



Leader's Report

27 April 2022

Report of the Leader of the Council

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To present the Leader's report to Council.

This report is public.

RECOMMENDATION

To receive the report of the Leader of Council.

1.0 Cabinet

1.1 Information on Cabinet matters is provided in the minutes from the Cabinet meeting held 1 March 2022, later in this agenda.

2.0 Decisions required to be taken urgently

2.1 No urgent Cabinet decisions had been taken in this period.

3.0 Leader's Comments

I write this report at the darkest time I can remember, with war in Ukraine in its second month, frightening cost of living rises affecting everyone but especially those on low incomes, government here and across the world still unable to grasp the reality of climate crisis. And Covid affecting up to one in 12 of us, disrupting services, businesses and healthcare.

Despite all, we have people all around us still doing a fantastic job – I hope this report does some justice to them.

Cabinet

I start with a sincere apology. When I presented the list of portfolio responsibilities in January 2022 I omitted Plan 2030 from Cllr Lewis portfolio and compounded this by failing to rectify the oversight through mentioning it in the March report. I now correct that error and will ask that it be minuted. Cllr Lewis has of course continued work on Plan 2030 and recent meetings will move the work on into refining both our decision-making and monitoring of quarterly outcomes and bringing it more into line with the UN

Sustainable Development Goals. During March cabinet members were pleased to receive an inspirational presentation from Karime Hassan MBE, Chief Executive of Exeter city council. Karime's creation of the Exeter Futures stakeholder group has enabled a very similar district to achieve significant change and development. We also were briefed on the progress made with the Climate Emergency Local Plan review documents and the proposed Discretionary Energy Rebate Scheme. The scheme will support those not entitled to receive the government Energy Rebate and give small top up payments for those who do receive it but are in most need.

Having successfully completed this year's budget, the needs of future years required immediate attention. The Leader, portfolio holder for Finance and senior officer team have begun working with Grant Thornton on the first phase of a scheme for outcome-based resourcing which will report in six weeks' time. Finally, cabinet members joined a good turn out of city councillors for a thought-provoking meeting about the committee system. Ian Parry left us both more aware of how local democracy worked and especially where it did not work well and with some new perspectives and new ways of working to try, whether we adopt a committee system or not. We look forward to the further contact with Ian as the committee on committees gets on with its brief.

Matters beyond our borders

The Levelling Up whitepaper did not give a local government organisation acceptable to most districts, unitaries and county. Government ministers are now too occupied with Ukraine to progress changes in any authorities. In the meantime, all authorities in Lancashire have agreed to create a framework for working together in the future, whatever the form of local democracy. Leaders and Chief Executives met together to consider the vision for the future, the key ambitions we had for Lancashire and how we could work on these together. There was general appreciation and enthusiasm for the new approach which will be taken up again after the May elections.

I attended the South Lakeland Partners dinner as a guest of their Chamber. Many of the members and officers were those involved in our failed bid to create the Bay unitary and are now facing new elections for much larger wards as they create the shadow authority for Westmoreland and Furness. There is still enthusiasm for working closely with Lancaster once the new authorities are created.

Staff matters, retirements and recruitment

At the end of March we said goodbye to Kieran Keane as Chief Executive with much appreciation and some sadness after his five years with us. At the same time, we welcomed Mark Davies, after a rigorous selection process stepping up from his director role. Mark has made a name for himself and Lancaster district, working alongside Cllr Kevin Frea on the Climate Action agenda and we look forward to his energy and enthusiasm in tackling the progress of the council on multiple fronts. In appreciating the recruitment of our new Chief executive, I must also appreciate the hard work put in by the recruitment committee and our interim HR manager Arshaluse Gougazian, over a number of months. Staff matters are always a concern for members and it is good to see the progress being made on the Fair Work charter, led by Cllr Wood and supported by HR staff. The legacy of lockdown is still making itself felt in various parts of our buildings where desks are only just be restored to use and systems for maintaining an open door for residents and members can break down and leave us sitting on the Town Hall steps. All leaders of the seven political groups requested and received a briefing on the Working Well Project; we have been assured that the situation for staff will be

finalised and presented to cabinet shortly, whilst the re-opening of the town halls will also be a priority.

Eden

Just a short note this month – all the Eden partners were delighted to see that the Levelling Up Fund round 2 prospectus included opportunity to bid for a £50 million funding pot. There are only two of these awards available so work is underway between partners to create an amazing and compelling bid by the 6th July closing date.

