



Leader's Report

29 July 2020

Report of the Leader of the Council

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To present the Leader's report to Council.

This report is public.

RECOMMENDATION

To receive the report of the Leader of Council.

REPORT

1.0 Cabinet

Information on Cabinet matters is provided in the minutes from the Cabinet meeting held on 9 June 2020. The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 14 July 2020 were not available at the time of publication of the agenda and will be tabled at the July Council meeting.

2.0 Decisions required to be taken urgently

As required by the Access to Information Procedure Rule 15, Special Urgency approval of the Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee was sought in order that an item of urgent business could be tabled at the Cabinet meeting on 14th July as it had not been possible to provide sufficient notice of the key decision. The report was with regard to the options for the disbursement of the remainder of the Discretionary Business Grants scheme and to suggest an approach to allocate remaining monies. The Leader agreed to this being considered as an item of urgent business as any delay in decision making would seriously prejudice the public interest and the Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny agreed to waive call-in on this occasion in order that the decision could be implemented without delay.

3.0 Leader's Comments

COVID Response

I wish to again thank our officers, councillors and partner organisations for the care and support they offer to our district. Before we move too far from the first emergency phase, I wanted to offer some summary numbers on the support we have delivered to vulnerable people and businesses across the district.

At the height of our emergency response we had redeployed more than 300 officers to help with the emergency response, who:

- contacted more than 28 000 vulnerable households to ask if they were ok and if there was any help they needed,
- completed more than 9 000 welfare visits, where a phone call wasn't enough to ensure people were safe,
- continued key services such as bin collection and street cleaning without interruption, and
- working with the Morecambe Foodbank, Eggcup, foodbanks & food clubs across the district, delivered more than 17 000 food parcels.

We have also worked to support businesses across the district by:

- distributing nearly £30 million in business support grants (some still open for applications),
- providing advice to help local businesses re-open safely, and
- investing £1m from the council's reserves to support local business recovery and resilience.

If you know any businesses, who haven't yet tested their eligibility for business support grants, please do encourage them to look at the schemes available at www.lancaster.gov.uk/coronavirus or seek advice from econdev@lancaster.gov.uk. I would also encourage businesses who just missed out on any of the grants schemes to check whether the changes made to the discretionary grants scheme at the last cabinet meeting mean they are now eligible.

Increasingly, the focus is on reopening, but there are many across the district for whom this is and was an emergency, as protections on jobs and tenancies come to an end. As a council we are working to support people and businesses in both phases. This does, however, mean that our officers continue to be stretched.

Local Government Reorganisation

Discussion continues on the future of local government in both Lancashire and Cumbria. Heightened somewhat by Simon Clarke MP's (Minister for Regional Growth & Local Government) comments that unitarisation of councils will be a 'vital first step' for negotiating new mayors.

In Cumbria, this has taken the form of a request from the leader of Cumbria County Council to the Secretary of State requesting an invitation to form a unitary. A request that doesn't have the support of a majority of district councils. In Lancashire, although the

agreement across Lancashire to explore a combined authority with a mayor has frayed somewhat, discussion about unitarisation has picked up.

We have been approached by Wyre Borough Council to test whether what is sometimes called “Greater Blackpool” (Ribble Valley, Lancaster, Wyre, Blackpool and Fylde) might meet the tests to be a unitary council. I think the main argument in favour of a “Greater Blackpool”, is that it allows Lancashire to be divided in three: a “Greater Blackburn”, a “Greater Blackpool”, and Central Lancashire, which matches the current number of directors of children’s services in Lancashire, rather than the principles of local government re-organisation. However, as I have given an undertaking to our council that I would pursue conversations both north and south, we have agreed to be part of this exercise. Noting that the grouping can meet a number of the tests to be a unitary without us, and may meet more without us.

We continue to make the case to government that, should invitations be issued for unitary proposals in Lancashire and Cumbria, they should allow for cross-boundary proposals. By the time council meets, we will have also had the first meeting of the joint committee recently formed between Lancaster, South Lakeland and Barrow. Papers for the joint committee are available from the committees & meetings section of the council’s website.

Community conversations

Community engagement has been one of the cornerstones of this administration. This was work we’d started before the pandemic, setting up new advisory groups and establishing an officer team focused on building community connections. But the pandemic underscored just how important it was for the city council to be working closely with as many of the community, voluntary and faith sector organisations as we could contact to share information, build partnerships and support their work and our residents.

What started as a small call for umbrella community, faith and business groups as shutdown started, eventually grew to three weekly calls that had grown both organically and deliberately to include parish councils, new mutual aid groups, voluntary, community and faith sector organisations, as well as key institutions from across the district. I want to thank Cllrs Sinclair, Frea and Jackson for their work in anchoring these calls, and officers for supporting these calls. For many of us, these calls were a key source of information and the helped to share information and solve problems. I also wanted to thank the many councillors and organisations who participated in these calls and helped ensure that information and support was getting to every corner of the district.

These conversations have now stepped down from weekly to fortnightly, and as some of the urgency of the original conversations’ eases, discussion has turned to recovery and what we can do together next. To this end we, along with partners, we are hosting a number of community conversations over the summer. These conversations are a mix of themes that have emerged during the pandemic and a return to ideas we’ve been working on for a while. The aim is for these conversations to continue to build shared understandings and lay the foundation for future shared work.

Invitations to register for these events will be circulated to all councillors:

- 6:30pm Thurs 23rd July: 'Community Power & Resilience'
- 6.30pm Thurs 20th August: 'Our Wellbeing District: Lessons from communities'
- 6.30pm Thurs 17th September: 'Building our Wellbeing Wealth: an exploration of Community Wealth Building & Wellbeing'

Climate Emergency

The People's Jury Oversight Panel has also been having discussions about how we can build a community conversation around the work of the People's Jury. Councillors may remember that the People's Jury has been asked to address the question "What do we need to do in our homes, neighbourhoods and district to respond to the emergency of Climate Change?" Although there was an interruption in the meeting of the People's Jury, they are now meeting online and we expect them to report later in the year. The breadth of the question means that while some of the recommendations of the People's Jury will be directed to the council, we expect that others will address residents and organisations in the district. Please look for opportunities to remind people of the work of the jury, there are handy resources on the council's website

4.0 Key Decisions

The following Key Decisions were taken by Cabinet 14 July 2020

- (1) Discretionary Business Grants (Urgent Business as set out in 2.0)
- (2) Adopt Homelessness Strategy
- (3) Allocation of Commuted Sums to Lune Valley Community Land Trust
- (4) Developing a Homes Strategy for Lancaster District
- (5) Procurement Strategy
- (6) CCTV – Change of Supplier
- (7) Property Investment Strategy: Investment Proposals
- (8) Co-op Building Refurbishment
- (9) Eden Project North

Background Papers

Cabinet agenda 14 July 2020