



Leader's Report

27 September 2023

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 6 June and 11 July, later in this agenda.

2.0 Decisions required to be taken urgently.

2.1 Two decisions have been taken under Rule 15 – Special Urgency, where it was not possible to provide 28 days' notice of the decision being taken. The decisions were taken with the agreement of the Vice-Chair of Overview & Scrutiny and are being reported in accordance with Rule 16.02 Access to Information Rules:

URGENT DECISION TAKEN BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE: ACCEPTANCE OF EXTERNAL FUNDING

(Report is exempt from publication under the OPE grant publicity embargo terms and exempt from publication by virtue of paragraph 3, of Schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972.)

Reason for urgency: To adhere to strict deadlines to accept the offer of funding.

URGENT DECISION TAKEN BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE: ARCON HOUSE BALCONY RAILINGS REPLACEMENT

(Report is exempt from publication by virtue of paragraph 3, of Schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972.)

Reason for urgency: The need to undertake the work as quickly as possible due to the health and safety concerns surrounding the repair of the balcony.

Further details of both decisions can be found in the 12 September exempt cabinet papers.

3.0 Leader's Comments

I hope members took the opportunity to enjoy some rest over the summer break and return to our regular work on committees and council refreshed. There having been no Leader's report in August, this instalment threatens to be quite lengthy. I will endeavour to cover the salient points but will attempt to remain as succinct as possible.

12/07/23 - I met with Jenny Natusch, Bill Kistler and Dame Professor Sue Black to discuss the work of Escape2Make. They shared a vision for the establishment of a community hub in the old brewery building within the canal quarter. I found their plans compelling and wish them every success as they engage in fundraising and seeking partners in this endeavour. I have since expressed my personal support for E2M and their ambitions in a letter dated 9/9/23.

I signed a letter to Michael Gove MP calling for an end to 'hope value' payments in support of Shelter's campaign on this issue. As Shelter put it, "Councils can make landowners sell their land to build much needed homes for our communities - but they are then forced by law to pay hope value. Hope value is calculated by the amount the land could be worth if the land was sold to build luxury private homes. Because hope value is so expensive, many landowners will refuse the council's initial offer, because they know that the council has no power to buy the land at a lower price. If we got rid of hope value, landowners would be more likely to accept a fairer price for land - and we could build many more social homes.". Members who wish to support this initiative can sign Shelter's petition here: <https://campaigns.shelter.org.uk/petition-unlock-social-housing-scrap-bizarre-'hope-value'-system-build-social-housing>

19/7/23 - I signed the Council's Annual Governance Statement 2022/23 which has since been published. Once a year the Council must approve and publish an Annual Governance Statement (AGS). The statement accounts how the Council's governance accords with its Code of Corporate Governance and with the principles set out in the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework Delivering Good Governance in Local Government (2016). The AGS touches on all areas of the Council's work in the context of good governance.

I received an annual review letter 2022-23 from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman. Our performance was considered on the basis of 1) Complaints upheld by the ombudsman, 2) Compliance with recommendations (by the ombudsman), 3) Satisfactory remedy provided by the authority (where this occurs prior to a response

form the ombudsman). Only 1 complaint was upheld by the ombudsman and the council complied with its recommendations.

25/07/23 - Honouring the commitment I gave at July's full Council meeting I have written to the consultation (and both local MP's) on the proposed ticket office closures affecting our districts railway stations in my capacity as Leader. Much of what I wrote aligns with concerns raised by many other parties and campaigners up and down the country. I did however make a case which I believe is a unique consideration for our district at this point in time. I will reproduce this paragraph here in order that it form part of the public record: Having completed a successful bid to the Leveling Up Fund, a major new tourist attraction is coming to the North West in the form of Eden Project Morecambe. In order to meet our climate change objectives and mitigate the environmental impact of thousands of visitors travelling to our district, every effort needs to be made to attract low-carbon visitors via the railway. Visitors travelling via the west coast mainline will need to change trains at Lancaster in order to reach Morecambe, therefore it is essential that both stations retain their ticket offices and full staffing. Closure of the ticket offices will make the prospect of low-carbon rail journeys into Morecambe to visit the Eden Project less attractive, less affordable, less safe, less accessible, less convenient, and less personal. Clearly this will not encourage low-carbon tourism via the railway nor enhance the visitor experience. Rather, it may serve to actively discourage some potential tourists from visiting our area entirely, particularly the elderly and disabled, or those anxious about safety at unstaffed stations. Others may choose to come by car instead. Whilst those visitors would be welcome, this will increase private vehicle traffic and congestion on our district's roads, contribute to greater emission of greenhouse gases and worsen air quality (which we know has a public health implication).

