

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE CABINET

GENERAL REPORT

1. The Executive Cabinet have met twice since the last ordinary Council meeting. Firstly, on 9 February and, secondly, at a non-scheduled meeting on 23 February. This report summarises briefly the principal matters considered at the meetings. Separate reports have been prepared in respect of those items which require Council decisions.

9 February 2006 Meeting

Draft Whistleblowing Policy

2. We approved, for the purpose of consultation with Trade Unions and the Staff Forum, a draft Whistleblowing Policy.
3. The draft policy aims to encourage, assist and protect employees who may wish and have cause to raise concerns about perceived acts of misconduct and malpractice within the organisation. The policy complies with the provisions of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1995 by defining the circumstances under which concerns should be raised and clarifies the appropriate steps and persons to whom concerns should be reported.
4. The Executive Cabinet has granted me delegated authority to approve the final version of the policy at the expiry of the consultation period.

Revenue Budget 2005/06 - Monitoring Report

5. The Executive Cabinet considered a further monitoring report of the Director of Finance on the present position in respect of the current year's General Fund and Housing Revenue Account budgets.
6. The report revealed that the situation with regard to the General Fund continues to improve, with the forecast overspend having been reduced from £126,000 to £101,000 since the previous monitoring report. In addition, we authorised additional General Fund savings of £27,000 that had been identified by the officers and agreed the transfer of planned expenditure on ICT costs to the Capital programme in order to generate further savings of £52,000.
7. While the anticipated deficit on the Housing Revenue Account's trading account has increased slightly by £3,000 the overall forecast for HRA balances at the year end has increased to £538,000.
8. We requested the Group Directors to continue their monitoring of potential savings and, where appropriate, impose spending restrictions to generate savings in areas that will least impact on services. The Executive Cabinet also authorised retention of the current restriction on the filling of vacancies only whenever there is a statutory or business critical need for the post to be filled with the specific approval of both Group Directors.

Determination of level of Council House Rents and Associated Service and Support Charges for 2006/07

9. We 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 in determining the level of Council House rents and associated fees and charges for the next financial year.

10. 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 five year period and the two year phased removal of the protection in respect of revised service charges. We also agreed to introduce an additional environmental service charge of appropriate Council dwellings in respect of grounds maintenance costs. These charges will apply only to land associated with a particular dwelling, and will ensure that costs are borne only by the tenants who receive the service.
11. Following consideration of the report, the Executive Cabinet approved the Housing Revenue Account budget proposals for 2006/07 as set out in the submitted report. The principal elements of the agreed budget can be summarised as follows:
 - an average Council house rent increase of 4.8% in line with the rent restructuring formula;
 - the introduction of a service charge for sheltered accommodation incrementally over a five year period, commencing at £1.60 in 2006/07;
 - a 50p increase in garage rents from 1 April 2006;
 - the implementation of a revised support charge over the two year period 2006/07 and 2007/08, as shown in an appendix to the report;
 - the reduction of charges for communication links and lifeline/patron alarms to £3.62 and £2.32 per week over 48 weeks respectively;
 - no increases be made in heating or other charges;
 - the introduction of an environmental service element for general housing needs for all properties affected and agreed at £1.60 in 2006/07, with an incremental increase in future years for Bands 3 and 4 properties, as set out in an appendix circulated at the meeting.
12. In addition, we agreed to reduce the projected 2006/07 Housing Revenue Account reserves by £150,000 and to re-invest that sum in the improvement of the Council's housing stock by allocating £50,000 for additional disabled adaptations to HRA properties and allocating £100,000 for the replacement of soffits in HRA properties on the Longfield Estate, Coppull.

Smoking in Council owned Public Buildings

13. The Executive Cabinet agreed to adopt a no smoking policy in respect of all public buildings for which the Council retains operational control. This policy will apply to all subsequent new reservations for the use of the buildings after 1 April 2006.
14. The adoption of the policy will 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 impending legislative requirements.
15. We are aware of the impact this policy will have on current smokers. We have, therefore, requested the Head of Customer, Democratic and Office Support Services and the Head of Property Services 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 Cabinet meeting.

Quarterly Performance Indicators, 2005/06 - Monitoring Report

16. We received 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 Indicators for the 2005/06 third quarter period ending on 31 December 2005.

17. 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.
18. A number of Members commented on the perceived dissatisfaction with the collections of litter and the removal of graffiti throughout the Borough. We accept that there is 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 can be promoted more effectively. In this context, we have requested the Head of Customer, Democratic and Office Support Services to contact each councillor to seek their views on litter collection by asking Members to identify specific locations where they consider that litter bins ought to be emptied more frequently.

Proposed Closure of Eaves Green Library

19. As a matter of urgency, I raised at the meeting the Lancashire County Council's plans to close the Eaves Green Library in Chorley between April and June 2006.
20. The Cabinet Members supported unanimously my intention to send a letter of objection to the County Council's Executive Director of Adult and Community Services. Usage of this facility has, in fact, increased by 53% over the last 10 years and is expected to rise further in future years as the surrounding area is residentially developed. The Executive Members also endorsed any suggestions for the potential alternative sources of funding to sustain the Eaves Green Library, particularly the possibility of the use of other public sector assets and buildings in the locality.

23 February non-scheduled meeting

Corporate Management Structure

21. We received and considered a confidential report of the Chief Executive reviewing the Council's current management structure and putting forward proposals for a revised corporate management structure.
22. The primary aims of the proposals was to create a structure that was capable of ensuring that the organisation was fit for purpose in meeting the new challenges facing local authorities; capable of delivering the Council's priority objectives; and economically viable.
23. We accepted the report and its recommendations and approved the proposals for the revision of the Council's management structure as the basis for consultation with Trade Unions and staff.

Recommendation

24. The Council is recommended to note this report.

COUNCILLOR J WILSON
Executive Leader

There are no background papers to this report.

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