework to ensure that opportunities defined in the Central Lancashire City Vision are delivered alongside principles of sustainable development. The Strategy was also aimed at informing the development of regional spatial planning, economic development and housing policies, by developing strategic solutions to key issues and realising the potential for growth.

The report also clarified how the Sub-Regional Strategy and City Vision were inter-linked with and related to the various other extant strategies and action plans that were linked to the draft Regional Spatial Strategy (ie the Regional Economic Strategy, Lancashire Economic Strategy and Sub-Regional Action Plan for 2006, Central Lancashire City Region Development Programme, Lancashire West Sub-Regional Housing Strategy Framework and Ambition Lancashire, 2005-25)

The strategic framework outlined for the sub-region would provide the context for Chorley Council's response to the consultation on the Regional Spatial Strategy. It would also provide the basis for further collaboration with Preston and South Ribble Councils on the alignment of the three Councils' respective Local Development Framework Core Strategies and Economic Development Strategies and action plans.

**Decision made:**

**That the Central Lancashire City Sub-Regional Strategy and the Central Lancashire City Vision, as now presented, be endorsed as the context for the delivery of the sustainable economic growth envisaged in the Borough Council's adopted Economic Regeneration Strategy, and that the documents be submitted to the Government Office for the North West in support of the joint Regional Spatial Strategy response.**

**Reason for decision:**

The Sub-Regional Strategy and the City Vision are key documents that will assist the Council in the delivery of sustainable growth in partnership with the other core authorities (Preston and South Ribble Councils) and maintain the role of the Core area within the City Region.

**Alternative option(s) considered and rejected:**

None, as the need for a planned, strategic approach to sustainable growth has been established.

**06.EC.85 REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY - SUBMITTED DRAFT**

The Director of Development and Regeneration presented a report recommending endorsement of the draft response compiled jointly by the Chorley, Preston and South Ribble Councils to the revised draft Regional Spatial Strategy.

Representations on the revised draft Strategy, which had been submitted to the Government Office for the North West, had been invited by 12 June 2006. An Examination in Public was expected in November 2006, in advance of the anticipated final approval of the Strategy in late 2007.

The interim draft Strategy contained some 60 policies within seven topic areas (ie Development principles; Spatial Framework; Working; Living; Transport; Enjoying and Managing; and Sub-Regional Policy Framework) and the report outlined and commented on each topic area.

The suggested response from the Central Lancashire City Authorities to the draft Regional Spatial Strategy requested, inter alia, the amendment of the policies and text of the Strategy to recognise the status of the Central Lancashire City area as a key location for sustainable economic growth that supports the wider Central Lancashire City Region.

**Decision made:**

**That the comments set out in Appendix A to the submitted report as compiled by the Central Lancashire City authorities of Chorley, Preston and South Ribble be agreed as this Council's representations on the draft Regional Spatial Strategy, subject to any major changes proposed by Preston or South Ribble Councils being approved by an appropriate Executive Member.**

**Reason for decision:**

To ensure that the final content of the Regional Spatial Strategy reflects the views and economic potential of the Central Lancashire City authorities.

**Alternative option(s) considered and rejected**

Separate representations from the three respective Authorities are unlikely to generate as much influence as a joint response.

**06.EC.86 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS**

**Decision made:**

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

**06.EC.87 STREETSCENE, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE - RESTRUCTURE**

The Executive Cabinet considered a report from the Director of Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment on proposals to (i) revise the senior management structure of the Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment Directorate following the amalgamation of the Public Space Services Unit, Environmental Services Unit and part of the Corporate and Policy Unit; and (ii) implement changes in the Directorate as a consequence of the impending termination of the Lancashire Highways Partnership on 1 July 2006 in order to effect both savings and the resources necessary to provide a sustainable street scene organisation.

The report contained a schedule identifying the posts that would transfer to the Lancashire County Council on the closure of the Highways Partnership, together with a summary of other proposed changes to the structure, which were expected to effect an annual saving of £119,000. In addition, the projected alteration of the middle management structure was anticipated to effect a further annual saving of £53,000. The report indicated, however, that a proportion of the total envisaged savings may need to be re-invested into technical staff under the next phase of the Directorate's restructure.

**Decisions made:**

- (1) That the proposals to revise the middle management structure of the Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment Directorate, as outlined in the submitted report, be approved for consultation with staff and trade unions.**
- (2) That approval be given to the transfer of the staff identified in Appendix 2 to the submitted report to the Highways Authority under the terms of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations.**

**Reason for decisions:**

The proposals are aimed at providing a 'fit for purpose' structure of the Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment Directorate.

**Alternative option(s) considered and rejected:**

The range of optional structures considered were rejected on the grounds that either they did not fulfil the objectives and requirements of the new Directorate or had additional cost implications.

Executive Leader