24/7/23. - The Cabinet undertook a 2-day accredited Carbon Literacy Training program with APSE. This training session offered a forum for focused discussion between members and officers and around meeting the challenges presented by the climate crisis. There is real expertise and drive already here in our Council and I'm delighted that we have such resources to draw upon going forward. I'm sure we have all been reminded of the seriousness of these issues this summer as we've seen shocking scenes of devastating wildfires in the Mediterranean, Hawaii and Canada.

The Government has announced stronger penalties for antisocial behaviour which came into effect on 31st July. Members may take particular interest that greater fines for antisocial behaviour which impacts the public realm can now be issued, £400-600 for household waste, and £400-1000 for fly tipping.

4/8/23 - I received a letter from Dehenna Davison MP, Minister for Levelling Up, which outlined the withdrawal of central government funding and support for Local Enterprise Partnerships. From April 2024 the functions of the LEP will be transferred to the principle local authority, which in our case is Lancashire County Council. If the CCA is formed before this time, then the CCA will assume the functions of the LEP. (N.B. As I write this report, I have received word that the Minister has just resigned.)

10/8/23 - The Government has responded to the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Select Committee report on Funding for Levelling Up. There is a commitment from the Government to increase core spending power for local authorities by 3%. Whilst all increases in funding are welcome, members will likely already have realised the consequence for our budgets of inflation remaining at 7% for some time.

This supposed increase in core spending power is likely to translate as an even greater real-terms reduction in our spending power in current market conditions. There has also been some welcome recognition from Government that it's model for competitive bidding / beauty-pageant approach to providing funding to local authorities (referred to as the local-government hunger games by the Shadow Levelling Up Secretary) is not the most effective model for funding levelling up initiatives.

21/8/23 - I met with the Police and Crime Commissioner Andrew Snowden and Chief Inspector Dave Hannan to discuss plans to tackle antisocial behaviour in our district. This initiative somewhat grandiosely named 'OPERATION CENTURION', draws upon central government funding aligned with the Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan to pay officers to work overtime on-the-beat. This will initially manifest as officers patrolling in Happy Mount Park but will move to cover other anti-social behaviour hot spots in the district over time. The police response to recent instances of Nazi graffiti were discussed at this meeting, and a commitment was secured for an additional police presence at the Vintage by the Sea festival.

24/8/23 - I met with Ruth Hannan from The Peoples Powerhouse to discuss the upcoming 'This is the North' convention which is being held in Preston. There was recognition that Lancaster has experience in finding positive and proactive routes for engaging our local communities in our decision making which extend beyond classic consultation techniques.

27/8/23 - On the disposal of Lune House and Derby House. These properties are in a flood plain and can no longer offer sleeping accommodation on the ground floor. Remodelling costs are prohibitive, and if demolished they could not be rebuilt because of their aforementioned positioning. The Cabinet of the previous administration therefore agreed to sell these buildings to private interests as part of work to advance the Mainway redevelopment project. The minutes of that Cabinet meeting show that it was agreed this item would come back to Cabinet to finalise the disposal once officers had completed the necessary work. This decision was intended to come to July's Cabinet meeting, however the paperwork could not be completed in time. I therefore agreed to deal with the disposal as Leader using an individual cabinet member decision in order to avoid needless delay. I authorised the disposal on 27th August. I did this in accordance with my commitment to honour the budgetary decisions of the previous administration.

Glasson Dock has been experiencing difficulties with their sea-gate since June, leading to a degradation of sea-defences in the area. The Environment Agency has coordinated a multi-stakeholder response to this situation over the course of the summer. Whilst repairs to the sea gate are incomplete, it is now possible to manually winch the gate closed for particularly high tides. Officers continue to monitor the situation and contribute to planning and interventions as necessary.

1/9/23 - Met with Councillor Jonathan Brook, Leader of the newly formed unitary Westmorland and Furness Council. Now that the dust has settled on the formation of this new authority we are in a position to once again explore the ways in which our Council's can collaborate to deliver the best outcomes for our area. The work done to create the business case for The Bay unitary authority will be used as the foundation of our collaborations going forward. We continue to recognise the strong connections we share across the county boundary and our common interests in economy, health, tourism, energy, housing, climate change and transport.

6/9/23 - I attended a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and answered questions from members about our administration's policies, the relationship between scrutiny and cabinet, and the future of projects such as Frontierland and the White Lund depot. Further details are available in the committee minutes.

