

## **REPORT OF EXECUTIVE CABINET**

### **GENERAL REPORT OF MEETING ON 26 MARCH 2009**

1. This report summarises the principal items debated at the last meeting of the Executive Cabinet held on 26 March 2009.

#### **Annual Audit and Inspection Letter for 2007/08**

2. The Executive Cabinet received and considered the Audit Commission's Annual Audit and Inspection Letter which summarised the areas examined and the outcome of the Auditor's work on the Council's 2007/08 activities.
3. The Executive Cabinet appreciates the generally positive tone of the letter, which commended the Authority on its acknowledged efforts and achievements in improving the delivery and access to services across the Borough. The Cabinet is particularly pleased with the Council's retention of the highest score of 4 for its overall use of resources.
4. Representatives of the Commission's Inspection Team were unable to attend the meeting, but Councillor Anthony Gee (Chair of the Audit Committee) reported that the main concerns raised by the Audit Committee during its debate on the audit letter at its meeting on 19 March. In particular, the following issues commented on by the Audit Commission were highlighted:
  - The difficulties the Council will face in maintaining a continuous stream of improvement in the face of the current economic downturn.
  - While the Audit letter acknowledges the progress that is being made to exceed the Local Area Agreement target for the provision of affordable housing units in 2008/09, the number of units provided in 2006/07 and 2007/08 are below the target figure. The Audit Committee members have requested the Executive, in consultation with the Group Leaders, to devise an action plan for measures to secure the delivery of more affordable housing units, taking account of expanding housing waiting lists.
  - The Audit Commission have drawn attention to the need for more effective collaborative partnership working to reduce the level of health inequalities across Lancashire. The view was expressed that more specific and proactive measures that would address the situation in Chorley are required.
5. In response to these concerns, I referred to the Executive's efforts to address the matters by pursuing the following actions:
  - Having made substantial adjustments to the base budget for 2009/10, the Executive is optimistic that the Council will achieve a balanced budget by the end of the 2009/10 financial year if the monitoring arrangements are maintained.
  - A Task Group has been formed to work with local Developers and Registered Social Landlords to identify and examine innovative means of accelerating the development of allocated sites for affordable housing; accessing available funding sources; and mechanisms to bring empty properties back into occupation.
  - The Council accepts the need to address the present health inequalities within the Borough and is examining relevant statistics with the Primary Care Trust and appropriate partners, with a view to the production of a Health Equalities Plan.

## **Developing Employees and Elected Members**

6. The Corporate Director (Human Resources and Organisational Development) presented a report outlining the Council's performance over the past year in its delivery of the Workforce Development Plan adopted in May 2008, which aims to clarify how the Authority anticipates and addresses current and future key workforce challenges.
7. In addition to the Plan's identified actions, training sessions have also been organised around project management skills; climate change awareness; equality and diversity issues; and NVQ2 business improvement techniques, together with an Organisational Development Programme for Directors and Managers to develop the Officers' knowledge, skills and attitudes.
8. The report also summarised several activities that have been arranged over the past year as part of a comprehensive programme to develop and improve Members' skills and knowledge base. In this context, we were reminded that, in addition to our reassessment for Level 1 of the North West Employers Member Development Charter, the Council will be seeking the higher Level 2 Charter, citing Members' involvement in the new Neighbourhood Working regime as its main theme.

## **Final Supplementary Planning Document on Sustainable Resources**

9. The Executive Cabinet approved for adoption the revised draft Sustainable Resources Supplementary Planning Document.
10. The purpose of the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) is to implement the policies of the Sustainable Resources Development Plan Document approved in September 2008 by providing practical advice and guidance to developers on how to incorporate the sustainable use of resources into new developments.
11. 43 representations had been received during the six weeks consultation on the draft SPD, the majority of which sought minor changes and/or clarification of a number of issues. Consequently, a few amendments to the maps have been made, together with a number of textual changes, principally to include reference to the designated sites of local, County or regional importance (eg geological or biological heritage sites, historic parks or gardens and local nature reserves).

## **Neighbourhood Action Plans**

12. The Executive Cabinet received a report of the Corporate Director (Environment) on the current initiatives to progress the Neighbourhood Working model aimed at improving outcomes at the local level through effective collaboration between partner agencies, organisations and residents.
13. Since the designation of the seven Neighbourhood Areas covering the whole of the Borough, Neighbourhood Profiles have been compiled for each Area from a variety of intelligence and information sources. Ward Walks led by the respective Councillors have been held across each of the 20 Borough Wards and a number of consultation meetings, events and mechanisms have been arranged and employed to identify pertinent issues within each Ward. The results of those consultation exercises will inform the content of draft Neighbourhood Action Plans which will set out a series of actions and projects to address the identified issues.
14. We have granted delegated authority to the Executive Member (Neighbourhoods), in consultation with the Lead Member for Neighbourhoods and the relevant Ward Members, to agree the final versions of the seven Neighbourhood Action Plans.

15. The Corporate Director gave assurances that further walks around the respective neighbourhoods would be organised early in the new municipal year, as an opportunity for Members to identify issues in other parts of the respective Wards, and that the action plan projects would be monitored closely over the next 12 months period.

### **Approval of Core Funding Grants for 2009/10**

16. Following consideration of a report and recommendations from the Corporate Director (People), the Executive Cabinet authorised Core Funding grant assistance in varying sums to 15 non-profit making organisations operating throughout the Borough from the 2009/10 budget provision. The grant aid is dependent on the Corporate Director agreeing and signing-off a Core Funding Agreement with each organisation whose activities contribute towards the Council's strategic objectives and themes within the Sustainable Community Strategy.
17. In many instances, Chorley's Core Funding grant represents only one of a number of grant sources for community and voluntary organisations. We have, therefore, also requested a review of the core funding streams, in conjunction with our partners, to examine whether there is potential to improve the co-ordination of future financial support to local organisations.

### **Recommendation**

18. The Council is requested to note this report.

COUNCILLOR PETER GOLDSWORTHY  
Executive Leader

There are no background papers to this report.

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