

Questions from Councillor Kershaw to Councillor Clifford

Councillor Kershaw asked two questions:

- (1) *“Please can you outline some of the ways that we might help the Dukes at this difficult time?”*
- (2) *“What are the benefits to Lancaster and district residents that our investment and support brings?”*

Councillor Clifford said that he would respond to both questions together.

The Council was already assisting The Dukes in a number of different ways. These included:

- Providing further professional support to ensure the Dukes had access to a range of professional skills during the transitional period.
- Potentially re-profiling the council’s grant to help manage peaks and troughs of expenditure. The Arts Council was also involved in this.
- Investigating ways of joint working with the Council and with other partners to cut costs but also to achieve a greater impact. This could include a joined up approach to ticketing and box office, marketing, purchasing and other things.
- Capital investment on a business case basis to help the Dukes to build income generation opportunities. This might include development of their cinema offer, or bar or catering.

The benefits of The Dukes could not be seen in isolation. It was part of the Arts Culture and Heritage offer and there was an overarching policy which the Council had for this wider role. This was embedded in cultural policy and would be consulted on. It was not just The Dukes but also the Musicians’ Co-op, Ludus, More Music, Grand Theatre, Winter Gardens; arts all across the board.

Question from Councillor Parr to Councillor Warriner

Councillor Parr had submitted the following question:

“Will the Cabinet Member for Housing please advise the council of the progress made in home adaptations?”

The Mayor noted that Councillor Warriner was not present at the meeting to make his response. A written answer would be provided.

Question from Councillor Parr to Councillor Clifford

Councillor Parr asked:

“Will the Cabinet member for Climate Change advise the council of the progress towards electrification of the council's vehicle fleet?”

Councillor Clifford said that, in accordance with the motion moved by Councillor Frea, and recently agreed at Council, he was currently working to develop a plan to provide for the Council to become Carbon neutral by 2030. Part of this plan would be to look at how the Council's vehicle fleet was powered.

The Council already had two electric pool cars. On 12 March, the Council had taken delivery of three electric vans to replace three diesel vans.

Councillor Clifford explained that, over the next four years there would be approximately 70 vans due for replacement. In the first instance a decision would be taken based on business need as to whether - by working differently - the Council could either reduce the amount of vans needed or, at least, replace a large van for a small van. Councillor Clifford reminded Councillors of the digital agenda; Council currently had a courier service with a van which delivered paper agendas to 60 councillors.

Based on business case, as many vehicles as possible would be replaced with electric vehicles.

There were also a number of sweepers that were due to be replaced over the next few years. The Council was already looking at what electric alternatives might be available, so they could be trialled in real life situations.

With regard to large vehicles like refuse collection vehicles work was going on with the University to look at whether shifting to a hydrogen power would be a practical alternative. The University representative would be coming to the Climate Change Cabinet Liaison Group to talk about that issue.

Question from Councillor Hamilton-Cox to Councillor Whitehead

Councillor Hamilton-Cox asked;

"What is the cap on commercial property investment expenditure in 2019/20?"

Councillor Whitehead responded:

There is no cap on commercial property investment expenditure in 2019/20.

However, the following points are made in order to clarify the position with respect to potential commercial property investments:

- The Property Investment Strategy which was approved by Council on 27 February 2019 includes a detailed process for the consideration of all potential commercial property investments in terms of financial yield, risk management and outcomes. The Strategy included a comprehensive governance process which requires all potential decisions to be made following a joint meeting of Cabinet and Scrutiny.

- The Treasury Management Strategy which was also approved by Council on 27 February sets out a limit for external borrowing which the Council is not expected to exceed, known as the operational boundary, which for 2019/20 was set at £85.8m. If the Council made any additional capital commitments outside of the agreed capital programme that necessitated borrowing above this operational boundary, it would require a Council decision to increase this limit before committing to any such capital expenditure. In so doing, the Council would have to be satisfied that any such increase is affordable, prudent and sustainable.
- Any property investment decision will include an analysis of the financial considerations. It is expected that investments will only proceed where it has been shown that they are capable of making a surplus after covering both a provision for the repayment of debt (known as MRP) and the interest on that debt.

By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Hamilton-Cox asked:

“Could you clarify the authorisation limits, if any, on individual projects?”

Councillor Whitehead referred to the Capital Strategy Group and the procedure in the governance framework to assess projects, which would then go to Cabinet to approve.

Question from Councillor Hamilton-Cox to Councillor Whitehead

Councillor Hamilton-Cox asked:

“How far did climate change policy considerations inform the final electricity supply contract procurement decision - as per the notice circulated on 4th March?”

Councillor Whitehead responded:

Responses to previous questions have covered the electricity supply procurement decision. As I outlined at the Council meeting on 27 February 2019, we are considering the green tariff offered by the winning bidder, which was nPower. We have now received an estimate, via the Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation, for the additional cost of transferring to a green tariff and, based on existing levels of electricity consumption, we estimate that switching to green energy will cost no more than £2,000. Subject to final confirmation of the rates, we will therefore switch all Council electricity to a green tariff.

In addition to this, we are working on a Climate Change Action Plan, which amongst other key actions includes bringing forward the Salt Ayre Landfill Site Solar Farm proposal to the first meeting of the Capital Strategy Group so that the Council moves closer to generating its own renewable energy.

Councillor Hamilton-Cox thanked Councillor Whitehead for her reply.