

PROCEEDINGS

A meeting of the Lancaster City Council was held in the Town Hall, Morecambe, at 6.00 p.m. on Wednesday, 13 March 2024, when the following Members were present:-

Roger Dennison (Mayor)

Suhir Abuhajar

Mandy Bannon

Phillip Black

Gerry Blaikie

Dave Brookes

Roger Cleet

Brett Cooper

Gina Dowding

Andrew Gardiner

Alan Greenwell

Tim Hamilton-Cox

Chris Hanna

Paul Hart

Caroline Jackson

Sally Maddocks

Sarah McGowan

Paul Newton

Margaret Pattison

Catherine Potter

Robert Redfern

James Sommerville

Sandra Thornberry

David Whitaker

Nick Wilkinson

Martin Bottoms (Deputy Mayor)

Joanne Ainscough

Matthew Black

Louise Belcher

Phil Bradley

Keith Budden

Ruth Colbridge

Claire Cozler

Tom Fish

Martin Gawith

Erin Hall

John Hanson

Prof Chris Harris

Ross Hunter

John Livermore

Sophie Maddocks

Abi Mills

Jean Parr

Sue Penney

Joyce Pritchard

Sam Riches

Paul Stubbins

Sue Tyldesley

John Wild

Jason Wood

129 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Catherine Armistead, Colin Hartley, Peter Jackson, Kate Knight, Jack Lenox, Hamish Mills, Sarah Punshon, Grace Russell and Paul Tynan.

130 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2024 were signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

131 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were five declarations of interest made in respect of Item 12, the motion about 53 Weeks.

Councillor Bannon declared an interest in relation to her employment with the North Lancashire Citizens Advice (NLCA). This was not an interest that would require her to leave the Chamber (DPI).

Councillors Tyldesley, Whitaker, Hanna and Stubbins declared 'other' interests, as defined in the Councillor Code of Conduct, in relation to their roles as Trustees on the NLCA. (Minute No. 136 refers.)

132 ANNOUNCEMENTS - QUIZ NIGHTS

The Mayor reminded Councillors that he would be hosting a charity quiz at Lancaster Town Hall on the 19th of April at 7pm. Teams of up to 5 people could be registered and tickets were £4 a head, available from the Mayor's office.

He also informed Councillors, on behalf of Councillor Redfern, that a quiz in aid of the Royal Infirmary Charity would be held at the Greaves Hotel on 17th April, tickets were £5 per team and Councillors were asked to see Councillor Redfern for further information.

133 ANNOUNCEMENTS - E-VOTING

Councillors were informed of plans to use the e-voting facility for the first time at the next meeting of Council in April. Democratic Support would be in touch with all Members about attending for a short training session immediately before the Council meeting. The protocol on e-voting, which had been adopted by Council previously, would be circulated as a reminder of how the process would work.

Since there was a public speaker in attendance for Item 12, the motion about 53 Mondays, the Mayor informed Councillors that he would move that item up the agenda to directly after the speech had been heard, to enable the speaker to stay and listen to the debate.

134 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 11

The Mayor advised that no questions had been received from members of the public in accordance with the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 11.

135 ADDRESS - 53 WEEKS

Ms Jeni Meadows addressed Council on the motion regarding 53 Mondays. A copy of her address had been previously circulated.

The Mayor thanked Ms Meadows. He advised that the motion which Ms Meadows had referred to in her address would be debated as the next item in the meeting (minute 136 refers).

136 MOTION ON NOTICE - 53 MONDAYS

Councillor Caroline Jackson proposed the following motion having given the required notice to the Chief Executive in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 15:-

"This Council notes that Universal Credit suffers from a perennial administrative problem that creates unfairness for housing tenants who pay rent weekly.

Universal Credit is calculated monthly on the basis of a 52-week year (364 charging days) and in a year with 53 Mondays, does not allow for the additional week's rent levied by councils and housing associations. This occurs every five to six years and will impact residents in Lancaster District from 1st April 2024 affecting an estimated 1,470 council housing tenants who will have to find an extra week's rent with no benefit payment to cover the cost. Residents in receipt of housing benefit are not affected because housing benefit is paid weekly, not monthly.

This council believes that regardless of the type of benefit received, the benefits system should be administered fairly to meet the needs of residents and councils.

This council also notes that the pressures caused by the cost-of-living crisis and in addition an extra week's rent, will impact on some of the most vulnerable residents in the district who live on the lowest incomes. The potential impact on rent arrears to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) may be significant and will require considerable administrative time from officers to manage.

This Council therefore resolves to write to the Secretary of State for the Department for Work and Pensions to request that the Universal Credit system be altered in 2024 by way of a payment adjustment and that a change is made so that this does not arise again in subsequent 53-week years."

