

# Special Meeting Policy and Service Review Scrutiny Committee



Date	Thursday 12 June 2008
Venue	Town Hall, Lytham St Annes
Committee members	Karen Buckley (Chairman) John Prestwich (Vice-Chairman) Ben Aitken; Peter Collins; Kevin Eastham; Howard Henshaw; Cheryl Little; Bill Thompson; Thomas Threlfall
Other Councillors	John Coombes; Paul Rigby; Elaine Silverwood; Ken Hopwood;
Officers	Phillip Woodward; Paul Walker; Annie Womack
Others	Members of the public

## 1. Declarations of interest

Members were reminded that any personal/prejudicial interests should be declared as required by the Council's Code of Conduct adopted in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000.

## 2. Confirmation of minutes

As this was a specially convened meeting, there were no previous minutes

## 3. Substitute members

The following substitutions were reported under council procedure rule 22.3:

Cllr Ben Aitken for Cllr Fabian Craig-Wilson  
Cllr Kevin Eastham for Cllr Elizabeth Oades  
Cllr Howard Henshaw for Cllr Tony Ford

## 4. Accommodation Working Group Meetings

Under the council's Standing Orders, there is a section which provides that a special meeting of a committee can be called on the requisition of at least one-third of the whole number of the committee. Such a requisition had been received for the Policy and Service Review Scrutiny Committee to examine progress made by the accommodation working group.

The Chairman, Cllr Buckley, asked Cllr Collins who was one of the signatories to the request to clarify why a special meeting had been requested. Cllr Collins explained that he believed there had been a lack of movement on the accommodation project and that members needed to be updated on progress. He felt it was possible that the issue may need to be re-examined in the light of budget pressures, and of partnership working.

Mr Paul Walker, Executive Manager for Strategic Planning and Development, gave an overview of the history of the project. He explained that subsequent to other options having been investigated, full council had made a decision in 2006 to build replacement accommodation alongside the existing Town Hall on the site of the "Chaseley" building.

He agreed that progress had not been as swift as had been expected, but explained that a number of external factors and the unexpected presentation of alternatives had diverted capacity from the project. The project had now reached RIBA Stage D and was now suitable for submission of a planning application. The Accommodation working group had recently met and had agreed to the submitting of a planning application for the Town Hall refurbishment and for the commissioning of planning consultants to work on the disposal of assets which the Council had agreed to sell in order to fund the project. He anticipated that the planning permission and the tendering and planning processes would be completed by early 2009.

Cllr Rigby, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Efficiency, answered questions regarding the potential for renting accommodation, for siting the civic suite and back offices elsewhere, about the perceived lack of progress and the costs that had already been incurred. He stated that other options had been explored, and that some time had been wasted in doing so, but that the council had made its decision and had thrown its weight behind this site. He confirmed that the costs of planning, architectural and other consultancy fees since 2006 would be met from the disposal of the designated assets so that the project would be cost neutral.

There was a wide ranging debate by the committee members concerning several issues -

- The cost of the proposed accommodation and the valuation of the assets for disposal; opinions were expressed that in the current economic climate cost neutrality could not be guaranteed and that a deficit might arise. Assurance was given by Mr Walker and Cllr Rigby that current valuations indicated cost neutrality but that these valuations could only truly be determined by explicit market testing. After all planning permissions had been secured and market testing and tendering had been carried out the Cabinet had agreed that the matter would be referred to full council for final consideration.
- The need to examine other sites was raised, but the committee's overall opinion was that this would cause more delays and more expense, and that the correct course of action was to wait for the matter to be returned to council when the financial outcomes were known. The Leader of the council, Cllr John Coombes, said that in the event of a deficit, other options would then have to be explored.
- It was suggested that the project management consultants should be questioned regarding the delays in delivering the project, but it was explained that they were appointed 3 years ago when they were instructed to deliver the Wesham site scheme, and some time was wasted on this before the new scheme was adopted. The committee felt that there would be no benefit in questioning the project managers at this stage.
- An objection was raised to the civic suite being single purpose, but Mr Walker stated that the new council chamber would be designed and fitted out to offer flexibility and would be available for community use.

Two members of the public spoke - a question was asked whether the cabinet was constitutionally able to approve the disposal of assets. The reply was given that they could. Another voiced the opinion that the disposal of North Beach Car Park (one of the designated disposal sites) would meet with considerable challenge and suggested that the council abandon that proposal. Councillor Rigby replied that the Council had already made a decision that this site would be included in the list of sites to be disposed of.

The Chairman summarised the main points of the debate and clarified that the real issue was the speed of the project delivery, and that the project had been held up by the council's investigation of the potential of different sites, before settling on the current project and that work should now progress on this as quickly as possible.

The committee RESOLVED:

- 1 To recommend that the accommodation working group meets regularly to ensure progress.
- 2 To recommend that an update on the accommodation project becomes a standing item on the Cabinet agenda.
- 3 To acknowledge that the matter would be referred to a future meeting of the Council prior to contractual commitment being given to the project.

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