



Leader's Report

30 September 2020

Report of the Leader of the Council

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To present the Leader's report to Council.

This report is public.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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 meetings held on 14 July 2020 and 17 August 2020. The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 15 September 2020 were not available at the time of publication of the agenda and will be tabled at the November Council meeting.

2.0 Decisions required to be taken urgently

No urgent Cabinet decisions have been taken in this period.

3.0 Leader's Comments

R U Ok? I've had reason to reflect recently, that quite a few councillors are doing it tough, including me some days. We're trying to be there for our communities, for friends, family, colleagues and neighbours and sometimes that can take a lot from you. It's a well-worn analogy but remember to fit your own oxygen mask before helping others to fit theirs. This isn't a selfish act, but rather one that allows you to keep on helping others.

There's a growing store of resources on the city council share point, as well as projects like the TogetherAll community supported by the NHS.

COVID

As everyone will be aware new local restrictions will come into force on Tuesday 22nd September. From the residents who have contacted me I can report that there is a sense of confusion and frustration. The most popular question – why isn't Blackpool included? The issue that causes the most frustration – that informal care arrangements aren't accommodated within the restrictions.

With the new local restrictions reducing people's opportunities to meet with family, putting stress on work and care arrangements, and requiring some businesses to operate differently and/or close early, we know that this is going to be an increasingly difficult time for many in our community.

As it becomes more difficult for our community, so it becomes more difficult for the council. More residents and businesses need our support, fewer residents and businesses are in a position to pay rates, rent, fees or charges. The intersection of austerity, COVID and economic fragility is going to prove to be a difficult one for local government and having been burnt by central government in the first wave, it seems likely we will need to be more cautious in our response to the second wave.

Once again, I want to thank our officers for the amazing work that they are doing. For the flexibility they have shown in being willing to take on new jobs as needs have shifted across the council and for the resilience they show in keeping going when the going is tough.

I also want to thank everyone across the district who has mobilised as part of a response to the pandemic. Partnership working has been the cornerstone of the pandemic response in our district. Since lock down began, more than 70 meetings have been held bringing together community, voluntary and faith groups, institutions like the NHS and our universities and FE college, and the business sector, to share information and to try and ensure that we help as many people, businesses and organisations through the pandemic as possible.

Depending on new restrictions that might be announced, the City Council is ready to ramp up its work in supporting residents again. We continue to have useful conversations with business representative organisations around business support.

Flooding

Again, the district has experienced flooding. The area that made the news was south Lancaster, but other areas and individual residents also experienced flooding in August. It is important to remember that while government responses are tied to flooding impacting large numbers of houses, flooding for residents and individual businesses is experienced individually.

Working with the Environment Agency, the city council has now removed the pedestrian bridge that contributed to the first flood incident in August and will replace it with a bridge with a higher clearance in the new year.

Grassland management

Councillors will have been pleased to learn grassed areas will be mown through the autumn. The grassland management review continues, and there is strong support from residents to have more land to support biodiversity. However, residents do also want mown areas for dog walking and playing ball games. Increasingly, it becomes evident that we may need to devote more land to holding and slowing water through natural flood management. Finding the right balance will need to be involve discussion with residents, and I would encourage all councillors to share the preferences of their residents.

Priorities, outcomes and budgeting

Over summer the cabinet, working with officers, has been reflecting on the work in our portfolios, looking at new priorities that have emerged through COVID, and trying to identify work that might now not be so urgent. This work is supported by a review of the outcome measures that are used for performance reporting and that will form the basis of our outcome-based budgeting process.

Setting the budget for next year will be a difficult task. Like many organisations, our income has been impacted by COVID and remains somewhat uncertain. The fragile economic circumstances means there are more calls for our support from both residents and businesses, and yet less resource to do it.

We don't want to be a council that delivers statutory services only. We want to be a council that continues to innovate and to meet new and emerging needs in our community. The partnership working that has been central to our district's COVID response is now offering new opportunities to build shared work with new partners to address the priorities of our district.

Local government reorganisation

This council meeting, local government reorganisation will have its own agenda item. Like many others, local government reorganisation isn't a topic I would have prioritised by choice. It is one that has been pushed up the agenda by the government:

- first, by the Prime Minister saying that the path to devolution ran through combined authorities and elected mayors,
- then in Lancashire particularly, by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) saying that there were too many councils in Lancashire to form a combined authority without unitarisation, and
- most recently by government saying that recovery funds would be linked to reorganisation plans.

Much of central government's thinking about the future of local government seems to be in flux, a position which in itself is unhelpful. Our challenge as a council remains to work out what local government structures will best serve our residents and our region. Nothing I have yet seen persuades me to believe that our district would be best served in a 'greater Blackpool' council. I continue to believe that our natural partnership lies round the bay, with South Lakeland and

Barrow. How far and how fast that collaboration deepens and develops is flexible. If the government backs away from local government reorganisation then we can continue to build shared work through the joint committee, if they push forward, then I believe we need to be ready to make our case.

Cabinet changes

Two changes have been made to cabinet since our last council meeting. Cllr John Reynolds has tendered his resignation, which with sadness I have accepted. Cllr Anne Whitehead, who had initially returned to cabinet at the acting cabinet member for finance while Cllr Reynolds was on leave, has now returned as the substantive cabinet member. I'm delighted to welcome Cllr Whitehead back to cabinet and the finance portfolio.

4.0 Key Decisions

The following Key Decisions were taken by Cabinet on 17 August 2020:-

- (1) Property Investment Strategy: Investment Proposals. Cabinet reaffirmed the decision taken on 14 July 2020 after considering a referral from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee following a call-in
- (2) Covid-19 Pandemic- Policy for decision making and spending delegations within the Budget and Police Framework - Award of contract- electric refuse collection vehicles

The following Decisions were taken by Cabinet on 15 September 2020:-

- (1) Provisional Revenue, Capital & Treasury Management Outturn
- (2) Covid 19 Pandemic - Policy for decision making and spending delegations within the Budget and Policy Framework - Award of contract electric pool cars
- (3) Repairs to Council Asset – 1 Lodge Street
- (4) Heysham Gateway
- (5) Local Plan for Lancaster District Climate Emergency Review: Formal Commencement of Review process and Launch of Scoping Consultation
- (6) Regulation 7 Direction under Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulation 2007

The following Officer Delegated Key Decisions have been taken since the last Leader's report:-

ODD1 Re-Roofing Programme

ODD2 Award of contract- electric refuse collection vehicles

Background Papers

Cabinet agendas 14 July 2020, 17 August 2020 and 15 September 2020.