Councillor Phil Black seconded the motion.

An officer briefing note had been circulated to Councillors for the meeting and a information leaflet from North Lancashire Citizens Advice titled "What is a 53 week year and why does it matter?"

Councillor Jackson responded to a number of questions from Councillors. At the conclusion of a lengthy debate a vote was taken and the motion was clearly carried.

Resolved:-

This Council notes that

Universal Credit suffers from a perennial administrative problem that creates unfairness for housing tenants who pay rent weekly.

Universal Credit is calculated monthly on the basis of a 52-week year (364 charging days) and in a year with 53 Mondays, does not allow for the additional week's rent levied by councils and housing associations. This occurs every five to six years and will impact residents in Lancaster District from 1st April 2024 affecting an estimated 1,470 council housing tenants who will have to find an extra week's rent with no benefit payment to cover the cost. Residents in receipt of housing benefit are not affected because housing benefit is paid weekly, not monthly.

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This Council therefore resolves to write to the Secretary of State for the Department for Work and Pensions to request that the Universal Credit system be altered in 2024 by way of a payment adjustment and that a change is made so that this does not arise again in subsequent 53-week years.

137 LEADER'S REPORT

The Leader presented his report updating Members on various issues since his last report to Council. The Leader and Councillor Ainscough, Cabinet Member with particular responsibility for Environmental Services, then responded to a number of questions from Councillors.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

138 FLEXIBLE USE OF CAPITAL RECEIPTS STRATEGY 2024-25

Councillor Hamilton-Cox, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, presented a Cabinet report proposing a Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy for 2024/25.

The report informed Councillors that statutory guidance from the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities (DLUHC) and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) enabled local authorities to make flexible use of capital receipts to fund projects which were likely to generate savings to the authority and/or other public bodies.

To make use of this provision, authorities had to submit a Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy to the Secretary of State, setting out how the provision would be applied in the next financial year.

This report proposed a Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy for 2024/25 to complement Phase 2 of the Council's Outcomes-Based Resourcing programme – Fit for the Future.

Councillor Hamilton-Cox replied to questions from Councillors, agreeing to send a written response to Councillor Riches to clarify what the figure of 'grants clawed back' referred to. He then proposed the recommendation set out in the report, seconded by Councillor Phil

Black.

After a short debate Councillors voted on the proposition, which was carried unanimously.

Resolved unanimously:

That Council approves the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy 2024/25 set out in the report, in accordance with the relevant statutory guidance.

139 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2024/25 - 2028/29

A Cabinet report presenting Councillors with an updated final consolidated Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25-2028/29 was introduced by Councillor Hamilton-Cox, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources.

No questions about the report were raised. Councillor Hamilton-Cox proposed recommendation (3) of the report, recommendation (1) being to simply note the report and recommendation (2) referring to the decision already taken by Council (minute 138 refers).

Councillor Phil Black seconded the proposition:

“(3) That delegated authority be given to the Portfolio Holder and Chief Finance Officer to undertake any required amendments to reflect minor additional content and/ or presentational adjustments”

There was no debate. Councillors voted on the proposition, which was clearly carried.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) estimates as set out in the report are noted.
- (2) That the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy be included within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 to 2028/29.
- (3) That delegated authority be given to the Portfolio Holder and Chief Finance Officer to undertake any required amendments to reflect minor additional content and/ or presentational adjustments.

140 PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2024/25

The Chief Executive, Chief Officer for Governance, Chief Finance Officer and Senior Manager, Democratic Support and Elections all left the Chamber for the duration of this item, having an interest in the Pay Policy report.

Councillor Harris, Chair of the People and Organisational Development Committee, presented the Pay Policy Statement 2024/25 for Council’s agreement as required by the Localism Act 2011.

He responded to Members’ questions before proposing:

“That the Pay Policy Statement 2024/25 appended to the report, be agreed.”

Councillor Wood seconded the proposition which was clearly carried when put to the vote.

Resolved:

That the Pay Policy Statement 2024/25 appended to the report, be agreed.

The Chief Executive, Chief Officer for Governance, Chief Finance Officer and Senior Manager, Democratic Support and Elections returned to the Chamber at this point.

