

CORPORATE STRATEGY AND FINANCE

A record of decisions made by the Executive Member with responsibility for Corporate Strategy and Finance on:-

WEDNESDAY, 6th JUNE , 2007

following consideration of the matters detailed below in the presence of:-

Councillor Morris	Executive Member Corporate Strategy and Finance
Councillor J. Walsh	Major Opposition Spokesperson
Councillor Hayes	Minor Opposition Spokesperson
Councillor Adia	Executive Member Development
Mr. S. Harriss	Chief Executive
Mr. S. Arnfield	Director of Corporate Resources
Mr. A. Eastwood	Director of Legal and Democratic Services
Mr. D. Grogan	Assistant Director Legal and Democratic Services
Mr. M. Kane	Special Projects and Partnership Manager
Ms. J. Duxbury	Principal Estates Surveyor
Mr. M. Dracup	Senior Estates Surveyor
Mr. A. Jennings	Democratic Services Manager

1. MONITORING OF EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISIONS

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services submitted a report which monitored the progress of decisions within the portfolio of the Executive Member Corporate Strategy and Finance.

The Executive Member Corporate Strategy and Finance NOTED the progress of the decisions taken.

2. MERE HALL

Councillor Morris declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the following matter and left the meeting.

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services submitted a report which presented proposals regarding the future operation of the Mere Hall Company Limited and Community Support and Development Centre (CSDC).

The Executive Member for Development was reminded of the background to the refurbishment of the Hall and the recent financial difficulties, whereby, there was a potential loss of between £40,000 and £50,000 grant per year from 2008. Consequently, the Company considered that certain restrictions had prevented them from putting the Company on a sound financial basis and they had requested changes in the present operating arrangements.

The report reminded the Executive Member of the operation of the Community Support and Development Centre which occupied offices at the Hall and was financially supported, via a series of grants, by the Council in the region of £40,000 for two staff. The accommodation cost was covered by the Company under the Management Agreement.

Mere Hall Ltd had raised a number of issues regarding the availability of rooms for letting with a view of generating increased income.

Currently, in order to save £10,000 on rental costs Mere Hall Limited had moved their training staff to the cottage block at Mere Hall which reduced the cottages availability to earn income. Mere Hall Limited were considering the development of the cottages undercroft at an estimated capital cost of £150,000 using Heritage Lottery Fund Grant and, in order to do this, they would need to show the HLR that they had a 10 year lease on the cottages. It was considered that development of

the cottage basement would further increase the value of the cottages at no direct financial cost. The Company had not as yet, submitted any detailed applications in respect of the cottages.

It was emphasised that the Council was unable to walk away from the Mere Hall building, partly because of the original Covenant, but also as a result of the investment of City Challenge funding. The grant conditions required repayment of some or all of the grants invested in the event of sale, cessation or change of use to a purpose outside that for which the grant was intended.

It was acknowledged that the Mere Hall Company had a difficult task in generating sufficient income from the use of Mere Hall to maintain the building and their staffing levels. However, should the Mere Hall Company be wound up, the Council would need to decide whether to replace it with a similar facility with potentially all the costs falling on Council budgets or refunding the grant. As the Council could not sell the building under the Covenant/Charity Commission requirements, there would be no incoming sale receipt to offset the grant repayment.

Therefore, it was considered that the Council needed to work within the current situation and facilitate the most effective and efficient use of the Council's asset.

The Executive Member Development AGREED, subject to the agreement of the Boards of the Mere Hall Company Ltd and Community Support and Development Centre within a two month period;

(i) to the proposed merger of CSDC with Mere Hall (Bolton) Limited including the transfer of the already committed funds for staffing and that Mere Hall Limited

manage the CSDC and extend its service delivery within the community with a view to exploiting the expertise within the Centre in opening the accessibility to Mere Hall for community usage;

(ii) to the Director of Legal and Democratic Services introducing a joint diary for the use of rooms at Mere Hall in order to maximise usage and increase income whilst preserving the needs of the Registrar, Births, Deaths and Marriages, including re-classifying some/all of the space as not part of the shared area within the Management Agreement with a potential for either the Company or the Registrar taking up space and operating it under charged arrangements;

(iii) to assist the Mere Hall Company with any application to the Heritage Lottery Fund with regards to the need for a lease on the cottages for at least 10 years; and

(iv) that if the recommendations are acceptable to the Boards of the Company and CSDC full monitoring reports and / or an increase in the number of places on the new board be pursued by the Director of Legal and Democratic Services.

