

Minutes of Meeting of the Council

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 11 October 2011, starting at 6.30pm
Present: Councillor S Hore (Chairman)

Councillors:

P Ainsworth	G Mirfin
J E Alcock	R Moores
R Bennett	R Newmark
S Bibby	E M H Ranson
S Brunskill	M Robinson
S Carefoot	J Rogerson
P Dowson	C Ross
R J Elms	I Sayers
R Hargreaves	G Scott
T Hill	R E Sherras
B Hilton	D T Smith
K Hind	D Taylor
S A Hirst	M Thomas
J Holgate	R J Thompson
K Horkin	N C Walsh
A M Knox	J White
S Knox	A Yearing

In attendance: Chief Executive, Director of Community Services, Director of Resources, Head of HR, Head of Legal and Democratic Services.

401 PRAYERS

The Rev A Froud, opened the meeting with prayers.

402 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors JB Hill, L Rimmer and R Swarbrick.

403 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

404 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no items of public participation.

405 COUNCIL MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 30 August 2011 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

MAYORAL COMMUNICATIONS

The Mayor reported on engagements attended since the last meeting. He had continued on his visits to a number of primary schools within the Borough and had been to schools in Read and Simonstone, Balderstone, Barrow and Chipping. He had been delighted by the warm welcome and enthusiasm from the children and all the schools.

The Mayor had also visited the Old Blackburn Orphanage building in Wilpshire which was now the base for Child Action North West, for looked after families and children from across the North West.

Another highlight of the previous period had been the visit of the Archbishop of York to Blackburn Diocese and a service to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the National Society. The Mayor had also attended a celebration at the Cathedral to mark the 90th anniversary of the Royal British Legion.

He had attended the AGM of Crossroads Care which offered valuable support and guidance to a range of families across the borough.

Finally he was pleased to report on a number of successes from Ribble Valley villages in the Lancashire Best Kept Village Competition.

LEADER'S REPORT

The Leader began by paying tribute to David Berryman who had recently resigned as a Councillor. The Leader thanked him for his contribution to the work of the Council during his term of office.

Next the Leader highlighted a range of consultation documents that would be of importance to District councils. The first of these would reform the way the Government funded Local Authorities. In the future the Government would no longer provide grant support to Local Authorities but instead external funding would be limited to an individual authority's share of the business rates raised in their area. The Leader explained that currently the Council acted as an agent on behalf of the Government and so collected business rates and then handed them over to Government. The Council was responsible for enforcing such collections but in the last resort the Government would indemnify the Council for any non-payment. The Government then used the system to allocate the Council's core funding through a formula grant method. The formula took into account population increases, deprivation levels and rurality issues etc. The new proposals would allow the Council to keep all of its business rates but the proposed system was not straightforward and would need careful consideration.

Another important issue was the introduction of the universal credit with effect from 2013 which in principle was a positive step in terms of simplifying the benefits system but it did come with significant implications eg apart from Council Tax, all benefits would be administered by Central Government through the JobCentre network, over 80% of all benefit claimants would be dealt with either on line or by phone (the Council currently dealt with more than 40% of its

customers face-to-face) and the Government would centrally investigate and prosecute benefit fraud. One related issue of major concern was the Government's instruction that local authorities must reduce the cost of Council Tax benefits by 10% at the same time as designing their own local scheme, with pensioners and other vulnerable groups to be protected but no reduction for those categories would be allowed. The Leader reminded Members that the Ribble Valley had one of the highest percentages of pensioners claiming benefit in the country at 66%. The Leader confirmed that officers were working hard to make constructive suggestions in order to get plans changed to make them more realistic and useable.

Finally the other major consultation underway was the NPPF – the new Planning Framework. This had a direct bearing on planning decisions in the Ribble Valley. The Leader confirmed that he would pursue concerns regarding the Framework through the LGA, the District Council's network and also if possible directly with Ministers.

The Leader closed by confirming that Corporate Management Team were putting the final touches to the management reorganisation that would deliver the savings that were required for 2012/13. The Council was fortunate that careful financial prudence over many years had made the task perhaps easier than in other authorities but that it was still a challenging and difficult task and was being undertaken with great sensitivity.

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LEADER'S QUESTION TIME

The Shadow Leader, Councillor A Knox, asked if the leader shared the concerns of the Fire Authority and the farming community regarding the dangers posed by Flying/Chinese lanterns. The Leader, Councillor M Ranson, thanked Councillor Knox for his question and confirmed that he did share those concerns and he believed that the County Council was supporting calls for a Government review into the sale of Chinese lanterns. He also understood that in order to mitigate the risk to livestock, some manufacturers now use cane or bamboo frames, rather than wire frames.

In a supplementary question Councillor Knox asked if it would be wise for a Committee of the Council to create a policy on flying lanterns at events on Council owned land. The Leader confirmed that he would pass the suggestion on to the appropriate officers.

Next Councillor Knox asked if the Leader could confirm what plans were in place to deal with potentially raised levels of anti-social behaviour due to increased alcohol tourism in Clitheroe. The Leader acknowledged that the weekend evening economy in Clitheroe had grown in recent years, mainly due to an increase in the range and quality of establishments providing food and drink. He reported that the Ribble Valley Crime Reduction Partnership and the Police were aware of the situation and had implemented an action plan to deal with any issues arising. He was pleased to report that this approach had meant that there had not been a noticeable increase in criminal activity as a result of the increased volumes of people visiting the town.

Finally, Councillor Knox asked when the Council would introduce a system to send all Agendas and Reports for meetings electronically to those Members who wished to receive them. The Leader thanked Councillor Knox for his question but recognised that the level and skill and interest in technology varied greatly amongst Members. He believed that Members should receive what they felt comfortable with, whether that was paper-based copies of Agendas or electronic versions. He confirmed that there already was a system in place for Councillors who wished to access Reports and Agendas electronically via the Councillors' Portal. He asked if Councillors who used the portal facility and therefore no longer wished to receive paper copies of Agendas could inform officers and then they would be removed from the distribution list.

Next Councillor G Mirfin asked the Leader whether "sustainability" was the best test of new build development. He asked if the Leader could outline how "sustainability" was to be best measured.

Councillor Ranson thanked Councillor Mirfin for his question and confirmed that sustainability was one of a number of tests for development. However it was also a matter of judgment in terms of what a particular development was being compared against to determine if it was sustainable. Development was viewed as "sustainable" if it did not create harmful impacts that would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. This was the approach National Policy was setting and to which Members would need to have regard when making planning decisions and measuring the impacts of a proposal. Ultimately it would be a matter for the decision-maker to judge the extent of any negative impacts against locally determined priorities and National Policy. The Leader noted that the best approach used to measure sustainability was likely to remain fixed but would continue to develop as circumstances changed.

409 COMMITTEE MINUTES

(i) Accounts and Audit Committee – 24 August 2011

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the above meeting be received.

(ii) Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 25 August 2011

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the above meeting be received.

(iii) Licensing Committee – 6 September 2011

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the above meeting be received.

(iv) Personnel Committee – 7 September 2011

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the above meeting be received.

(v) Community Committee – 13 September 2011

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the above meeting be received.

(vi) Planning and Development Committee – 15 September 2011

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the above meeting be received.

(vii) Health and Housing Committee – 22 September 2011

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the above meeting be received.

(viii) Policy and Finance Committee – 27 September 2011

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the above meeting be received.

(ix) Parish Council Liaison Committee – 29 September 2011

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the above meeting be received.

The meeting closed at 7.35pm.

If you have any queries on these minutes please contact Marshal Scott (414400).