

# Executive Cabinet

## Public Minutes of meeting held on Thursday, 9 February 2006

**Present:** Councillor J Wilson (Executive Leader in the Chair), Councillor D Edgerley (Deputy Leader of the Council) and Councillors K Ball, T Brown, A Gee, D Gee, C Hoyle, L Lennox, A Lowe and R Snape

**Also in attendance:** Councillors E Bell, J Walker and Mrs S Walsh

### 06.EC.20 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

Councillor D Edgerley and Councillor L Lennox each declared a prejudicial interest in Item 6 on the meeting's agenda (Determination of the Level of Council House Rents and associated charges for 2006/07) by virtue of their membership of the Chorley Community Housing Shadow Board. They each left the meeting during consideration of the item and took no part in the discussion or voting on the item.

### 06.EC.21 MINUTES

The public minutes of the meeting of the Executive Cabinet held on 12 January 2006 were confirmed as a correct record for signature by the Executive Leader.

### 06.EC.22 DRAFT WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

The Director of Legal Services submitted a report seeking approval to the adoption of a Whistleblowing Policy, a draft of which was attached to the report.

The draft policy aimed to encourage, assist and protect employees in raising concerns about perceived misconduct and malpractice within the organisation. The policy complied with the provisions of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1995 by defining the circumstances under which concerns should be raised and clarified the appropriate steps and persons to whom concerns should be reported.

The Trade Unions and Staff Forum had been consulted on the draft policy.

#### **Decision made:**

**That the draft Whistleblowing Policy, as now presented, be approved, subject to consultation with the Trade Unions and Staff Forum and that, if any amendments are required following such consultation, delegated authority be granted to the Executive Leader to approve the final version of the policy.**

#### **Reasons for decision:**

An effective whistleblowing policy is a vital component in overall effective corporate governance.

The decision will allow the views of the Trade Unions and the Staff Forum to be assessed in advance of the adoption of the policy.

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

None.

### 06.EC.23 REVENUE BUDGET, 2005/06 - MONITORING REPORT

The Director of Finance submitted a report on the present financial position of the Council in respect of the 2005/06 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account, and their comparison with the identified efficiency savings targets.

The report revealed that the situation with regard to the General Fund continued to improve, with the forecast overspend having been reduced from £126,000 to £101,000 since the previous monitoring report. In addition, a number of other potential savings which could substantially reduce the prospective overspend even further had been identified.

While the anticipated deficit on the Housing Revenue Account's trading account had increased slightly by £3,000, the overall forecast for HRA balances at the year end had increased to £538,000.

**Decisions made:**

- (1) **That the report be noted.**
- (2) **That the additional General Fund savings of £27,000 identified in Appendix 5 to the submitted report be implemented and that approval be given to planned expenditure on ICT costs being transferred to the Capital Programme in order to generate further revenue savings of £52,000.**
- (3) **That vacancies only be filled whenever there is a statutory or business critical need for the post to be filled and that the existing requirement for the approval of both strategic Group Directors for the filling of any vacancy remain in place.**
- (4) **That the strategic Group Directors continue to review potential savings areas and, where appropriate, a spending restriction be imposed in order to generate savings in areas that will have least impact on services.**

**Reason for decisions:**

In order to ensure that the Council's budgetary targets are achieved.

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

None.

**06.EC.24 DETERMINATION OF THE LEVEL OF COUNCIL HOUSE RENTS AND ASSOCIATED SERVICE AND SUPPORT CHARGES FOR 2006/07**

The Executive Cabinet considered a joint report of the Director of Finance and the Head of Housing Services on the draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget for 2006/07, which outlined the factors that needed to be taken into account when the level of Council House rents and associated fees and charges for the next financial year was determined.

The report recommended an average Council house rent increase of 48p in line with Government guidelines, the planned introduction of a number of service charges over a 5 year period and the 2 year phased removal of the protection in respect of revised support charges.

An addendum report was circulated at the meeting recommending the introduction of an additional environmental service charge for appropriate Council properties in respect of grounds maintenance costs. The charges, perceived as good practice, would apply only to land associated with a particular dwelling, and would ensure that the costs were borne only by the tenants who received the service.