3. REVIEW OF BODYWORK STANDARDS

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services submitted a report requested the Executive Member to determine whether to amend existing bodywork standards for licensed private hire and hackney carriage vehicles, following a review.

The report reminded the Executive Member that the current bodywork standards had been adopted in September, 2001 and that representatives of the trade had recently made

representations that the standards were too high and created unnecessary expense.

A Taxi Scrutiny Panel had recommended that the current position should be reviewed and the matter had been the subject of consultation with the trades in the period since and had been discussed by the Panel.

However, the trade representatives were unable to agree on alternative proposals and their suggestions as to amendments which they would like to see were included in the Appendices to this report.

The Department for Transport had recently issued guidance to local authorities under the title 'Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing – Best Practice Guidance' which was detailed.

The issue had been considered by the Corporate Strategy and Finance PDG, together with representations from the Trade.

The Executive Member AGREED the revised requirements for bodywork standards for private hire vehicles and hackney carriages as recommended by the Policy Development Group and as detailed in Appendix 2 to the report.

4. GAMBLING ACT 2005 AND TESTING REQUIREMENT – SETTING OF FEES

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services submitted a report which considered proposed fees which would be charged for new responsibilities under the provisions of the Gambling Act 2005, together with fees for private hire and hackney carriage vehicle tests in anticipation of changes to the testing requirements.

With respect to the Gambling Act the Council was allowed to recover its costs up to maximum fees set by the Government and proposed fees were detailed in Appendix 1 and were subject to Council approval.

The Executive Member was reminded that the Council agreed to permit private hire vehicles and hackney carriages which were less than three years old to have an annual vehicle test (rather than a bi-annual test), subject to a maximum mileage allowance. However, no fee was set for the annual test at the time the decision was made.

Consequently, it was proposed that with effect from 1 September, or the date on which 'outsourced testing commenced, a standard six month vehicle licence fee of £63:00 would apply, with a twelve month vehicle licence fee of £126:00.

The Executive Member AGREED –

(i) that the fees set out in Appendix 1 to the report be recommended to the full Council as the fees which will be charged for applications made under the provisions of the Gambling Act 2005; and

(ii) the fees for the private hire and hackney carriage vehicles which are licensed under the annual testing and 'outsourcing' arrangements or which require only one test each year, in accordance with the proposals detailed in the report.

5. TESTING DEMAND FOR HACKNEY CARRIAGE LICENCES

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services submitted a report which requested the Executive Member to consider the current restriction on the number of hackney carriage licences issued.

Currently the maximum number of licences issued was capped at 111 following a survey to determine unmet demand (October, 2003).

The report explained that such restrictions were normally reviewed after three years ,although the Government felt that limitations were not in the interest of the consumer.

The matter had been considered by the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Consultative Panel which considered that the restriction should be retained. However, if this was agreed an independent survey needed to be undertaken.

The Executive Member AGREED that the restriction should remain as at present and that an unmet demand survey should be carried out in September, 2007 to determine whether or not the correct number of hackney carriage licences are in issue or whether additional licences should be issued to satisfy any unmet demand and that the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to agree the provider of the survey in consultation with the Executive Member.

6. LAA ANNUAL REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE UPDATE

The Chief Executive submitted a report that provided the Executive Member with a performance update in advance of the LAA Annual Review (2006/07) which involved the submission of a self assessment to Government Office for the North West (GONW) on the 8th June, 2007 and a review meeting with GONW on the 18th June, 2007.

The Executive Member considered the performance report for the LAA and the Chief Executive explained that the LAA Agencies Group had agreed the methodology to ensure that any plans for remedial action were robust and suitable to achieve the required improvements.

The Executive Member AGREED the LAA Annual Review and Performance Update and to work with officers to achieve the necessary improvements where required.

7. REVIEW OF SUPPORT ARRANGEMENTS PROVIDED TO HM CORONER

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services submitted a report that advised the Executive Member of a significant increase in the workload of the Coroners Office and sought approval for the appointment of an additional member of staff in the Coroners Office.

