

PROCEEDINGS

A remote public meeting of the Lancaster City Council was held via Teams Live Events at 6pm on Tuesday, 28 April 2020, when the following Members were present:-

David Whitaker (Mayor)

Paul Anderton

Phillip Black

Dave Brookes

Lucie Carrington

Darren Clifford

Roger Dennison

Adrian Duggan

Kevin Frea

Jake Goodwin

June Greenwell

Tim Hamilton-Cox

Colin Hartley

Caroline Jackson

Debbie Jenkins

Geoff Knight

Erica Lewis

Abi Mills

Joyce Pritchard

John Reynolds

Alistair Sinclair

Malcolm Thomas

Anne Whitehead

John Wild

Peter Yates

Alan Biddulph (Deputy Mayor)

Mandy Bannon

Victoria Boyd-Power

Keith Budden

Roger Cleet

Tim Dant

Gina Dowding

Merv Evans

Andrew Gardiner

Mike Greenall

Mel Guilding

Janice Hanson

Tricia Heath

Joan Jackson

Mandy King

Sarah Knight

Cary Matthews

Jean Parr

Robert Redfern

Oliver Robinson

Paul Stubbins

Sandra Thornberry

David Whitworth

Jason Wood

Joanna Young

160 APOLOGIES

The Mayor welcomed Councillors and the public to the first meeting of full Council to be held remotely. He asked for patience whilst Members and Officers adapted to the new equipment and procedures.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Stephie Barber, Michael Mumford, Jack O'Dwyer-Henry, Faye Penny and Katie Whearty at this point.

Councillor Dennison presented apologies for Councillor Anderson later in the meeting under 'Declarations of Interest'.

161 MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Yates, seconded by Councillor Wood:

"That the minutes of the Council meeting held on 18 March 2020 be accepted as a correct record."

Councillors present who had attended the March meeting confirmed their approval of the minutes.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the Council meeting held on 18 March 2020 be accepted as a correct record.

The Mayor noted that he would sign a paper copy of the minutes at the earliest opportunity for the Council minute-book.

162 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Pritchard declared an interest that would require her to withdraw from Item 11, Mayor Making and the Annual Council Meeting, because the seniority list indicated that she might be invited to become Mayor in 2022/23.

At this point in the meeting, Councillor Lewis asked the Mayor if the meeting could be adjourned, because several Councillors were experiencing problems attending remotely. Councillor Gardiner seconded the request to adjourn, which the Mayor agreed to.

The meeting adjourned at 6.15pm, reconvening at 6.30pm.

Councillor Greenall declared an interest in relation to Item 11, Mayor Making and the Annual Council Meeting, because he was due to hold the office of Mayor in 2021/22.

At this point, it became clear that several Members using iPads were unable to join the meeting. Councillor Lewis suggested that these Members 'pair' themselves via phone call or facetime with Councillors who had remote access, so that they could contribute and be heard at the meeting using speakerphone.

The Mayor adjourned the meeting for a further five-minute break, to allow time for 'pairing up'.

The meeting adjourned at 6.35pm, reconvening at 6.40pm.

163 ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor conveyed his thanks to the NHS and other public services, care workers, volunteers and the community for their work in the fight against COVID-19. He noted that it was International Workers' Memorial Day, commemorating those who have lost their lives at work, and that a one minute silence had been observed earlier in the day at 11am to remember NHS workers and carers who had lost their lives during the COVID-19 outbreak. The Council sent its thoughts to their families.

164 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 11

No questions from the public had been received.

165 PETITIONS AND ADDRESSES

No petitions or addresses had been received.

166 LEADER'S REPORT

Councillors considered the Leader's Report and additional information from the Leader, recently received, that the City Council would receive £1,443,734 of the £1.6 billion COVID-19 emergency funding for local authorities.

The Leader responded to questions from Councillors.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

167 COMBINED AUTHORITY FOR LANCASHIRE WITH AN ELECTED MAYOR

The Leader presented a report of the Chief Executive to enable Council to form an in-principle decision regarding a Combined Authority for Lancashire, with an Elected Mayor.

Councillors asked a number of questions, which the Leader responded to.

Councillor Lewis, seconded by Councillor Gardiner, proposed:

"That Council supports ongoing work at a pan-Lancashire level to develop a model for a combined authority with a mayor."

Following debate, a vote was taken. The proposition was clearly carried.

Resolved:

That Council supports ongoing work at a pan-Lancashire level to develop a model for a combined authority with a mayor.