Communities. Community meetings and events

This month has brought some serious concerns about anti-social behaviour in both Lancaster and Morecambe including evidence of victimisation and hate crime. By the time of the council meeting the Community Safety Partnership will have brought together local agencies to work together both to support victims, help with enforcement and to ensure support for some of the vulnerable young people involved. Members attended a briefing on domestic abuse scheduled to follow up the motion on misogyny passed last November. This month's Community Conversation was planned and run by young people from Stanley's in Morecambe and Escape2Make. It was professionally and humorously carried out, with expert help from officers especially Jamie Murphy and provided a lot of insight into young people's concerns. I am looking forward to the next one already. We raised the Commonwealth Flag with some difficulty this year due to a broken flagpole in Morecambe after the gales and having to use the Memorial Garden in Lancaster and crane our necks to see the flag appear. It was good to see Pam Barker attending as Lord Shuttleworth's representative to read the Commonwealth Affirmation.

Significant district developments

A very rapid bid was put together to support Carnforth as the site for the HQ of Great British Railways. As a rail heritage site, with space for new building and the capability to be on both direct north/south and east/west rail communication the site has much to recommend it. The bid received support from both our local MPs. But we note we have forty- one competitors in the first round. The new hospitals project has also progressed so that we know there is a possibility of a new Lancaster hospital on a site elsewhere than RLI but we will be in competition with Preston in putting forward plans. A further briefing for all councillors will be provided in April. Officers met with cabinet members to discuss the progress towards action in the development of Morecambe, especially the Frontierland site. Strategies need clarification and a further meeting is planned.

Low carbon futures

A select number of members and officers attended a guided tour of the community – led housing scheme being constructed in Halton. The development of twenty passivhaus standard affordable houses is outstanding in conception and design and matched by the enthusiasm and expertise of the construction company. The whole project has repaid the extensive support provided by officers, especially in the early stages. A number of councillors attended a presentation by Dean O'Connor at NanoSUN, an expanding Lancaster company on the Caton Road Business Park, developing the infrastructure to enable on-site delivery of hydrogen to power larger vehicles such as bin wagons. The technology was hugely impressive as was the commitment to growing the company in the Lancaster district. Finally, but definitely not least we had an APSE meeting at Salt Ayre drawing attendance from all over the north of England because it included a tour of the new energy system. Officers from other councils left both envious and inspired.

Community standout

Four items stand out for me this month as immensely typical of the positive spirit of people in this district. The first was to visit Kevin in Primrose Street in Morecambe which must have the most beautiful back alley in the district, to make a video for the Great British Spring Clean. He is a great inspiration. The second was the response from our district to the government scheme to house Ukrainian refugees – 18 homes matched and most of them already visited and assessed by officers. Whilst at the same time city and county officers with our City of Sanctuary volunteer and third sector partners swung into action to meet the needs of over 150 asylum seekers placed in a Lancaster district hotel by the Home Office at extremely short notice. Lastly there was an event sponsored by Marcus Angell of Silver Door and supported by city officers and members along with a large number of businesses, to set in motion the creation of a CIC to get together funds to repair and refurbish Queen Victoria and enhance and develop Dalton Square as a community outdoor space.

So dark times but amazing energy, activity and resilience in this district. I hope you had a good Easter.

4.0 Decisions

The following decisions were considered by Cabinet 12 April 2022:

Supplementary Planning documents to support climate emergency local plan review
Council Tax energy rebate scheme
Gateway, Whitelund Fire Damage Reinstatement & Insurance Matters
Hackney Carriage Fare Review
Morecambe Vision Cabinet Advisory Group

No Officer Delegated Key Decision has been taken since the last Leaders report.

The following Individual Cabinet Member Decisions were taken since the last Leader's report:

ICMD17	Expression of Interest: Great British Railways HQ	Cllr Caroline Jackson Published on 7.3.22 – call-in waived
ICMD18	Microsoft Enterprise Agreement	Cllr Hamilton-Cox Published on 7.3.22
ICMD19	Demolition Costs	Cllr Caroline Jackson Published on 5.4.22 (exempt)
ICMD20	City Council response to Carnforth Neighbourhood Plan	Cllr Gina Dowding Published on 6.4.22
ICMD21	City Council response to Slyne with Hest Neighbourhood Plan	Cllr Gina Dowding Published on 6.4.22

Background Papers

Cabinet agenda of the meeting held on 12 April 2022.