The Coroner had advised that the demands placed on her service had increased not only in relation to the numbers of reported deaths and Inquests which last year were 3679 and 467 respectively, but also as a result of the volume of work generated by those cases. Current statistical information on reported deaths and Inquests so far completed in 2007 suggested that those figures continued to rise and could well be in excess of 4,000 and 600 respectively by the end of the year.

Consequently, the Coroner had requested the Proper Officer to provide additional administrative support and it was recommended that an additional post of Coroners Officer (Scale 5) be established to be funded jointly by Bolton ,Wigan and Salford Councils.

A job description and person specification for the current post was appended and the salary range of Scale 5 was currently £18,450 to £20,235 for which provision has been made in the 2006/07 budget.

The Executive Member AGREED, subject to the concurrence of the Executive Member for Human Resources, the establishment of an additional post of Coroners Officer on Scale 5, to undertake the duties as detailed in the job description.

8. APPOINTMENT OF RATING SURVEYORS

The Director of Corporate Resources submitted a report that requested the Executive Member to enter into a joint procurement approach with other North West local authorities for the appointment of a firm of rating surveyors in order to realise substantial savings via more competitive fee levels.

The Executive Member AGREED that the Council, together with Wigan, Bury, Macclesfield and Warrington Councils and others who may wish to join, explores further and implements the joint procurement of Rating Consultants utilising the Government's OGC Framework as a means of securing best practice in the appointment of Consultants to provide rating advice, submission of appeals and the consequent negotiations with the District Valuer to secure rateable value reductions.

9. CORPORATE RESOURCES DEPARTMENT PERFORMANCE INDICATORS- QUARTER 4 2006/07

The Director of Corporate Resources submitted a report that detailed the quarter 4 performance indicators for 2006/07 relating to the Corporate Resources Department.

Performance against the indicators was generally good and most targets were being met and it was noted that actions over the last twelve months had led to an improvement in performance against a range of indicators.

The Executive Member NOTED the report and that the payment of invoices within 30 days is now above 90% and emphasised that all sections of the Council needed to work diligently to maintain this level.

CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

The background papers and reports in relation to the following items were considered confidential as defined in

paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 and that it be deemed that, in all the circumstances of each case, the public interest in their exemption outweighs the public interest in their disclosure.

10. THE WOODLANDS MANCHESTER ROAD

The Director of Corporate Resources submitted a report which requested the Executive Member's instructions with respect to the disposal of the Woodlands Manchester Road.

The Executive Member AGREED that the tender from Newbury Homes for residential use be accepted, in the sum now reported, subject to clarification, within a month's time, of the planning and highways issues now reported and that the next two offers be held in reserve if the offer from Newbury Homes does not progress satisfactorily.

11. LAND AT LEVERHULME PARK – COMMUNITY SPORTS AND LEISURE CENTRE BUILDING – USE OF EMERGENCY POWERS

The Director of Corporate Resources submitted a report that advised the Executive Member that the Executive Member for Development (who was formerly responsible for land and property matters) had used the emergency powers procedure to agree to the identification of land in Leverhulme Park to have a restricted covenant placed upon it to protect it as a park, recreation grounds, public park and pleasure grounds to compensate for the loss of land needed to improve the Leverhulme Park community sports and leisure centre building which was protected under an existing restrictive covenant.

The Executive Member NOTED the action taken .

12. LAND AT ST GEORGE'S STREET/DUKE STREET

The Director of Corporate Resources submitted a report that requested the Executive Member's approval for the disposal of an area of land at St George's Street/Duke Street for use as a car park and ancillary uses for an hotel on adjacent land for which planning permission had been granted.

The Executive Member AGREED to the disposal of the land, edged black on the plan submitted, on the terms and conditions detailed; that the Director of Legal and Democratic Services complete the necessary legal formalities and that members be apprised of the planning issue relating to the car park for the Spinners Hall.

13. WRITE OFF OF UNCOLLECTABLE DEBT

The Director of Corporate Resources submitted a schedule of general income debt over £5,000 which was recommended to be written off.

The Executive Member AGREED to the write offs as set out in the submitted schedules and that the Director of Corporate Resources inform members of the background to the case now highlighted.