168 REMOTE MEETINGS - PROCEDURE RULES (Pages 9 - 10)

The Monitoring Officer had submitted a report setting out draft additional procedures for remote meetings for Council to consider and approve.

There were no questions. Councillor Reynolds moved:

"That the draft procedure rules for remote meetings (appended to the report), be approved for inclusion in the Constitution."

Councillor Hanson seconded the motion, which was clearly carried when put to the vote.

Resolved:

That the draft procedure rules for remote meetings (appended to the report), be approved for inclusion in the Constitution.

(The procedure rules are appended to these minutes)

169 MAYOR MAKING AND THE ANNUAL COUNCIL MEETING

Council considered a report of the Democratic Services Manager regarding Mayor Making and the Annual Council meeting 2020 in light of recently introduced regulations which had lifted the obligation to hold an annual meeting (the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020).

Councillor Black made the following proposition:

"That Council agrees to hold both of its annual council meetings scheduled for May 2020 at 6pm on Monday 18th May 2020."

Councillor Hanson seconded the proposition, that both meetings be combined to take place on 18th May.

In response to a query, the Democratic Services Manager clarified that, if the proposition was carried, the customary celebratory meal for the new Mayor could be held at a point later in the year when it was deemed safe to hold such a large gathering.

After a short debate, a vote was taken. The proposition was carried unanimously.

Resolved unanimously:

That both of the City Council's annual Council meetings scheduled for May 2020 be held at 6pm on Monday 18th May 2020.

170 SIX MONTH ATTENDANCE RULE (SECTION 85 (1) OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972)

The Democratic Services Manager submitted a report to enable Council to consider extending the period of absence for any Councillor who was unable to attend meetings for a six-month period, for a further three-month period. This recommendation was to apply during the period when remote meetings were necessary due to COVID-19 restrictions, to avoid any unnecessary disqualifications from office.

The Leader asked about the extension period of three months, given that remote meetings may have to be in place for some time. The Democratic Services Manager clarified that a longer automatic extension period could be proposed. For example, Members may feel that six months would be preferable to three months. That would allow the usual six-month entitlement, plus an extra six-month extension automatically, if required.

Taking this information into account, Councillor Robinson proposed:

“That, during the period when remote meetings are necessary due to COVID-19 restrictions, any Councillor who becomes unable to attend meetings of the authority for six months will automatically have their period of absence extended for a further six months by Council. This is pursuant to Section 85 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972.”

Councillor Wood seconded the proposition.

There was no debate. The proposition was carried unanimously when put to the vote.

Resolved unanimously:

That, during the period when remote meetings are necessary due to COVID-19 restrictions, any Councillor who becomes unable to attend meetings of the authority for six months will automatically have their period of absence extended for a further six months by Council. This is pursuant to Section 85 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972.

171 QUESTIONS UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 12

The Mayor informed Councillors that one question on notice had been received for the meeting, from Councillor Dant to Councillor Whitehead, as follows:

The Covid-19 pandemic has dramatically changed the work of Lancaster City Council as it has responded to the crisis in supporting its residents with food parcels, information and the coordination of volunteer efforts. The cost of this support together with the suspension of parking charges, the closure of leisure services and the foregoing of substantial amounts of rent and rate income mean that the budget agreed in February is going to need substantial revision. The impact of the lockdown on the economy of the UK as a whole will have a significant and lasting effect on business and commerce and there is every likelihood that the world economy will enter a recession.

Nonetheless, to my surprise, some aspects of the Council's work have continued regardless of these changed circumstances. Under the Chief Executive's 'urgent business' powers, a decision was taken on the 17th March to purchase commercial property in Morecambe as part of the Property Investment Strategy and the Capital Finance Strategy Group have since pursued investment in other commercial property.

On 30th January 2019, Full Council approved a Property Investment Strategy to buy land with sitting commercial tenants whose rent would provide an income to the Council to help meet its funding gap. On the 18th December 2019 Full Council approved a major uplift in the amount the Council can borrow (the total figure was not specified in the minutes) in order to purchase a series of commercial properties identified by the Capital Strategy Group. To date the investment strategy has been focussed solely on purchasing property currently occupied by commercial businesses paying rent.

In the light of the substantial impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the Council's budget and the likely effect on the UK economy including local commercial businesses, will the Portfolio Holder for Finance suspend the Investment Property Strategy agreed by Full Council on the 30th January 2019 and seek a review of that strategy to be undertaken by the Budget and Performance Panel?

