

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE CABINET

GENERAL REPORT OF MEETING HELD ON 3 DECEMBER 2009

1. This report summarises briefly the principal items considered at the last meeting of the Executive Cabinet held on 3 December 2009.

Report of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Task Group on Affordable Housing

2. The Executive Cabinet was presented with the findings and recommendations of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Task Group that had been set up by the Chorley, Preston and South Ribble Councils to consider issues around the provision and access to affordable housing for both rent and sale.
3. The report contains a number of recommendations aimed at addressing the authorities' concerns that the delivery of affordable housing will be insufficient to meet the needs of expanding communities. The recommendations include measures to overcome current barriers to the provision of affordable housing, a number of which have already been initiated.
4. We accepted the Task Group's report for consideration and will report our response to a future Cabinet meeting.

Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2010 – 2012

5. The Executive Cabinet approved in principle for consultation purposes an updated Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy, with a view to its introduction in March 2010.
6. The revised policy has been compiled around the following main strands of assistance:
 - Disabled Facilities Grant – mandatory grants intended to provide specialist adaptations to meet the care and mobility needs of disabled persons;
 - Decent Homes Assistance – a discretionary form of assistance aimed at helping vulnerable households on low income to undertake repairs and improvements to bring their home up to the Decent Homes Standard;
 - Energy Efficiency Assistance – the eligibility criteria is to be adjusted to ensure that the grant assistance is targeted to the maximum number of households in greatest need within the priority areas.
7. The new policy also introduces the ability to offer Home Improvement Loans to householders as an alternative method of providing assistance as a means of maximising the grant finance resource.
8. Chorley's progress against the policy's targets will be monitored by the Private Sector Housing Stock Condition Survey, the results of which are expected by the middle of 2010.

Section 106 Agreements for Open Space – Involvement of Parish and Town Councils

9. We received a request of the Corporate Director (Business) on the outcome of the consultation with Parish and Town Councils on the use of the Section 106 contributions earmarked for the Play and Recreation Fund.
10. Following consideration of the response, we have approved a policy under which all Parish and Town Councils, together with appropriate community groups, will be invited to submit bids for the funding of projects to be financed from the fund. This will ensure that all local community needs can be identified and contributions effectively distributed.

11. The ultimate decisions on the allocations of the Play and Recreation Fund resources will be taken by the Executive Cabinet following the evaluation of all bids.

Alcohol Consumption in Designated Public Places – Proposals for Chorley Town Centre and Astley Park

12. On the recommendation of the Corporate Director (Neighbourhoods) and the Responsible Authorities Group of the Safer Chorley and South Ribble Partnership, the Executive Cabinet has agreed the making of a Designated Public Places Order under Section 13 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2002 in respect of the area identified as “Chorley Town Centre and Astley Park” on the plan appended to the submitted report for consultation purposes.
13. The Order will not impose a ban on alcohol consumption within the area, but will empower Police Officers and Police Community Support Officers to require individuals to surrender alcohol and any opened or sealed containers in appropriate circumstances. The powers will provide a further tool for the Police to combat nuisances, annoyance or disorder by adults associated with alcohol.
14. A suggestion was made at the meeting that the Council should consider the designation of the town centre, identified areas of Astley Park and recreation areas in the Borough as alcohol free zones. While we were reluctant to support a blanket ban on the consumption of alcohol as proposed, we have agreed to consider the possible extension of the Designated Public Places Order to cover the Coronation Recreation Ground, along with other responses to the consultation exercise on the planned Order.

Corporate Debt Management and Recovery Policy

15. The Executive Cabinet approved for adoption an updated Corporate Debt Management and Recovery Policy.
16. The policy has been formulated following a recent review of the Council’s debt management across all debt streams and will provide an overarching framework for all debt management practices and procedures. The policy will ensure that a professional and consistent approach is taken by the Council when pursuing debts that takes full account of all debtors’ individual circumstances.

