



Leader's Report

13 December 2023

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

1.1 The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held 24 October 2023 will be tabled at January's meeting of Council.

2.0 Decisions required to be taken urgently.

2.1 No urgent cabinet decisions have been taken during this period.

3.0 Leader's Comments

3.1 Remembrance

I observed Remembrance at the Garden of Remembrance at Lancaster Town Hall alongside the Mayor, Councillors, representatives from community organisations and service personnel.

3.2 Culture & Events

November was a month with a great deal of cultural offerings. I attended the launch event for Light up Lancaster on 3rd November and had a chance to hear first-hand the incredible effort that had gone into putting on this year's festival. The

installations were superb and the streets were packed with people out enjoying the spectacle. I also attended the 'Spill the Mill Race' exhibition at St Johns Church which brought together ceramics, clog dance and soundscapes to retell stories of that ever-changing part of our city and its long history. I note too the Museum's centenary event which celebrated the city museum opening its doors on 5th November 1923. I had hoped to attend the 'facing the past' event at the priory on the 28th (but could not because of a diary conflict) and see the exhibition of important works which reveal and redress omissions in the way that Lancaster (as the 4th largest slavery port in the UK) commemorates its history. On the 27th we celebrated Lancashire Day, and civic, community, business and public service leaders gathered in Westminster at the Speaker's invitation to hear the proclamation.

I also welcome progress that has been made in an effort to retain the Platform in Morecambe as a cultural venue operated by the Council. A reimagined operating model is being devised by officers and Cabinet members (esp. Cllr Potter who has the culture portfolio) and promises to deliver both a broad entertainment programme and cost neutrality to the Council in the future.

3.3 The Autumn Budget

Cabinet agreed to sign a letter addressed to the Chancellor of the Exchequer supporting the Samaritans campaign to properly fund the National Suicide Prevention Strategy. As put by the Samaritans:

"We welcome the new National Suicide Prevention Strategy for England, but this cannot be implemented without ongoing funding. It is crucial that ring-fenced funding for local suicide prevention is renewed so that local areas can direct resources towards the most appropriate interventions for their population. Samaritans estimate that this would cost around £77.1million for the five-year duration of the new strategy, an equivalent of £1.40 per capita."

I signed a letter to Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to support a District Council's Network (DCN) campaign to tackle the temporary accommodation crisis. There are rising levels of homelessness and a pre-existing demand for social housing which outstrips the availability of suitable properties. Temporary accommodation (such as B&B's) is not only an inappropriate solution, but also an expensive one which is placing ever more strain on many Councils already under-resourced budgets. Further details about the campaign and the text of the letter can be found here: <https://www.districtcouncils.info/chancellor-urged-by-119-councils-to-avert-homelessness-crisis/>

The budget announcements that may interest members included an increase to the Local Housing Allowance rates, funding for local authorities to invest in homelessness prevention, changes to fees for major planning applications, and the Public Works Load Board (PWLB) preferential borrowing rate being extended until June 2025. There was no indication of any intention to increase Council's core spending power, either through taxation, grants or other funding mechanisms. Further details will become available by the end of the year, but it is unlikely that

any significant easing of budgetary challenges will arise in the Local Government Finance Settlement.

3.4 Local Government & Devolution

Cllr Jean Parr attended the Lancashire Parish and Town Council Conference on 4th November 2023 on behalf of our Council and heard speakers covering topics including Lancashire 2050 and devolution, public rights of way, flooding, highways and environment updates and rural crime. She queried the lack of involvement/voting rights of the district councils in the new Combined County Authority (CCA). The leader of the County Council, Cllr Phillippa Wilkinson, said that district councils would not be extended voting rights.

On the 26th of November the Lancashire Devolution Deal was signed by the leaders of Lancashire's upper tier authorities and the Minister, Jacob Young MP, at a ceremony held at Lancaster Castle. Prior to this I joined leaders from Burnley, Chorley, Pendle, Preston, Rossendale, South Ribble and West Lancashire in signing a letter to the Minister calling for a pause and review of the devolution plans – until such stage as they can be supported by a majority of the district councils. On 30th November these signatories did not attend the scheduled Lancashire Leaders meeting (for all 15 Lancashire Councils) in protest at the conduct of the upper tier authorities and the government in their handling of this issue.

The public consultation on the deal is now live and available online at <https://lancashiredevolution.co.uk/consultation/> until the 26th Jan.

3.5 Consultation & Stakeholders

November has been a busy month for consultation and discussion with stakeholders. There have been discussions between cabinet members and local businesses and the community around issues concerning city centre parking, transport and wider plans for the canal quarter. A consultation has been launched seeking views on this year's budget setting process, alongside events with local stakeholders and a media briefing. Member of the public can respond to this consultation online at <https://keepconnected.lancaster.gov.uk/outcome-based-resourcing-2023> before 17th December.

Consultation work has continued around the objective setting for the Frontierland redevelopment. Alongside direct public engagement sessions, there have also been stakeholder briefings and workshops – including a briefing to Morecambe Town Councillors. Further responses to the consultation can be submit online at <https://keepconnected.lancaster.gov.uk/frontierland> by 3rd Jan.

4.0 Decisions

The following decisions were scheduled to be considered by Cabinet on 24 October 2023:

Council Plan 2024-2027

Resourcing the Review of the Lancaster District Local Plan
Delivering Our Priorities: Q2 2023/24
Localised Council Tax Support
Strategic Risk Register
Risk Appetite
Centenary House (Former Co-Op Department Store), Regent Road, Morecambe: BRLF2 Grant Funded Abnormal Works.

There have been no Officer Delegated Key Decisions taken since the last Leaders report.

The following Individual Cabinet Member Decision has been taken since the last Leader's report.

ICMD 12	UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Capital Funding Award: Community and Place UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF): Communities, Well-Being and Partnerships	Published on 18.10.23 Taken by: Cllr Peter Jackson
ICMD 13	UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Capital Funding Award: Community and Place UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF): Environmental Services	Published on 18.10.23 Taken by: Cllr Joanne Ainscough
ICMD 14	Shared Prosperity Fund, Capital Funding Award: Community and Place UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF): Housing and Homelessness	Published on 18.10.23 Taken by: Cllr Caroline Jackson
ICMD 15	UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Capital Funding Award: Community and Place UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF): Regeneration, Skills and Digital Innovation	Published on 18.10.23 Taken by: Cllr Nick Wilkinson
ICMD 16	UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Capital Funding Award: Community and Place UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF): Visitor Economy, Community Wealth Building & Culture	Published on 18.10.23 Taken by: Cllr Catherine Potter

Background Papers

Cabinet agenda of the meeting held on 5 December 2023.