Councillor Whitehead responded:

First of all, I should like to thank Council Officers for their quick and decisive action and

tremendous efforts during the Covid-19 pandemic to support vulnerable people and businesses in our district, whilst maintaining vital frontline services as much as possible.

This pandemic will inevitably have a financial impact on residents, businesses, public sector organisations, charities, and the community and voluntary sectors. As a Council, we will incur costs related to the pandemic as well as losses due to reduced income from council tax, business rates and fees and charges. Today, Central Government have offered the Council approximately £1.4 million towards our costs.

Over the last few years, the value of all usable reserves increased significantly, and we are more financially resilient than some other Councils. That is why we were able to allocate £2.0 million of reserves to help mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 emergency to residents and businesses in the District. Our approved budget for 2020/21 included the use of reserves to help us to achieve progress in our priority areas and to lead to increased income to support our priority areas. Now, in these unprecedented times, Cabinet and Officers are working on ways to move forward on financial decision making. Whilst there are so many uncertainties, a flexible plan based on a set of principles is required. Where possible we want to achieve progress in our priority areas, while ensuring that the Council remains financially viable. To that end, we need to progress our 'funding the future strategy': that is implementing a zero-based budgeting approach, looking to make efficiency savings, implementing a commercial strategy and investing for a return or to reduce costs.

It is planned for financial monitoring to be undertaken on a monthly basis. The Financial Resilience Group will meet monthly from the beginning of May and will review the Council's ongoing financial position, the statutory and non-statutory spending, and consider zero-based budgeting. Cabinet will be reviewing the position on a regular basis. The Budget and Performance Panel may also wish to consider their involvement.

The Capital Strategy Group includes the Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny and Budget and Performance, senior officers across a wide range of relevant expertise and an outside consultant. Recommendations on property investment proposals are made with a view to providing long term investment in accordance with the Council's corporate and financial objectives, whilst assessing and managing all risks and undertaking effective due diligence. Proposals are thoroughly reviewed prior to any recommendation to Cabinet. The Group has a duty to take appropriate decisions in the light of the pandemic.

Cllr Dant states "Under the Chief Executive's 'urgent business' powers, a decision was taken on the 17th March to purchase commercial property in Morecambe as part of the Property Investment Strategy" The decision was actually taken by the Leader using her executive powers on 19 March, not by the Chief Executive. The Leader made the decision after consultation with the cabinet, as the decision had initially been intended to be made by cabinet on 17th March, but at that time we were not able to hold a formal cabinet meeting. The details and procedures followed are provided in 'The agenda for Individual Cabinet Member and Officer Delegated Decisions, Tuesday, 21st April 2020.' The Council has had a long-term interest in this property for both its investment and strategic development potential and to enable resolution of the legal restrictions on adjoining land in council ownership. Its acquisition was recommended due to the increased importance to the critical path of the emerging Morecambe Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) implementation strategy, and the potential of Eden North.

So far, the Council has acquired two properties since the implementation of the Property Investment Strategy. The investment strategy is not focussed solely on purchasing property currently occupied by commercial businesses paying rent. The Capital Strategy Group is currently reviewing the Property Investment Strategy, to make clearer the

distinction between purely commercial investment and investments which provide some social value, such as economic regeneration, environmental and housing projects. The updated version will come to Council. I welcome any comments that Councillors may have.

The two purchases were made earlier in 2020. The Council has not undertaken any borrowing to make these purchases. The Capital Strategy Group has a remit to monitor performance of individual acquisitions as well as in total. It is too early to undertake a meaningful review.

I hope that you can see that the Capital Strategy Group will be acting to take appropriate action in the light of the pandemic, and that suspending the Property Investment Strategy would be restricting the Council from taking opportunities when they arise. The advice from officers remains that this strategy is an important part of securing our financial future. Not only could judicious acquisitions help build financial resilience they may also contribute to improving local economic sustainability.

I do not support suspending the Property Investment Strategy. Also, I am not allowed personally to suspend the Investment Property Strategy. Suspending a Strategy agreed by Council would have to be a Council decision.

I am also not allowed to instruct the Budget and Performance Panel. The Budget and Performance Panel is free to set its own work program.

Councillor Dant thanked Councillor Whitehead for her full and comprehensive response to his question. He joined with her in congratulating all the officers of the council and, indeed, Cabinet in the way it had responded to the COVID crisis, which he had found really impressive.

As his supplementary question, Councillor Dant asked:

What progress has been made in property investments that would directly benefit Lancaster residents such as renewable energies or housing projects?

