

## EXECUTIVE MEMBER ANNUAL REPORT – 2008/09

### COUNCILLORS TONY JOHNSON AND SUSIE CHARLES, CABINET MEMBER WITH SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR

- RURAL AREA PORTFOLIO
- PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT and EFFICIENCY

*(Councillor Johnson held this Cabinet portfolio from 19<sup>th</sup> May to 17<sup>th</sup> June,  
Councillor Charles from 17<sup>th</sup> June to end of 2008/9)*



#### **1 EXECUTIVE MEMBERSHIP:**

##### **Councillor Johnson**

- Cabinet
- Climate Change Cabinet Liaison Group

##### **Councillor Charles**

- Cabinet
- Lancaster and District Chamber Liaison Group

#### **2 EXECUTIVE APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES etc:**

- Arnsdale and Silverdale AONB Unit
- Forest of Bowland AONB Advisory Committee
- Lancashire Rural Affairs Forum
- Lancashire Rural Partnership
- Lancaster Canal Restoration Partnership (formerly Northern Reaches Steering Group)
- LGA Rural Commission
- LSP Management Group
- North West Rural Affairs Forum

#### **3 OVERVIEW OF PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITIES - PROGRESS DURING 2008/9:**

##### **Rural Areas**

##### **Arnsdale/Silverdale and Forest of Bowland AONBs**

2008/9 has seen considerable activity in the main areas of rural land management. Both the Arnsdale/Silverdale AONB and the Forest of Bowland AONB have reviewed their Management Plans and this work has involved the consideration of significant

new impacts such as climate change and sustainability testing. The City Council has appointed a new manager for the Arnsdale and Silverdale AONB and the post holder is now making considerable progress in adapting the operation to the Natural England's new strategic agenda. The adoption of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy will advocate urban concentration, but the City Council is taking appropriate policy steps to ensure that an economic upturn does not undermine this by leaving "green field" sites vulnerable to development as the rush for new house building occurs.

### **Carnforth Market Town Initiative**

September 2008 saw the completion of the three and a half year Carnforth Market Town Initiative [MTI]. The programme closed at the end of September and succeeded in drawing down almost the full amount of the £1 million funding allocated for it by Northwest Development Agency.

Although most projects had been completed in the previous financial year, the programme had been granted a 6 month extension into 2008 to allow two projects to complete:

- **Carnforth Resource Centre** -Opened in December 2008 and provides a shared facility for use by the local community, school, youth and early years services, plus hot-desking business workspace.
- **Carnforth Fire Station** – An options study and design for potential redevelopment of the fire station site was completed at the end of July 2008. Due to the need for further negotiations with the Fire Service it has not been possible for the project to be taken further forward during the MTI timescale, but the project is still being pursued by CARP Ltd, the successor body to the MTI Partnership.

Carnforth MTI Partnership held its final meeting at the opening of the Resource Centre in December 2008. However, the MTI programme has left a positive legacy in the form of CARP Ltd, a not-for-profit social enterprise company which continues to operate a number of former MTI projects including Carnforth Connect, and the canal "waterbus".

### **Possible Future Support for Rural Service Centres**

It is worth noting that Northwest Development Agency is currently looking to develop a County-wide investment strategy for Lancashire's rural key service centres, including Carnforth, with an emphasis on identifying the barriers to maximising their role in developing the rural economy. In response to a request for priority projects for inclusion in the strategy, two linked submissions are being made – one for Carnforth Fire Station site redevelopment to create high quality office and retail space in the centre of Carnforth and one for Carnforth Public Realm Improvements focusing on Carnforth Town Square adjacent to the fire station site. It is understood that NWDA will take project funding decisions based on the investment strategy during 2009/10.

### **Rural Development Programme for England**

During the past year the City Council has taken the lead in submitting the North Lancashire Local Development Strategy for delivery of part of the Rural Development Programme for England across the Districts of Lancaster, Fylde and Wyre. The submission has now been approved by a Regional Panel through NWDA, subject to

addressing a number of points raised in feedback from the Panel. RDPE funding in the submission totalled £2.5m over the period to 2013.

The Rural Development Programme for England is the national framework for delivery of the European Union's European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development in the period 2007-2013. The main mechanism for the delivery of the socio-economic priorities of the RDPE in the North West is the Leader approach which is based on community-led and locally based programmes. In implementing this approach, the Northwest Development Agency (NWDA) introduced a process to establish Local Action Groups (LAGs), comprising a range of organisations representing a wide cross-section of rural community interests. These LAGs would take decisions on those projects and proposals from a range of delivery bodies that best contribute to the improvement of the local rural economy and which offer innovative solutions to identified local needs.

