



Leader's Report

8 November 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 12 September, later in this agenda.

2.0 Decisions required to be taken urgently.

2.1 No urgent cabinet decisions have been taken during this period.

3.0 Leader's Comments

3.1 Asylum Hotels

I have received letters from the Government confirming that the contracts with hotels in our district to house asylum seekers will be ended early next year. The Strathmore in Morecambe will be closing to asylum seekers in Jan 2024 and Ibis in Lancaster will be closing to asylum seekers in Feb 2024. Those housed there will be transferred to 'dispersal accommodation', although it is as yet unclear what this accommodation is or where it will be located. We anticipate that Serco will be seeking to provide ~150 beds within our district, but no other details are available at this time.

3.6 Climate Score Cards

Climate Emergency UK have been collecting data on the plans and performance of councils across the UK since 2018 when Council's such as ours began declaring a climate emergency. They produce an annual 'score card' which considers aspects such as transport, building and heating, planning and land use, governance and finance, biodiversity, waste reduction and food and collaboration and engagement. The score card provides an 'at a glance' assessment of our achievements in comparison to other councils across the country. Lancaster performed exceptionally well, coming second only to Westminster when compared to all other councils. We scored highest of all District councils with a total score of 61%. Further details can be found at: <https://councilclimatescorecards.uk/scoring/district/>

3.7 Devolution

I sent a letter in support of the DCN amendment to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (calling for voting rights for district councils on CCA boards) to Michael Gove and both of our local MP's ahead of it's reading in the Lords. The DCN amendment was supported by Labour and Lib-Dem peers, however it narrowly lost at the vote. The Government said that it was up to local upper tier authorities to determine the voting rights of district councils in their CCA's. Speaking for the government Earl Howe said,

"we are sympathetic to the idea that district councils should have voting rights pertaining to them as non-constituent members. We have deliberately left scope for this to happen. However, we are clear that that should be a matter to be determined at the local level. District councils need not be shut out of the room, as the noble Baroness, Lady Taylor, suggested, nor do I expect them to be so. We expect the upper-tier local authorities that we agree devolution deals with to work with district councils to deliver the powers most effectively being provided. In discussions thus far, we are encouraging potential deal areas to consider how best to involve district councils, in recognition of the role they can play."

The Shadow Minister for Devolution and the English Regions, Paula Barker MP, has written to the Minister urging clarification on the fate of UKSPF funding, calling for district councils to have voting rights and urging a greater scope of devolved powers and funding as part of the deal for Lancashire.

Last minute update: As I finish writing this report I have just attended a briefing on devolution from the new Minister, Jacob Young MP. The Minister stated that arrangements on voting rights are to be made locally and that it is anticipated that Lancashire's districts will have two votes 'on matters pertaining to districts' – although it is not yet clear exactly what will be covered by that definition and more importantly what will not. Lancashire's leaders heard more of the detail of the proposed devolution deal, however there is very little in terms of powers and funds that are actually new. For the most part it is the repositioning of funds and powers and capital projects already sited within the County at various levels. Worryingly this includes the intention for the CCA to administer UKSPF funding, which has been a district council responsibility. I'm not sure there is much of this deal which can be truly considered 'devolution'.

3.2 A1 Supaskips

I added my signature to a letter to Michael Gove MP (Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities) from Cat Smith MP requesting a meeting to discuss the situation at the site. The previous Ministerial meeting which had been arranged was cancelled due to the resignation of Minister Davidson. Since that cancellation the situation has deteriorated, and a major incident has been declared following fires at the site. The council has convened the Lancashire Resilience Forum (a multi-agency taskforce including the EA, County Council, LFRS and Police) and is being Chaired by Mark Davies. It is clear that removal of the harmful waste on the site will require funding and support from Government.

3.3 Council Budget

Work has begun in earnest on next year's budget (due to come to council in Feb 2023). Outcomes Based Resourcing (OBR) groups comprised of officers and cabinet members have begun meeting to discuss spending and opportunities for additional efficiency savings – as necessary to meet the challenge of our structural budget deficit. The groups have the following themes: strategy and coordination, business as usual, fit for future, people comms and engagement, assets, financial strategy, and the HRA.

