

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE CABINET

GENERAL REPORT

1. The Executive Cabinet has met twice since the last ordinary Council meeting on 25 May and 29 June 2006. This report summarises briefly the principal matters considered at the meetings. Separate reports have been prepared in respect of the items which require Council decisions.

25 May 2006 meeting

Implementing E-Government (IEG) Statement No 6

2. The Executive Cabinet approved the Council's e-Government Statement 2006 for submission to the Government Office for the North West. The statutory return details 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.
3. The Statement confirmed that the Council had achieved the BVPI target of delivering 100% e-enabled services by 31 December 2005. Significant progress has 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 is the responsibility of the County Council and the second is being considered with the Shared Services Contact Centre project.
4. In response to comments at the meeting, we 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 does, in fact, recognise that a redesigned website will be key to the delivery of the strategy.

Discretionary Housing Payments

5. 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.
6. The Discretionary Finance Assistance Regulations 2001 gives local authorities the discretion to make discretionary housing payments to claimants whose Housing/Council Tax Benefit is less than their full liability.
7. The policy that had been adopted by the Council 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. The Executive Cabinet approved the revision of the policy by agreeing to disregard the first £3,000 of the capital savings of all claimants for Discretionary Housing Payments, irrespective of age, in the calculation of the payment. This will ensure that available grant monies are distributed equitably and that the scheme is applied consistently for all applicants.

Introduction of Bankruptcy, Charging Order and Winding Up Proceedings to recover large debts

8. The Executive Cabinet have authorised the introduction of bankruptcy, charging orders and winding up proceedings for the unpaid Council Tax, Business Rates and other large debts owed to the Council.

9. The recovery methods currently in use are 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 may be expedient.
10. We have also requested the other precepting authorities (ie Lancashire County Council, the Police Authority and the Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service) to contribute towards the costs of implementing the new draft recovery proceedings.

Human Resources Policies and Procedures - Flexitime Policy

11. The Executive Cabinet has agreed the implementation of a revised Flexi-time policy for Council employees on a six months trial basis.
12. Principally, the major changes established by the new modernised scheme will be 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).
13. The new policy will be monitored through the measurement of reduction in staffs' time off in lieu, overtime and sickness absence and information on potential savings will be made available to Members at the conclusion of the trial period.

Regional and Sub-Regional Strategy - Update

14. We received a report of the Director of Development and Regeneration and endorsed, for submission to the Government Office for the North West in support of the joint Regional Spatial Strategy response, the Central Lancashire City Sub-Regional Strategy and the Central Lancashire City Vision, as the context for the delivery of the sustainable economic growth envisaged in the Borough Council's adopted Economic Regeneration Strategy.
15. The Central Lancashire City Sub-Regional Strategy has 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 also aims to inform the development of regional spatial planning, economic development and housing policies, by developing strategic solutions to key issues and realising the potential for growth.
16. The Director's report also clarified how the Sub-Regional Strategy and City Vision are interlinked with and relates to the various other extant strategies and action plans that are linked to the draft Regional Spatial Strategy.
17. The strategic framework outlined for the sub-region will provide the context for Chorley Council's response to the consultation on the Regional Spatial Strategy. It has also provided the basis for collaboration with Preston and South Ribble Councils on the alignment of the three Councils' respective Local Development Framework Core Strategies and action plans.

Regional Spatial Strategy - Submitted Draft

18. The Director of Development and Regeneration presented a report and we endorsed the recommended draft response compiled jointly by the Chorley, Preston and South Ribble Councils to the revised draft Regional Spatial Strategy for submission to the Government Office for the North West.

19. The response from the Central Lancashire Authorities to the draft Regional Spatial Strategy requests, 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.

29 June 2006 meeting

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report, 2005/06

20. Councillor J Walker, the former Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, presented the Executive Cabinet with the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2005/06 which had been endorsed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its last meeting.
21. We accepted the report which outlines and comments on the areas of work and scrutiny inquiries undertaken by the Committee and the three former Overview and Scrutiny Panels during the last municipal year.