Within Lancashire three LAGs will be established including one covering the North Lancashire area and comprising the rural areas within Lancaster, Fylde and Wyre Districts. Lancaster City Council has acted as Lead Authority in developing the North Lancashire Local Development Strategy, supported by Lancashire Economic Partnership. The Strategy was approved by NWDA in December 2008. Total RDPE funding of £2.53m to 2013 will be available for North Lancashire, split between seven measures:

- Vocational training and information actions - £141,505
- Adding value to agricultural and forestry products - £660,358
- Co-operation for the development of new products - £141,505
- Diversification into non-agricultural activities - £308,393
- Support creation and development of micro enterprises - £411,191
- Encouragement of tourism - £102,798
- Basic services - £205,596

20% of the overall funding is allocated to management and administration costs, including a full-time, dedicated Rural Development Officer to support implementation of the programme. This officer will be employed by Lancashire Economic Partnership but the City Council's Economic Development Service have offered office space for the officer to use as a base, to ensure that close links are developed. The City Council is also taking the lead in establishing the North Lancashire Local Action Group and LAG Executive Group which will make decisions on project funding proposals. It is anticipated that the City Council would be represented on the LAG Executive Group. Lancashire Economic Partnership will be the accountable body for the programme and will also provide certain centralised functions.

### **Performance Management and Efficiency**

The Planning Service has seen a significant reduction in income from fees for planning applications and building regulation submissions. To compensate for this vacant posts have been frozen in Building Control and the whole of last year's Planning Delivery Grant has been provided to offset income losses. The Service will continue to look for efficiencies in staffing levels where it can without prejudicing its ability to respond to the economic upturn when it arrives.

## **Managing Performance**

Having achieved a 'Good' rating in the last ever round of CPA inspections, the emphasis in 2008/09 has been to consolidate and strengthen the significant improvements we have made in managing performance over recent years. All our processes and systems are regularly reviewed and in summer 2008 it was the turn of our Performance Management Framework (PMF). The aim of the review was to ensure that we continue to monitor the delivery of all strategic and operational priorities in the most effective way.

The PMF had been praised in the 2007 CPA inspection and was working well, so the outcome was a number of small improvements to what was already a solid and functional process. Recommendations included the streamlining of paperwork and the establishment of a convention of Plain English in all monitoring reports. The PMF continues to deliver effective monitoring and a consistent focus on priorities.

The change associated with corporate improvement requires processes to manage it well. Our systems continue to be robust, well embedded and consistently applied. 'Escendency', our web based performance management tool, provides a 'picture' of performance in relation to priorities in using the most up to date available information and highlighting both under and over performance.

## **Managing Projects**

Our bespoke corporate project management methodology is well embedded across the Council. Lancaster's Approach to Managing Projects (LAMP) was introduced in April 2007. Adoption of a standard method has developed a pool of trained and experienced project staff who can apply the method to any type or size of project proportionate to its significance to the success of the Council, its complexity and degree of risk. Through LAMP, we ensure that all intended project benefits are realised and that individual projects are delivered to time, cost and quality. Evaluation to date shows that the LAMP project is achieving its objectives. Our recent emphasis has been on improving Programme Management and this activity will continue in the coming financial year.

## **Partnership Performance**

Increasingly, the council delivers its ambition for our communities through partnership working, so we seek to share our performance management expertise with all our partners. This was an area for future development/improvement identified in the CPA report and the coming year will see the council's ever more active engagement in the Local Strategic Partnership's (LSP) PMF.

In 2008/09 the council was actively involved in the negotiation of the latest county-wide Local Area Agreement LAA). The Council plays an active role in the performance monitoring arrangements which are now in place with the County LSP to monitor local progress in achieving targets in the LAA. Data Sharing Protocols are now in place across partnerships; the MADE (multi-agency data exchange) database is a specific example of this – which helps determine priorities and improvement planning in the Community Safety Partnership.

## **Ensuring Data Quality**

Consistent, high-quality, timely and comprehensive information is vital to delivering improved service outcomes. In the most recent audit we again scored 3 out of 4 which means 'performing well'. This tells us that KPMG, the Council's auditors, believe the measures we have put in place over recent years are robust. This

ensures that the data upon which Members rely to make decisions is accurate and fit for external scrutiny.

The Council had set a target to score Level 4 for data quality by 2008. Achievement of this target was dependent upon rolling out best practice across all our partnerships, particularly the LSP. The LSP was comprehensively restructured over the last year and the partnership's performance management arrangements were only recently agreed. This means that the earliest possible date for achieving Level 4 is 2009 and the target has been deferred accordingly.

### **Comparison & Value for Money**

The Council continues to benchmark its activity with comparable authorities, in particular through strong links with our family group, the Exeter Benchmarking Group. This enables an exchange of knowledge and ideas to support many of the Council's improvements. We are also a corporate member of the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE). Specific professional and countywide officer groups also meet regularly to discuss performance and opportunities to share best practice and efficiency options.

Other practical examples of using comparative performance data include using the Audit Commission's VFM tool, Direction of Travel and visiting other Councils to learn from best practice. These tools are used by services in both their PRT reports and also in the Star Chamber's annual VFM challenge. Value for money is central to our performance management framework and continues to drive our efficiency agenda.

### **Corporate Plan Priority Outcomes:**

Continue to evaluate our services to ensure they are delivered in the most efficient and cost effective way.

- *Deliver service improvement targets through business plans and achieve the efficiency targets in the Corporate Improvement and Efficiency Plan, Medium Term Financial Strategy and in the Comprehensive Spending Review*

\* \* \* \*