Councillor Whitehead replied:

We are looking at renewable energy projects. I don't want to go into the details at this moment in time, but that is the case. And we are thinking about looking into housing projects in the future.

Councillor Dant thanked Councillor Whitehead for her response. The Democratic Services Manager agreed to circulate the questions and answers to all Councillors following the meeting.

Mayor

(The meeting finished at 8.10 p.m.)

**Any queries regarding these minutes,
please contact Debbie Chambers, Democratic Services - telephone (01524) 582057 or email
dchambers@lancaster.gov.uk**

**PROCEDURE RULES FOR THE REGULATION OF REMOTE PROCEEDINGS AGREED
AT COUNCIL 28 APRIL 2020**

PROCEDURE RULE

REMOTE MEETINGS

1. The [Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels \(Coronavirus\) \(Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings\) \(England and Wales\) Regulations 2020](#) make provision for remote attendance at, and remote access to, council meetings held on or before 7 May 2021.
2. The regulations enable the council to hold meetings without all, or any, of the members being physically present in a room. This allows for remote meetings through electronic, digital, virtual locations, live webcast, live interactive streaming, video and telephone conferencing.
3. The 'place' at which the meeting is held may be a council building, or where the organiser of the meeting is located, or an electronic, digital or virtual location, a web address, or a conference call telephone number.
4. In order for members to be able to attend meetings of the council remotely, they need not be physically present, provided they are able to hear and be heard (and, where possible, see and be seen by) other councillors and members of the public attending remotely or in person.
5. The procedure rules in this constitution apply to remote meetings in the same way as they do for other meetings of the council except where they conflict, in which case this procedure rule takes precedence over other procedure rules in relation to the governance of remote meetings.

6. Process

- 6.1 The council facilitates remote attendance and access to its meetings through the medium of appropriate digital/virtual/conferencing technology, which enables the following to take place:
- 6.2 Contributions to be received from people using a wide variety of devices, not all of whom are on the council network.
- 6.3 Being accessible to both participants and members of the public who are not taking an active role but just observing.
- 6.4 Presentations and documents (maps, plans, etc) to be displayed and spoken to.
- 6.5 Before the meeting, any document to be referred to during the meeting should be shared with participants and published (where appropriate) in advance on the council's website, and ensure that every page and slide is numbered, wherever possible.

6.6 Before the meeting, all participants should be made aware of the following etiquette

- a) Join the meeting promptly to avoid unnecessary interruptions.
- b) Mute microphones when not talking.
- c) Switch off cameras when not speaking (to save bandwidth).
- d) Indicate a wish to speak by using the chat function.
- e) Only speak when invited to by the chair.
- f) Anyone speaking should state their name before making a comment.
- g) If referring to a specific page or slide, mention the page or slide number.

6.7 The chair and the clerk may:

- a) Pause (adjourn) the meeting by taking down the stream (live feed) from public viewing and then resume it when needed.
- b) Switch on each active participant's microphone when they are invited to speak and switch them off afterwards.
- c) Mute someone speaking at any time.
- d) Mute everyone speaking except themselves at any time
- e) Allocate different levels of access to people logging in (based on upon whether they are a councillor, an officer, a member of the public who has registered to speak or just an observer of the meeting).
- f) Switch some active participants and the observers off, so they are paused and have neither 'live' visual or audio feed whilst the committee deliberates in private or an officer present gives the committee advice. By taking down the live feed content from the public and just displaying a holding slide, decision makers may hold a separate meeting on Teams. The live stream can then be resumed when needed.

7. Questions by members of the public

7.1 Only written questions from the public, submitted in accordance with Procedure Rule 11 of the Council Procedure Rules, may be considered at remote meetings.

8. Voting

8.1 Named voting will be used to record votes at remote meetings.

8.2 To record a vote, the clerk will perform a roll-call of all members present and ask them to state their voting intention (For, Against or Abstain). These will then be counted and recorded. At the conclusion of the voting the chair shall announce the numbers of votes cast for, against and abstentions and announce whether the motion has been passed or lost.

9. Access to information

9.1 The requirement to ensure meetings are open to the public includes access by remote means, including video conferencing, live webcast and live interactive streaming. Where a meeting is accessible to the public through such remote means, the meeting is open to the public whether or not members of the public are able to attend the meeting in person.

9.2 Any requirements for the authority to ensure publication, posting or making available a document for inspection at offices of the council include publication on the council's website.