Decriminalisation of Parking Enforcement - Scrutiny Inquiry

22. The Executive Cabinet approved and adopted the final report and recommendations of the former Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel on its inquiry into the decriminalisation of parking enforcement.
23. The Cabinet Members and other Councillors present welcomed and commended the excellence of the report and its recommendations.

Future of Mental Health Services in Lancashire

24. The Council's views have been sought by 14 July 2006, by the Lancashire Joint Primary Care Trust on proposals for changes in the way mental health services are provided in Lancashire.
25. In essence, the proposals aim to improve and modernise mental health care services by closing and converting the 15 existing mental health specialist units across Lancashire and creating a new state-of-the-art mental health hospital unit on three sites in Central and West Lancashire, East Lancashire and the Fylde Coast. This will release funding to provide an improved care-in-the community service, supported by crisis support and respite services.
26. The consultation paper has been considered by both the Environment and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their last meetings.
27. After taking account of the views of both Overview and Scrutiny bodies and the opinions of Executive Members, the Executive Cabinet agreed to respond to the Lancashire Joint Primary Care Trust generally supporting the proposals to improve mental health services as proposed in the consultation document, provided that the following issues and concerns raised by Members are considered and addressed by the Trust:
 - the accessibility of the projected site for the new hospital to serve Central and West Lancashire;
 - the planned timetable for the provision of the new hospital units which will delay construction until 2011;
 - consideration of the possible development of a new mental health hospital unit on a suitable site in Chorley Borough; and
 - concern at plans to delay additional funding for the maintenance of the service currently provided by the Crisis Intervention Team.

Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme, 2006/07

28. We received a report of the Chief Executive enclosing the projected Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2006/07 identifying the proposed areas of work to be undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its two associate Panels during the municipal year.
29. A revised work programme was circulated at meeting which reflected the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's endorsement of the programme and its prioritisation of the planned scrutiny inquiries to be undertaken by the Committee and the Panels over the next year, after having taken account of their linkage to the Corporate Strategy.

Revenue Outturn, 2005/06

30. The Executive Cabinet received a report of the Director of Finance on the provisional outturn figures for both the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account, including the Building Maintenance direct service, for the financial year 2005/06.
31. The report confirms that, overall, the General Fund budget targets have been achieved, with initial forecasts of overspends having been dealt with and anticipated levels of working balances maintained.
32. We agreed the recommendations for the slippage of £77,400 allocated for five identified schemes to the 2006/07 revenue budget, which will allow a further unallocated £83,600 to be utilised for the creation of two equalised reserve accounts for recycling contract bonus payments and net financing costs.

Revenue Budget 2006/07 - Monitoring

33. The Executive Cabinet received a report of the Director of Finance monitoring the current financial position of the Council in comparison with the budgetary and efficiency savings targets for 2006/07 in respect of the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account.
34. We noted that progress has been made towards the achievement of the corporate savings target of £278,000 and the efficiency savings target of £60,000. Further savings will be pursued and we agreed:
 - to restrict the funding of additional expenditure from the contingency fund without the express permission of the Executive Leader;
 - the use of part of the £112,000 set aside in an Innovation Fund for promotional projects in the town centre;
 - the provisional Post Ballot Budget for Stock Transfer, subject to there being a positive vote and further clarification, together with an application for the requisite Section 25 consent.

Review of Council Insurances

35. We received a report of the Director of Finance advising us that, following a lengthy and vigorous assessment process, the Council's principal insurers, Zurich Municipal, had been re-appointed as the Council's insurers. It had been concluded that it would be inappropriate for the Council to pursue the self insurance, which will allow the release back to revenue of £147,000 allocated for the self insurance route.

External Funding Strategy for 2006 and beyond

36. The Executive Cabinet has approved for wider consultation with partner organisations a draft External Funding Strategy for 2006 and beyond.

