

Council meeting 26 January 2022

Questions on notice from Members

- (1) **From Councillor Stubbins to the Leader:** *On 15 December 2021 Parliament gave the Government the green light to sign up to the first treaty to address harassment and violence in the world of work – the International Labour Organisation’s Violence and Harassment Convention, otherwise known as ILO C190.*

The convention comes into force one year after the date of the UK’s ratification and is legally binding, thus employers should take clear steps now to ensure they are fully in line with the new treaty. The Government has also said it will introduce a new proactive duty requiring employers to protect employees from harassment by third parties, for example customers or clients, which means that staff in public-facing roles who are more likely to be subjected to harassment and violence will finally have better protection.

Specifically, the Council should:

- *Review all staff policies to mitigate the risk of harassment and violence at work*
- *Ensure that a clear and transparent policy against harassment and violence is known and available to employees, and acted upon if complaints are received*
- *Use its influence to encourage local businesses to review and improve their policies on violence and harassment in the workplace.*

Do you agree with me that it is important for our Council to show it will be a beacon of best practice on this and to lead the way so others can follow?

The Leader replied:

The Council’s Dignity at Work Policy sets out its deep commitment to supporting its employees and contains a clear and robust procedure to address any issues that may arise.

The Customer Services Charter sets out the Council’s commitment to the highest quality customer service, whilst also setting expectations of residents in contact with Council officers. This is further supported by a Complaints Policy which provides protection from abusive or unreasonable complaints.

Further work to develop and implement best practice in this area will be undertaken both internally and through partnership working as the Council takes a leading role in initiatives such as the Fair Work Charter and Morecambe Bay Anchor Collaborative.

- (2) **From Councillor Budden to Councillor Brookes:** *For several years now Lancaster District has been strewn with roadside weeds. Can anything be done to clear them and keep the area clear?*

Councillor Brookes replied:

As you know, the County Council has responsibility for maintaining highways infrastructure in the district, which includes the vast majority of roads, verges, bridges, pavements, footpaths and cycleways. The City Council undertakes some of this work as part of a public realm contract, including mowing verges and maintaining

street trees. The City Council gave the County Council notice in late 2019 that it no longer wished to undertake the weed treatment elements of the contract, partly because of a reluctance to continue using glyphosate herbicide, and partly because the funding provided was only about a quarter of the cost of providing a basic service.

As a result of this, responsibility for weed treatment returned to the County Council at the end of the 2019/20 financial year. Unfortunately, this coincided with the onset of the Covid pandemic and the initial lockdown, which forced councils to significantly reprioritise service delivery. The result of this was minimal weed treatment in 2020. The County Council did eventually get a contract for planned weed treatment in place in 2021, but it was late in the growing season and had a limited geographical coverage. The County Council did also carry out an element of reactive weed treatment in response to complaints about specific locations.

Clearly, what happened in 2020 and 2021 was not good enough, and residents are understandably concerned that this might repeat in 2022. We are too, and we arranged to meet with County Council officers at the end of last year to discuss their intentions and how the City Council could work with them to provide a much improved service. We had a very positive meeting where some principles were agreed, including the need for a substantially increased allocation of resources, a hybrid approach with both City and County contributing, and a need to particularly target prestige areas and areas where the nature of the infrastructure leads to higher weed growth. City and County officers were commissioned to work together to develop a detailed plan in good time to get a much earlier start on tackling weeds this year.

In terms of the City Council's contribution, we have included a figure for additional Public Realm resource in our budget proposals. Our understanding is that County officers have also requested that a significantly increased sum be included in the County Council's budget. Understandably, County officers are unable to confirm their plans until after the budget has been through Council. City and Council officers are due to meet again in mid-February. Our officers have also expressed their eagerness to be involved in a County Council Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group on Public Realm across the County.

In the meantime, the County Council has continued to respond to specific issues. As an example I believe that the clumps of buddleia growing out of Skerton Bridge have now been removed. The advice from County is to use the 'Report It' system on the County Council's website to flag up areas that need attention. Similarly, the City Council will continue to support residents who want to tidy up their area, and will supply tools and remove waste on request. Contact publicrealm@lancaster.gov.uk to arrange this.

(3) From Councillor Budden to Councillor Dowding: *Do we have any plans in the short/medium/ long term for the future of the Frontierland site?*

Councillor Dowding explained that a regeneration strategy for Morecambe was currently being prepared, which would consider all of the work undertaken to date and bring together an achievable phasing strategy around key Council assets and wider development priorities/opportunities. Set against this strategic context, options

would be developed around short, medium and longer term opportunities. It was very much a 'work in progress' but work had started on ideas for the site. It would also consider potential sources of future funding for Morecambe, including any government decision on Eden North. Councillor Dowding assured Councillor Budden that this was important for local people and she would be pushing for it to move forward sooner rather than later.

(4) From Councillor Hartley to Councillor Brookes: *Please can the Cabinet member provide an update on single use plastic reduction in our district?*

Councillor Brookes replied:

You and I were both members of the Plastics Working Group that ran in the last year of so of the previous Council term, before being wound up and folded into the wider carbon reduction agenda following the Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency. Good progress had already been made at that point and the work didn't stop, although there is still some room for improvement.

Like carbon reduction, single use plastic reduction falls into three broad categories: direct use by the Council, chiefly at its own catering venues; indirect uses associated with the Council such as festivals and markets; and use in the wider community across the district. I'll start with Council venues.

Salt Ayre Leisure Centre sells drinks in cans only, including water, and has installed recycling bins to separate the waste. It also sells reusable water bottles and has installed water fountains to complement this.

Williamson Park café currently uses paper or fully compostable cups. Other items are mostly a mix of plastic alternatives or compostable bioplastics, achieving about an 80% reduction in plastic use. Allergen legislation changes have meant the temporary reintroduction of individually wrapped tray bakes, but the supplier is working on other options. On-site composting is being looked at.

The Storey Printroom Café and the Ashton Hall both have no single-use plastics in use. I was disappointed to learn that the Platform has been using single-use plastic 'glasses', albeit mitigated slightly by in-venue recycling bins. It doesn't use glass or cans for safety reasons and compostable bioplastic glasses don't comply with weights and measures legislation, but I have pointed out that there are reusable plastic options, and was told that these are being investigated.

Going beyond direct operations, Light Up Lancaster has signed up with Julie's Bicycle, a charity that works with the cultural sector on sustainable best practice. This will look at single use plastic as well as water and power consumption, travel, print etcetera. It will look to establish a baseline and an action plan for improvements. This will then be shared with other local event organisers.

Highest Point has taken significant steps forward since it first started. Last year canned alcohol and water was offered and further steps are being taken, with an intention to learn from Light Up.

Other events and concessions are being encouraged and supported to reduce single use plastic. Many new leases now have this written in as an agreement.

In the wider community, drinking water fountains have been installed in a number of locations to encourage the use of refilling reusable water bottles, although these were temporarily shut off to support pandemic infection control. Unfortunately, a workable location in Lancaster city centre has yet to be identified, but a fountain is in stock and this is still being work on.

More broadly the Council is a partner in Lancaster University's Plastic Packaging in People's Lives research project, which is looking at the whole life cycle of plastics, from production to disposal.