The Executive Leader also proposed an additional amendment to reduce the projected Housing Revenue Account balances for 2006/07 by £150,000, which he recommended be re-invested in the improvement of the Council's housing stock.

**Decisions made:**

- (1) That the Housing Revenue Account budget proposals for 2006/07, as set out in Appendix 3 to the submitted report, be approved.
- (2) That approval be given to an average Council House rent increase of 4.8% in line with the rent restructuring formula.
- (3) That approval be given to the introduction of a service charge for sheltered accommodation incrementally over a 5 year period, commencing at £1.60 in 2006/07.
- (4) That garage rents be increased by 50p per week from 1 April 2006.
- (5) That approval be given to the implementation of a revised support charge to be introduced over the two year period 2006/07 and 2007/08, as shown on Appendix 6 to the submitted report.
- (6) That the charges for communication links and lifeline/patron alarms be reduced to £3.62 and £2.32 per week over 48 weeks respectively.
- (7) That no increase be made in heating or other charges.
- (8) That an environmental service element for general housing needs be introduced for all properties affected and capped at £1.60 in 2006/07, with an incremental increase in future years for Bands 3 and 4 properties, as set out in Appendix 7 circulated at the meeting.
- (9) That approval be given to the reduction of the projected 2006/07 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) reserves by £150,000 for re-investment in the housing stock as follows:
  - £50,000 allocation for additional disabled adaptations to HRA properties; and
  - £100,000 allocation for the replacement of soffits in HRA properties on the Longfield Estate, Coppull.

**Reasons for decisions:**

The increase in Council house rents and associated charges have been calculated to conform with the Government's policies on rent restructuring and to assist the achievement of a balanced budget.

The use of Housing Revenue Account reserves will enable extra investment in the improvement of the Council's housing stock.

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

None.

**06.EC.25 SMOKING IN COUNCIL OWNED PUBLIC BUILDINGS**

The Executive Cabinet considered a report of the Head of Customer, Democratic and Office Support Services proposing the adoption of a smoke free policy to apply to all public buildings for which the Council retains operational control.

The adoption of the policy would ensure a smoke free environment for users and visitors to the Council's public buildings, including licensed areas within the newly refurbished Lancastrian Room, the Clayton Green Sports Centre and the Café at Duxbury Park, in advance of any impending legislative requirements.

**Decisions made:**

- (1) That approval be given to the adoption of a no smoking policy in respect of all public buildings for which the Council retains operational control.**
- (2) That the policy be applied to all subsequent new reservations for the use of the buildings after 1 April 2006.**
- (2) That the Head of Customer, Democratic and Office Support Services and the Head of Property Services be requested to examine the feasibility of locating a suitable receptacle or facility for the use of smokers adjacent to the Town Hall and report their recommendations back to a future meeting of the Executive Cabinet.**

**Reason for Decision:**

In order to ensure that all employees and visitors to the Council owned public buildings can enjoy those buildings in a smoke free environment.

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

To continue to allow smoking within the public buildings until such time as legislation enforces the adoption of a no smoking policy.

**06.EC.26 QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS, 2005/06 - MONITORING REPORT**

The Executive Cabinet received and considered a statistical report compiled by the Head of Corporate and Policy Services monitoring the Service Units' performance against the respective Key Performance Indicators and Best Value Performance Indicators for the 2005/06 third quarter period ending on 31 December 2005.

The report identified, in respect of each service area, whether the performance was (i) achieving or exceeding its target for 2005/06; (ii) within a tolerance level; or (iii) significantly worse than planned or worse than the previous year. The data also indicated whether performance was improving, worsening or remaining static during the quarterly reporting periods and included explanatory comments from the Officers on appropriate selected areas.

The Executive Member for Customers, Policy and Performance (Councillor Edgerley) told the Members that errors in the printing process had resulted in a few incorrect 'direction of travel' icons being illustrated in the data. The Executive Member also commented on, and explained the reasons for, the areas where performance was not meeting the requisite targets.