37. Since the appointment of a dedicated Funding Officer in 2002, the Council has been successful in attracting grant offers totalling almost £750,000 which have assisted various public, private and voluntary sector organisations throughout the Borough.
38. The new draft strategy, however, envisages a wider perspective with fewer, more targeted funding applications for projects to be developed in partnership with two or more organisations. Whilst the Council's officers will continue to advise and assist local organisations to undertake their own research, the Funding Officer will be able to devote more capacity to strategic issues.

Performance Indicators, 2005/06 - End of Year Monitoring Report

39. The Executive Cabinet received and considered a statistical report prepared by the Head of Corporate and Policy Services monitoring the Council's performance during the year ended 31 March 2006 against the following key indicators:
 - Best Value Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) (National indicators measured against definitions issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister);
 - Corporate KPIs (Indicators used to monitor the Corporate Plan);
 - Local KPIs (Locally defined indicators used to monitor performance).
40. The report clarified that, overall, the Council's performance in its achievement of key targets had been good, but pointed to a number of areas which require to be improved. In this context, we agreed a projected action plan of measures aimed at increasing the level of customer satisfaction in the shorter and longer term which had been circulated at the meeting by the Chief Executive.

Statement of Community Involvement - Inspector's Report and Adoption

41. We received a report of the Director of Development and Regeneration and approved for adoption the Statement of Community Involvement, following its amendment to take account of the Inspector's comments and minor alterations.
42. The Authority is required to produce the Statement, which set out the various ways and means of ensuring the engagement and involvement of organisations and the local community in the preparation of the Local Development Framework and in considering planning applications.

Buchanan Street, Chorley - Environmental Improvement Scheme

43. The Executive Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment containing recommendations for the acquisition, disposal and management of land in the vicinity of Buchanan Street, Chorley.
44. The report recommended the pursuance of compulsory purchase procedures in respect of two identified parcels of land, which, if successful, would allow the execution of an environmental improvement scheme as a means of combating anti-social behaviour incidents in the area.
45. We agreed, in principle at this stage, to pursue the recommended actions, but gave delegated power to the Executive Members for Streetscene, Neighbourhoods & Environment and Resources to consider the financial implications of the proposals and determine ultimately whether or not to authorise implementation of the respective schemes.

Termination of Lancashire Highways Partnership - Financial and Legal Implications

46. The Executive Cabinet received a report of the Director of Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment on the progress on completing arrangements upon the termination of the Lancashire Highways Partnership on 30 June 2006 that would ensure the continuation of services after the transfer of functions.
47. We agreed an arrangement whereby the Lancashire County Council will provide highways information to the Borough Council for Land Charges Searches, with the costs of the service being passed on to the search applicant.
48. The first draft of the residual agreement between the County Council and District Council requires significant amendment before it is acceptable to District Councils, Chorley Council has been tasked with seeking the revision of the draft agreement and the Director of Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment has been authorised to conclude negotiations on the residual agreement with the Lancashire County Council, in consultation with the Executive Member for Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment.
49. We also placed on record our appreciation of the commitment and services rendered to the Authority by the Highways and Traffic Management staff who will transfer to the Lancashire County Council upon the termination of the Lancashire Highways Partnership.

Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment Directorate/Policy and Performance Directorate - Restructuring

50. Following consideration of respective confidential reports of the Director of Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment and the Chief Executive to the 25 May and 29 June meetings, the Executive Cabinet has approved for consultation purposes proposals to revise both the middle management structure of the Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment Directorate and the staffing structure of the Policy and Performance Directorate. The proposals are designed to provide a 'fit for purpose' structure in each Directorate.
51. Affected staff and trade unions will be consulted on the restructuring plans, with the outcome of the consultations being reported back to the Executive Cabinet.

Recommendation

52. The Council is recommended to note the report.

COUNCILLOR P GOLDSWORTHY
Executive Leader

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There are no background papers to this report.