

Council – 26 September 2016

- 1. The question from Councillor Edwards to Councillor Blamire was withdrawn and will be re-submitted to the November Council meeting.**
- 2. Question from Councillor Barry to Councillor Kershaw**

Do you think it acceptable that the Personnel committee of 20th February 2018 was asked to make a decision about severance payments to an officer who had left on 9th February 2018?

Councillor Kershaw replied:

I thank Cllr Barry for his question. As reported to Personnel Committee at the time, an error in the procedure followed by officers was identified following the commencement of discussions with the employee concerned. On the advice of the Monitoring Officer, the procedural error was remedied by the matter being considered by the Personnel Committee. Therefore, it was perfectly appropriate and indeed necessary for the Personnel Committee to have considered this issue and it was the Committee's decision to proceed with the agreement.

Councillor Barry asked, by way of supplementary question:

That's a big error, isn't it? Offering someone a load of money contrary to advice of the Section 151 Officer and possibly the Monitoring Officer, a decision the Committee couldn't really have overturned because the officer had left the authority?

Councillor Kershaw clarified that the officer had not left the authority at the point when the Committee met. He explained that this had been a genuine error and the Committee had passed a ruling to say that these payments must come to the Committee in future.

- 3. Question from Councillor Hamilton-Cox to Councillor Burns**

Can the Cabinet Member report on the progress and scope of the high-speed broadband network bid?

Councillor Burns reported that the council had agreed to lead a local partnership bid to the Local Full Fibre Network to upgrade and strengthen fibre broadband capacity in Lancaster city centre. The Government had revised its guidance on inviting bids for the Local Full Fibre Network; there was now no deadline for submissions, and an 'iterative' approach had been adopted consisting of three stages:

- Informal expression of interest
- Dialogue to assess the project
- Invited to submit full proposal when the strategic approach is deemed satisfactory

The council's ICT team had undertaken initial work to identify and cost a fibre 'route'.

The stakeholder group would be meeting to review the implications of the Government's new iterative approach, and decide where local aspirations would fit best, within the themes identified by Government. The group would then collate the information requested by Government to begin engaging with the project.

Councillor Hamilton-Cox asked a supplementary question:

When will the stakeholder meeting take place?

Councillor Burns said that an exact date had not been set yet, but he would let Councillor Hamilton-Cox know as soon as a date had been agreed.

4. Question from Councillor Hamilton-Cox to Councillor Hughes

What is the marginal cost of adding an additional public CCTV camera to the Vodafone platform?

Councillor Hughes replied that the purchase cost of an extra camera would depend on various factors, including the specification of the camera required. The installation cost would be determined by the location and proximity to power supply. Councillor Hughes said he was aware of the background to Councillor Hamilton-Cox's question and would point out that, whilst CCTV was good for evidence-gathering, it was not much of a deterrent for anti-social behaviour. Consideration would always be given about whether it would be in the interests of the public purse to site a camera in any particular location.

Councillor Hamilton-Cox asked a supplementary question:

What would a ball-park figure be?

Councillor Hughes could not give an accurate estimate but as a guide, he said it would be thousands, not hundreds of pounds.

5. Question from Councillor Mace to Councillor Whitehead

The public consultation on the City's Heritage Strategy has recently ended. The proposed Heritage Strategy for the district is a major programme that includes all the Heritage assets of the District in a co-ordinated effort - by City and County Councils, the Universities and the Duchy of Lancaster - to use these assets as a driver for the District's visitor economy. Implementation of this strategy is a project that has not yet been added explicitly to the draft list of 34 projects that was made available for the call-in heard by O&S on 28 August.

A problem identified at the call-in was that the City Council may not have the staffing and financial resources to carry forward multiple projects simultaneously, and the O&S Committee unanimously recommended "that Cabinet considers the list of projects and the way in which the projects are prioritised at its next meeting".

Please explain why cabinet decided on 4 September [minute 36] to postpone a decision on its priorities among these competing projects. It is clear that postponing this decision puts in jeopardy the success of the ongoing re-structuring, the purpose of which is said to be to ensure that staffing resources are available to enable the Council's ambitions to be achieved.

Councillor Whitehead replied:

The list of projects will be considered on an advisory basis at the next informal Cabinet briefing meeting.

Councillor Mace asked, by way of a supplementary question, whether the Cabinet member appreciated the difference between Critical Path Analysis to identify priorities and Cabinet's role of making decisions on what issues it wants officers to prioritise.

Councillor Whitehead replied yes, Cabinet did understand this and she would check progress but that the list of 34 projects referred to in the question was not the total list of projects.

6. Question from Councillor Mace to Councillor Hanson

At the same call-in to which I referred in my previous Question, the relative powers of cabinet and council in respect of the spending of taxpayer's money were discussed, and O&S unanimously referred "to the Constitutional Working Group the following issues :

- (i) Clarification of what should be referred to Cabinet or Council regarding spending of the City Council's reserves.*
- (ii) Request the Constitutional Working Group to consider additional parameters that should be set on the amount Cabinet can spend from the City Council's Reserves."*

The basic principle underlying the relationship between Council and Cabinet on budgetary matters is that the Council votes on the budget and within the constraints set by that budget, the Cabinet implements the policies determined by Council. Do you agree that Cabinet should not have the right to spend large sums without a public debate - when in full council the budget debate frequently centres on approving or denying the inclusion of relatively small sums of expenditure in the annual budget?

Councillor Hanson replied:

I thank Councillor Mace for asking such an important question. This chamber has given Cabinet the task of seeing through the newly approved Council Plan. That plan is delivered through our strong leader and cabinet governance system.

It is necessary to allow us to deliver the Plan (as you have asked us to do), which means that we in Cabinet have the obligation to expend money on behalf of our citizens. Indeed, the responsibility on cabinet is significant but we do not shirk our task or devolve responsibility. We are accountable and we will deliver.

We answer ultimately to the public, and we welcome transparency and openness. This chamber, overview and scrutiny, audit and other committees all have the opportunity for debate and challenge to what we do.

So we welcome the debate.