

AGENDA ITEM 14 – QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF COUNCIL

1. Question from Councillor Tim Hamilton-Cox to Councillor Eileen Blamire

Can the leader set out the advantages of the model of devolution which comes with need to elect a mayor or lead the Lancashire combined authority?

ANSWER

Two reports regarding the details of the Combined Authority (CA) have been submitted to Council, on 16 December 2015 and 13 April 2016. The Council meeting on 13 April 2016 resolved that

“the City Council agrees to become a constituent member of a Lancashire Combined Authority”

The Shadow Lancashire CA, which includes local authority Leaders and Chief Executives, has met regularly to discuss its role in taking advantage of the benefits in effectiveness and efficiency to be gained through pursuing the CA model. There are five themes under the CA:

- better homes for Lancashire
- skilled Lancashire
- connected Lancashire
- prosperous Lancashire
- public services working together

Lancashire is on track for laying an order for CA on 1 April 2017 and implementing the ‘Devo Lite’ CA based on the scheme for governance already voted on by Councils. This does not include an elected regional mayor. Lancashire is taking a phased approach to devolution.

A key outcome of the Lancashire Combined Authority (LCA) is to provide a single, united voice to represent the region’s interests with government and drive economic growth. It will open up significant opportunities with government, given that forming a CA demonstrates a track record of stability and collaboration.

Following the establishment of a CA, Lancashire can move towards devolution, however this is another stage in the process.

The Shadow CA has noted that the experience of other regions pursuing devolution suggests a number of additional advantages can be accessed only through pursuing the ‘Devo Max’ model, which would require the election of a regional mayor.

Government has indicated that there are fiscal advantages available to those CAs committed to an elected regional mayoralty, for example:

- annual fund to support major growth and renewal priorities
- multi-year transport settlement

- skills & employment support funding

Supplementary : Councillor Hamilton-Cox asked the Leader to comment regarding suggestions of an elected mayor by 2018.

Councillor Blamire replied that electing a mayor had to be a decision of every authority in Lancashire (except Wyre). This would be at the point of devolution and agreeing a deal. A mayor was working in some areas but not in others. The fact that Lancashire was working together would help when going for deals and funding.

2. Question from Councillor Tim Hamilton-Cox to Councillor Anne Whitehead

Can the portfolio holder detail any work that has been undertaken by the city council to assess and reproduce Preston city council's initiative to encourage what it calls 'community wealth building' – including increasing the value of procurement by public sector institutions within the Lancaster district from local businesses?

ANSWER

There has been no recent work on this sort of initiative.

EU legislation created complexities around aspects of this issue - and with Brexit it's not really clear what, if any, existing EU procurement requirements will be retained albeit in a different form in some way, and when we might know.

Putting those complexities aside, in any event procurement capacity has been (and continues to be) tied up on supporting actual procurement activity, rather than developing strategy. Arrangements are in hand to consider capacity needs for addressing this, through the budget process.

Supplementary: Can Cllr Whitehead contact Preston CC to talk about the advantages of what they've done?

Councillor Whitehead replied that she would look into this.

3. Question from Councillor Caroline Jackson to Councillor Janice Hanson

Do we have any information regarding the future occupancy of the empty BHS store and the Morrisons Convenience store on Market Square and have we any strategies for mitigating the depressing effect these large empty windows have on the area?

ANSWER

Part of the problem lies with the premises being in the hands of the receivers. We are advised that future tenancies cannot be negotiated until the receivers have finished their work in winding up the affairs of the original tenants. We are working with the Lancaster BID to investigate whether temporary displays can put into the windows until new tenants come forward.

Supplementary : are there any imaginative strategies which can make Council owned empty shops less depressing like showing local crafts etc.

Councillor Hanson replied that it would be a great idea if people came forward with suggestions to make the empty shops less depressing.

4. Question from Councillor Caroline Jackson to Councillor Darren Clifford

After the successful and far reaching dig for Roman remains on Quay Meadow in the summer, the area is still looking unfinished and in need of attention. Do we have any information as to how this will be looked after and made good especially in view of possible further excavation work?

ANSWER

Whilst the dig was successful in terms of archaeology, the soil from the trench was infected throughout with Japanese Knotweed.

Further exploration of the trench is likely to take place in summer 2017. Therefore temporarily filling the trench would have been at a cost to the Council and would have likely resulted in a further invasion of Japanese knotweed and the associated cost of then treating it.

Therefore the option that was considered the most sensible was -

Leave trench empty, board and make safe until summer 2017. Once the dig has been completed, we will refill the trench and make the ground good with seed. (The infected soil has been kept on site (different location), covered and is being treated accordingly. Once the soil is free of Japanese Knotweed, it will be removed from site by a contractor). The boarding and fencing of the trench has completed in house and will incur the one off cost for filling with clean soil following the summer 2017 dig. The site is currently visited weekly to ensure the fencing and boarding is safe.

We did send a briefing note to ward councillors to inform them of this at the time.

Supplementary: Can you tell us more about the dig in 2017.

Councillor Clifford replied that he could not go into too much detail but they were working closely with the Beyond the Castle team and a report from Aitken, Prince and Pearce would be considered in the new year.