14/9/23 - Cabinet has begun the task of reviewing our corporate plan and revising our ambitions and priorities for the remainder of the council term. This work is being expertly facilitated by the LGA, who have also conducted sessions with the senior officers. Once this work has been completed a report will be brought to cabinet and then council requesting the adoption of our new corporate plan.

The District Council's Network (DCN) continue to raise concerns about the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill which is due to have its Third Reading in the House of Lords on Tuesday 19 September (which will happen after my penning of this report). The DCN support the Bill's aims to extend devolution to more areas of England and the principle of power flowing down to local leaders to enable decisions to be made ever closer to the public. However, they are concerned that unless district councils have the right to a full seat at the table in Combined County Authorities (CCAs), county deals will fail to achieve their potential. DCN has consistently raised concerns during the passage of the Bill that the legislation for Combined County Authorities (CCAs) marginalises the role of district councils.

DCN believes the Bill must make explicit provision for district councils in a CCA area to have the right to be a constituent member of the CCA. To that end the DCN is calling for the retention of the amendment tabled by Baroness Taylor of Stevenage at Report stage (Amendment 29 at Report stage), by which a "Minister of the Crown may by regulations establish a process for non-constituent members [of Combined County Authorities] to become full members". This is an issue which should be close to our hearts here in Lancaster district as a Combined County Authority is currently being developed by Lancashire County Council, Blackpool Council and Blackburn with Darwen Council, which would exclude formal voting rights for the county's district Council's (such as ours) on its board.

I have attended a meeting of Lancashire Leaders over the summer, where the hot topic has been the devolution arrangements and the formation of the Combined County Authority. I am somewhat constrained in the remarks I can make due to considerations around confidentiality. However, I continue to be underwhelmed by the evolving devolution deal and the lack of ambition for Lancashire by those coordinating the formation of the CCA. I continue to be of the opinion that the scale of additional funding and the scope of the proposed devolved powers are disappointing. Not only that, but it looks increasingly likely that major CCA capital investments will be targeted to benefit the current upper tier authority core geographic areas rather than taking a view toward benefiting the whole of Lancashire. We will likely have our work cut out to convince any future CCA that when it is making decisions, to hold in mind that Lancashire does in fact extend further north than Preston. I am also increasingly concerned about the potential for key budgets, powers and responsibilities administered by district councils to be transferred to the CCA as part of the devolution deal. I do not believe this would be a beneficial change for the residents of Lancaster district. Rather, I believe it will distance decision making and accountability further from the local electorate and diminish the funding our council can utilise to support businesses, charities and individuals in our area. Devolution deals are supposed to be an exercise in decentralisation and bringing

decision making closer to the people. I would therefore call upon those negotiating with the Whitehall to set their aspirations on acquiring additional powers from the Government, not needlessly wrestling powers away from natural local partners such as our district councils.

Finally, I would like to address the recent incidents of Nazi graffiti which have occurred in Morecambe. This vandalism has targeted Morecambe Pride and the War Memorial. The slogans of hate used included threats of violence, homophobia, racism and antisemitism. On the memorial there are 180 names of local men who gave their lives so that we might live in a society of peace which is free from prejudice. These attacks are disgusting, and I wholeheartedly thank members of this council and the wider community who have come together to express our unity in opposing fascism. The criminal behind this graffiti will be found and brought to justice.

4.0 Decisions

The following decisions were scheduled to be considered by Cabinet on 12 September 2023:

Future Local Plan Options
Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme: Phase 3c
Delivering out Priorities Quarter 1
Provisional Revenue, Capital and Treasury Management Outturn 2022/23
Frontierland, Morecambe: Update and Next Steps (Exempt)

There have been no Officer Delegated Key Decisions taken since the last Leaders report.

The following Individual Cabinet Member Decision has been taken since the last Leader's report.

ICMD 2	Developing a Registered Provider Framework	Published on: 21/08/23 Taken by Cllr Caroline Jackson
ICMD 3	Mainway Regeneration Next Steps (Derby and Lune House) (Exempt)	Published on 29/08/23 Taken by Cllr Phillip Black
ICMD 4	Long Term Lease of council housing dwelling to deliver housing with support and care	Published on 06/09/23 Taken by Cllr Caroline Jackson
ICMD 5	Adoption of Policy on Civil Penalties for Smoke Emissions within Smoke Control Areas under the Clean Air Act 1993, as amended by the Environment Act 2021	Published on 08/09/23 Taken by Cllr Ainscough

Background Papers

Cabinet agenda of the meeting held on 12 September 2023.