Value for Money Review of the Corporate Support Services – Determination of response to final report

17. We received and considered a report of the Corporate Director (People) which presented the findings and recommendations of the Value for Money review of the various elements of the Council’s Corporate Support Services. The review was undertaken to assess the support services’ effectiveness in delivering high quality services with the most efficient use of resources and working methods.
18. The review had concluded that, in general, the support services provide good value for money, but a number of service improvements and revisions with the potential to streamline the use of resources and provide better value for money for the Council Tax payer have also been identified.
19. Consequently, the Executive Cabinet has approved the recommendations contained in the respective findings reports for the Office of the Chief Executive, and the Human Resources and Organisational Development; Information and Communications Technology; Policy and Performance; and Corporate Governance (Civic Services, Legal Services and Democratic Services) Directorates for development and implementation.

20. In addition, in response to a number of Councillors' comments, I have accepted the suggestions that the Members Support Working Group examine options for the publication of the information currently available in the Council's Year Book and Diary and that further reports be prepared on the role and function of the Lancastrian Room and issues surrounding the Mayoralty function for assessment by the Executive Cabinet.

South Lancashire Home Improvement Agency

21. The Assistant Chief Executive (Policy and Performance) submitted a confidential report reviewing the performance and costs associated with the South Lancashire Home Improvement Agency and outlining options for the operation of the services provided by the Agency upon the expiry of the current contractual arrangements on 31 March 2010.
22. The current partnership administering the Agency comprises Anchor Staying Put, Lancashire County Council, Chorley and South Ribble Councils and Central Lancashire PCT. The purpose of the agency is to provide a one-stop shop for Chorley and South Ribble residents to access housing grants and advice. Officers from the respective Housing Renewal Teams of the two authorities were seconded to the Agency.
23. A recent review of the service has raised doubts that the Agency is providing value for money and there is no evidence that the Agency is attracting additional funding to the Borough as originally envisaged. The Executive Cabinet has, therefore, authorised an examination and instigation of proceedings to establish an in-house Home Improvement Agency to offer Disabled Facility Grants, Home Repair Assistance and Energy Efficiency grants/advice. A further report on the consequential staffing implications will need to be presented to a future Cabinet meeting.

Property Services Contract – Commercial Dispute

24. The Executive Cabinet considered a confidential report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Business Transformation) seeking our agreement to recommended terms aimed at concluding an on-going commercial dispute between the Council and Liberata, the company responsible for the management and maintenance of the Council's property assets.
25. The dispute centres principally on the interpretation of "planned maintenance" in the context of the contractual arrangements, which has resulted in the Council withholding some payments since the beginning of the contract in July 2007. Following protracted negotiations, terms have been agreed tentatively between the two parties to settle the dispute, which will result in an additional sum being incurred in the current financial year.
26. We consequently agreed the suggested terms intended to end the current contractual dispute with Liberata and granted delegated authority to the Assistant Chief Executive (Business Transformation), as the Council's Section 151 Officer, to authorise the conclusion of the dispute, provided the ultimate costs remain within the Council's current budget for planned maintenance.

Value for Money Review of the Corporate Support Services – Restructure Proposals

27. The Assistant Chief Executive (Business Transformation) circulated a report on proposals to amend the staffing structures and establishment of the various Sections that had been examined during the recent Value for Money review of the corporate support services.
28. Following an evaluation of the economy and efficiency aspects of the review, a number of prospective amendments to the establishment of the respective functions have been identified. The measures aim to reduce costs in areas where Chorley's costs are greater

than other authorities, remove duplication of tasks and increase the efficiency of some working practices. The proposals envisage a reduction of 6.8 full time equivalent posts.

29. A number of associated issues were raised by Members present at the meeting, particularly in relation to the Communications Section, and it was highlighted that the plans to reduce the staffing in the Democratic Services Section was dependent upon the number of meetings serviced by the Section being reduced.
30. We approved the projected establishment revisions for consultation with affected staff and trade unions and have granted the Executive Member (Resources) with delegated power to take the final decisions on the restructure, provided no significant changes to the current proposition are deemed necessary.

Senior Management Restructure – Final Recommendations

31. The Chief Executive circulated a report on the outcome of the consultation with staff and Unison on the proposals to revise the senior management structure of the Council agreed in principle at the Executive Cabinet meeting on 12 November 2009.
32. As a result of the consultation exercise, a number of alterations affecting posts within the Directorates, had been recommended. We accepted the suggested amendments and approved for adoption the new senior management, and associated, structure for the Council.

Recommendation

33. The Council is recommended to note this report.

COUNCILLOR PETER GOLDSWORTHY
Executive Leader

There are no background papers to this report.

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