A number of Members commented on the perceived dissatisfaction with the collections of litter and the removal of graffiti throughout the Borough. It was accepted that there was a need for a review of the means by which the public's awareness of street cleanliness issues and the potential penalties for deposited litter could be promoted more effectively.

**Decisions made:**

- (1) That the third quarter performance monitoring report be noted.
- (2) That the Head of Customer, Democratic and Office Support Services be requested to contact each Councillor to seek their views on litter collection by asking them to identify specific locations where they consider that litter bins ought to be emptied more frequently.

**Reason for decision:**

The quarterly monitoring procedure is an integral part of the Council's performance management strategy.

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

None.

**06.EC.27 AMENDMENTS TO DESIGNATED POLLING PLACES**

The Head of Customer, Democratic and Office Support Services presented a report proposing a number of amendments to the location and designation of Polling Places within the Borough.

The alterations were recommended after taking account of operational experiences during the 2005 elections, requests to consider newly available alternative facilities and the recent closure of a current polling place.

**Decisions made:**

**That the Council be recommended:**

- (1) to approve the following amendments to Polling Places:

- **Clayton-le-Woods and Whittle-le-Woods (Register 10B)**

The substitution of Whittle Village Hall, Union Street for the current designated station at Whittle-le-Woods Primary School, Preston Road.

- **Clayton-le-Woods North (Register 11A)**

The substitution of the current designated station at Clayton Youth and Community Centre, Manor Road by two stations at St Bede's School (Old School), Preston Road and Clayton-le-Woods Primary School (Old School), Back Lane, Clayton-le-Woods.

- **Chorley North East (Registers 6A and 6B)**

The substitution of the current designated station at St Joseph's RC Primary School, Railway Road, Chorley by a mobile station to be located on the car park between All Seasons Leisure Centre and the former Bentwoods factory.

- (2) to designate the above new polling stations as Polling Places for Chorley.

**Reason for decision:**

The amendments proposed are considered to offer the best solution for voting arrangements in the respective areas where changes are necessary.

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

In respect of Register 10B, the alternative option is to remain at the present polling station.

In respect of Register 11A, the alternative option is to establish a polling station at either St Bede's School or at Clayton-le-Woods Primary School. Each of these schools is at an opposite end of the polling area and one single station would be inconvenient for electors living at either extreme end of the polling area. In addition, the room to be used at the Clayton-le-Woods Primary School is not large enough to accommodate comfortably a double station.

In respect of Registers 6A and 6B, an alternative option would be to utilise St Joseph's RC Primary School on Cedar Road. However, the school's location is not geographically central to voters in Registers 6A and 6B and is located in the area covered by Register 6C, whose electors currently vote at another polling station. The alternative school is, therefore, not favoured because of the location and the confusion that would be caused to voters in the area of Register 6C.

**06.EC.28 PROPOSED CLOSURE OF EAVES LANE LIBRARY**

The Executive Leader accepted the urgent consideration of the item not included on the meeting's agenda in order to respond to an important community issue before the next Executive Cabinet meeting.

The Executive Leader informed the Members of a letter he had received from the Executive Director of Adult and Community Services at the Lancashire County Council on a proposal to close the Eaves Green Library in Chorley between April and June 2006.

The Members supported unanimously the Executive Leader's opposition to the projected closure, on which no prior consultation had taken place. Usage of the facility had, in fact, increased by 53% over the last 10 years and was expected to rise further in future years as the surrounding area was residentially redeveloped. The Executive Members also endorsed the Leader's suggestions for the potential alternative sources of funding to sustain the Eaves Green Library, particularly the idea to consider the use of other public sector assets and buildings in the locality.

**Decision made:**

**That the Council objects to the Lancashire County Council's proposed closure of the Eaves Green Library and supports the representations of the Executive Leader to the County Council's Executive Director of Adult and Community Services.**

**Reason for decision:**

The Library is a highly valued, well used community facility that warrants preservation.

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

None.

**06.EC.29 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, 7 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.**

**06.EC.30 MINUTES**

The non-public minutes of the Executive Cabinet held on 12 January 2006 were confirmed as a correct record for signature by the Executive Leader.

Executive Leader