141 MOTION ON NOTICE - NEW RAILWAY STATIONS AND ELECTRIFICATION ALONG THE LANCASTER - MORECAMBE - HEYSHAM BRANCH LINE

The following motion of which notice had been given to the Chief Executive in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 15 was moved by Councillor Potter and seconded by Councillor Cleet:-

"Lancaster City Council notes that:

- a) Morecambe and Heysham Councillors representing the almost 37,000 residents of the wards: Heysham Central, Heysham South, Heysham North, West End, Westgate and Poulton, are calling on the Council to support new railway stations or halts alongside other improvements to the Lancaster-Morecambe-Heysham railway line.
- b) The 37,000 residents of these communities only have the public transport option of bus services, yet there is a railway line running right past them. Having access to the railway network would enhance the lives of our residents, connect us directly to national railway services, take traffic off our roads, reduce congestion throughout the district and help us achieve our net zero targets. It should also make the rail line more profitable for the operator as it will deliver many thousands more paying customers per year.
- c) We are all great supporters of the Eden development in Morecambe and are well aware of how transformational it has the potential to be.
- d) Lancashire County Council has responsibility for transport and not City, however Lancaster City Council is the accountable body for the Eden funding and is represented on the working group looking into the parking and transport needs of the visitors to Eden.
- e) The great majority of residents are fully supportive of the coming of Eden however their main concerns are the traffic and parking impact on the lives of the people who live in the area.
- f) Eden will be generating up to 4,000 visitors to Morecambe per day, a significant proportion of whom will be encouraged to arrive by train, necessitating an improvement to the service between Lancaster and Morecambe and beyond to Heysham Port.
- g) We understand that discussions are in their very early stages about such modernisation and improvements, including a new transport hub and some form of electrification, either through overhead lines or through the use of battery trains.
- h) Lancaster Civic Vision has made a point of lobbying Lancashire County Council and Lancaster City Council with regards to this electrification of the service.

- i) Transport improvements shouldn't just be to the benefit of Eden and its visitors but equally should benefit local residents.

Lancaster City Council believes:

Substantial benefits to the local community can be achieved by new stations or halts to be built in Heysham, between Oxcliffe Road and Mossgate Park, in Westgate near to the football stadium and in Poulton at York Bridge. Visitors to Morecambe could be served by a station with an adjacent 'park and ride' car park on land already owned by City and County at the end of the Bay Gateway near the Trumacar roundabout. These new stations should be built whilst other improvements to the service including its electrification are being implemented to benefit visitors to Eden.

Lancaster City Council will:

- (1) adopt the above as its preferred position in relation to railway stations on the Lancaster – Morecambe – Heysham line;
- (2) make the case to the appropriate bodies and organisations at every available opportunity for new railway stations in Westgate, Poulton, Heysham and also potentially at the end of the Bay Gateway with an adjacent 'park and ride' car park;
- (3) call for all parties to work towards a solution that will deliver an improved rail service for the residents of Morecambe and Heysham as well as for visitors to Eden and users of the port.”

An officer briefing note accompanied the motion on the agenda.

Councillor Potter responded to questions from Councillors.

There was a lengthy debate on the motion. When debate ended, a vote was taken and the motion was clearly carried.

Resolved:-

Lancaster City Council notes that:

- a) Morecambe and Heysham Councillors representing the almost 37,000 residents of the wards: Heysham Central, Heysham South, Heysham North, West End, Westgate and Poulton, are calling on the Council to support new railway stations or halts alongside other improvements to the Lancaster-Morecambe-Heysham railway line.
- b) The 37,000 residents of these communities only have the public transport option of bus services, yet there is a railway line running right past them. Having access to the railway network would enhance the lives of our residents, connect us directly to national railway services, take traffic off our roads, reduce congestion throughout the district and help us achieve our net zero targets. It should also make the rail line more profitable for the operator as it will deliver many thousands more paying customers per year.

- c) We are all great supporters of the Eden development in Morecambe and are well aware of how transformational it has the potential to be.
- d) Lancashire County Council has responsibility for transport and not City, however Lancaster City Council is the accountable body for the Eden funding and is represented on the working group looking into the parking and transport needs of the visitors to Eden.
- e) The great majority of residents are fully supportive of the coming of Eden however their main concerns are the traffic and parking impact on the lives of the people who live in the area.
- f) Eden will be generating up to 4,000 visitors to Morecambe per day, a significant proportion of whom will be encouraged to arrive by train, necessitating an improvement to the service between Lancaster and Morecambe and beyond to Heysham Port.
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- (3) call for all parties to work towards a solution that will deliver an improved rail service for the residents of Morecambe and Heysham as well as for visitors to

Eden and users of the port.

142 APPOINTMENTS AND CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

It was noted that the Labour Group had appointed Councillor Colbridge as a named substitute for the Budget and Performance Panel.

143 QUESTIONS UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 12

No questions had been submitted.

144 MINUTES OF CABINET

Council considered the Cabinet minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2024. There were no questions.

Mayor

(The meeting finished at 7.45 p.m.)

**Any queries regarding these minutes,
please contact Debbie Chambers, Senior Manager, Democratic Support & Elections/Deputy
Monitoring Officer - email dchambers@lancaster.gov.uk**