



Leader's Report

8th April 2009

Report of the Leader of the Council

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To present the Leader's report to Council.

This report is public.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To receive the report of the Leader of Council.

REPORT

1.0 Cabinet

1.1 Information on Cabinet matters is provided in the minutes from the Cabinet meetings held on 3rd and 17th March 2009, later in this agenda.

2,0 Decisions required to be taken urgently

2.1 As required by Access to Information Procedure Rule 17.03, set out below is a matter which required immediate implementation and in respect of which call-in was waived in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 17.

Employee Establishment – Vacancy Authorisation

At its meeting on 17th March 2009, Cabinet endorsed an urgent business decision in respect of Post no PL0096, Forward Planning Administrator:

- (a) That the Conditions of Employment of the temporary holder of post PL0096 in Planning Services be amended to extend the fixed term contract on a reduction in hours to 18.5 on a temporary basis to accommodate a request from the substantive post holder to work half time for a period of 12 months following maternity leave, under the Family Leave Scheme policy.
- (b) That the call in be waived in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 17 to allow immediate implementation.

The urgency for this decision was to allow the main holder of the post to return to work half time, under the Council's Family Leave Scheme Policy, without any loss of service.

3.0 Other

3.1 Regional Matters

- The NW Regional Funding Advice submitted to Government sets out the long term priorities in a Single Regional Strategy including investment priorities from 2009 onwards. It reaffirms existing priorities already in the process of being delivered and states a clear vision for the future of the Region.
- Specified local items include "Completion of the Heysham to M6 Link Road is the most advanced in terms of DFTs approvals process following the granting of Programme Entry in January 2009. This scheme already has planning permission and subject to successful completion of the remaining statutory processes, construction could start early in 2010".
- Elsewhere, there is reference to developing growth "nodes" including Lancaster "as an historic City with a University centre of excellence in research in regional growth business sectors" and Lancaster Bailrigg Science Park – which has been retained as a Strategic Regional major site following a review of sites (seven of which have now been deleted).
- I continue to represent the City Council as a member of the Lancashire Economic Forum and also attended.

3.2 Important Press Releases by the City Council

I draw attention to two of particular importance:

- A joint statement from the City Council and Centros (issued on 26th March 2009 PR2103).
- Audit Commission report on Councils' Investments in Icelandic Banks (Issued on 26th March 2009 PR 2102).

There is also an article in the LGO's magazine "FIRST" of 28th March 2009 which is critical of the Commission's own report.

3.3 Council Housing Rents Increasing

The Government's policy of raising council house rents on average by 5% or more per annum to be closer to housing association rents is to change in recognition of changing economic conditions to a 3.1% guideline rent level increase. Details are still awaited and will be considered by the districtwide Tenants Forum and I anticipate that this will lead to a mid-term review of rents.

3.4 Prospects for Tourism

In my Budget speech, I said that I believed "the prospects for Morecambe are better than some Jeremiahs predict. In recession families spend less on

holidays by trading down. More will holiday in the UK being faced with falling income, weakness of sterling and so on – what economists call the import substitution effect – so seaside resorts should gain. Pontins and Butlins elsewhere are investing heavily.” I am told that visitor footfall in the district is rising. There has been significant public investment in Morecambe and more is expected. I was present recently at the opening of the new VIC hub at The Storey, an important new venture in an imaginatively redesigned and renovated building. As referred to above, the NW Regional Strategy also sees Lancaster’s historic centre, heritage and quality of place, as one of the five towns in the region to be singled out for public investments.

3.5 Staff, Pay and Personnel

Two events dominate circumstances –

- The National Pay offer of 2.75% was increased by 0.3% following ACAS arbitration of the 2008 award. The extra 0.3% will add approximately £65,000 to expenditure implemented last October.
- The Fair Pay procedure following job evaluation and individual interviews was followed by letters to employees delivered on 26th February 2009. There is a two stage appeals process in place. The new pay structure is expected to come into effect from 1st July 2009.
- At its last meeting, Council decided to ask Personnel Committee to review its Redeployment and Early Termination of Employment Policy.

3.6 Morecambe Parish Council

The introduction of this new Council on 1st April 2009 creates an extra tier of local government for part of the old Borough of Morecambe and Heysham. After the elections there could be members with dual and possibly even a tripartite representative role to play. Not least will be the need to sort out the details of service responsibilities and financial complexities to achieve mutually acceptable and co-operative operations.

3.7 The Storey Creative Industries Centre (SCIC)

Known as “The Storey” the building has been handed over by the contractors and City to the Board who intend to have a launch event in June. SCIC Board have entered into a 30-year full repairing and maintaining lease with the Council and also a SLA which formalises the short-term revenue subsidy agreed last September.

Originally a gift to the City, this remodelled building had been for 130 years a much loved centre for the city’s artistic, technical and scientific endeavours. It has seen various tenants and users such as an Art College, Polytechnic Outreach, Secondary School, University Continuation department, a Further Education College, night schools and apprentice training, a venue for different learned societies and as an exhibition gallery and much more. It replaced an earlier Mechanics Institute where the Post Office is now sited. How much better its new life and the new opportunities it offers than to be offered for sale perhaps to be converted into flats!!

3.8 Morecambe Bay Regional Park

A number of Councillors attended the Annual Meeting of the Morecambe Bay Partnership in Barrow in February 2009. Regional Parks are the latest areas designated for public and private development and conservation. The attendance in Barrow was wide ranging with presentations which were received with enthusiasm. Responsibility for further involvement will initially be part of Councillor Archer's Cabinet portfolio.

3.9 The NW Charter for Member Development

The Charter is awarded by the North West Employers Organisation. At a ceremony at the Lowry in Salford, the City Council was awarded the Charter having signed its commitment way back in 2002 but only really began to chase the Charter two years ago as preparations for the District elections were in progress. The Business Committee has updated and rejuvenated progress and, at the second submission, were successful and the Charter was granted, topped up with a Municipal Journal Award.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Cabinet agenda and minutes of the meetings on 3rd and 17th March 2009.