3.4 Community Cohesion

I am sure all members will share in my deep upset at the horrendous violence we are seeing in the conflict in the Middle East at the moment. We deplore the loss of innocent life, especially children, and mourn the victims of terrorism and armed conflict in the region. This conflict has the potential to undermine community cohesion here in the UK and members will be saddened to hear of increasing numbers of hate crimes being reported across the country. There is no place for antisemitism or Islamophobia in the Lancaster district. Members have been given the contact details for Detective Constable Oliver Maughan and PC Helen Stanley from the Lancashire Constabulary, with whom they can discuss concerns about hate crimes and community safety. Incidents of hate crimes should be reported to 999 or 101 as appropriate - further information is online at <https://www.police.uk/ro/report/hate-crime/hc-av1/report-hate-crime/> Incidents of antisemitism can also be reported to the Community Safety Trust at <https://cst.org.uk/> and incidents of Islamophobia can be reported to Tell Mama at <https://tellmamauk.org>.

3.5 Four-Day Working Weeks

Seemingly originating from a Tufton Street think-tank, I have received correspondence from a campaign against four-day working weeks in the public sector. I have declined an invitation to become a signatory for this campaign. I have affirmed that whilst we currently have no intention of implementing 4-day working practices, that should such a proposal come forward, it would be heard and democratically debated by our members. Further to this I have received a letter from Minister Lee Rowley MP expressing his concern at 4-day employment

options 'deleting 20%' of the working week and the potential impact to service delivery. I have responded to the Minister with my concerns about the Government 'deleting 60%' or more of local government financing over the last decade and the definite impact this has had on service delivery.

On 16th Oct I met with Colette Webb & Jinghan Zeng from Lancaster University Confucius Institute. Among matters discussed were the welfare of the ~2000 Chinese students living and studying in Lancaster. Our community connectors will help provide information for induction materials for these students on matters connected to our service provision. For example how to sort waste for recycling collections etc. I was concerned to hear of instances where students have been victims of fraud or subject to racist abuse in the city centre. Members will agree that this is utterly unacceptable, and we are committed to working to ensure Lancaster embraces diversity and is a place where everyone can feel safe and welcome.

3.8 Social Tariff for Energy

I have signed a letter to the Prime Minister on behalf of the Council, alongside 140 organisations and MP's, calling for a social tariff for energy to be implemented. As the temperature falls, more households will face impossibly high energy bills, with many under-heating their homes to a dangerous extent. According to new polling carried out for National Energy Action by YouGov, a third of British adults are expecting to struggle to afford their heating bills this winter if the government doesn't offer financial help with energy bills. The government has previously committed to consult on future approaches to consumer protections including a social tariff. This was promised in the Autumn Statement 2022, with the commitment repeated multiple times since then by the Prime Minister and others. But with winter looming, no consultation has appeared. The signatories to the letter are therefore calling on the government to make good on its commitment to consult on a social tariff so that this urgent conversation can move forward. The letter can be read at <https://www.nea.org.uk/social-tariff-letter/>

3.9 Deputy Leader

Cllr Jackson deputised at the October North West Regional Board meeting which Shaun Davies attended as new chair of the Local Government Association. Cllr Davies spoke eloquently about local government responsibility to be corporate "family" to children in care and acknowledged the need for more frequent LGA meetings in the regions.

Cllr Jackson also deputised at the October meeting between senior civil servants from Departments of Leveling Up , Housing and Communities and of Business and Trade with the city council, the Eden team , Lancashire county council and Lancaster University. The meeting made a thorough review of progress on the Eden Project and was followed by an informative visit to the site to see exactly where the planned biomes will stand.

4.0 Decisions

The following decisions were scheduled to be considered by Cabinet on 24 October 2023:

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| Homeless and Rough Sleeper Strategy |
| Livestreaming of Cabinet Meetings |
| White Lund Depot Improvements |

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.

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| ICMD 6 | Lancaster High Streets Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) – Mill Race Area Conservations Management Plan (CMP). | Published on: 14.09.23 Taken by: Cllr Jean Parr |
| ICMD 7 | Renewal of Existing Contact Centre Software. | Published on: 26.09.23 Taken by: Cllr Hamilton-Cox |
| ICMD 8 | Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) Round 1 award: SRC2: Funding (capital grants) for investment in capacity building and infrastructure support for local civil society and community groups. | Published on 15.09.23 Taken by: Cllr Peter Jackson |
| ICMD 9 | Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) Round 1 award: SRC6 active travel and SRC2 investment in capacity building and infrastructure support. | Published on:15.09.23 Taken by: Cllr Gina Dowding |
| ICMD 10 | Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) Round 1 award: SRB1 Small scale investment. | Published on:15.09.23 Taken by: Cllr Catherine Potter |
| ICMD 11 | Swimming Pool Support Fund: Capital Funding. | Published on: 06.10.23 Taken by: Cllr Gina Dowding |

Background Papers

Cabinet agenda of the meeting held on 8 November 2023.