



Leader's Report

28 February 2024

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 Information on Cabinet matters is provided in the minutes from the Cabinet meeting held 15 January later in this agenda.

2.0 Decisions required to be taken urgently.

2.1 No urgent Cabinet decisions have been taken since the last Leader's Report.

3.0 Leader's Comments

3.1 Following on from the confusion at last month's Leaders report, I thought it might be helpful to members to know that these words are written at least 9 days before the next full council meeting. Written reports have to be supplied to democratic services in enough time that they can be included in the Agenda reports pack. Matters that would normally be included in a written report but which arise between the penning of the report and the meeting itself are delivered verbally by the Leader at the meeting.

3.2 Nuclear Power

As was noted verbally at last month's full council meeting, I have written a letter to our district's two MPs, and the Minister for Energy, outlining my support for EDF's application to extend the generating life of Heysham 1 & Heysham 2. I will circulate the text of this letter to all members.

Cat Smith MP has replied and I will also circulate her response to all members ahead of the meeting. Here I will restrict myself to a quote from her letter:

"By quadrupling offshore wind, doubling onshore wind, tripling solar power generation and extending the lifetime of existing nuclear plants, a Labour Government could switch the UK to clean power by 2030.

With the certainty of safety assurances you have outlined, I support your ambition to protect the 1,500 local high-skilled jobs and extension of the life of Heysham 1 and 2, and want to do all I can to support Lancaster City Council plan a financial strategy which meets the needs of residents, following the 58% government cuts to the city council's budgets over the past fourteen years."

I note too that the Energy Minister, Andrew Bowie MP, visited the power stations on the 8th of February. The Minister met with apprentices on site and spoke to the potential for Heysham to host a mobile nuclear reactor (SMR) in due course, as designs for these are set to be approved by the Government in the coming months.

3.3 Culture

On the 25th of Jan I attended the Holocaust Memorial Day event organised by More Music at Lancaster Town Hall. There was a candle lighting ceremony remembering all who lost their lives during the holocaust, subsequent genocides and current conflict in Palestine & Israel. There were powerful speeches, alongside music & arts performances including choir, traditional klezmer folk band, violinist, and poetry readings from refugees. The theme was 'the fragility of peace', and it was a deeply moving and thought provoking occasion.

This month has seen Chinese New Year (CNY) celebrations taking place in our district. On the 27th I attended the CNY variety show at the Grand Theatre where performers from across the North West preformed an impressive showcase of Chinese music, song, dance and opera. I was also invited to give a speech at the opening ceremony for CNY and saw Lancaster city centre adorned with hundreds of lanterns, before the celebrations began proper with the lions and dragon parading through the streets. This colourful festival and the sharing of rich culture was a welcome addition to the diverse tapestry of our city.

I attended the 'Sigh of the Seas' memorial event in the West End of Morecambe to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Morecambe Bay cockling disaster. More than 20 Chinese cockle pickers tragically lost their lives. That tragedy shook not only the local community but the nation, and highlighted the prevalence of modern slavery in the UK.

Later in February, Morecambe's promenade was bursting with colour and movement for the excellent Baylight festival, a three-day free light art trail featuring light artworks from local, national and international artists. My amazement to see giant tentacles bursting out of the Winter Gardens was hardly dampened by the very wet weather!

3.4 Democracy in Lancashire

In January I attended both meetings of District Leader's & Lancashire Leader's and discussed a wide range of issues affecting the county, most notably changes to waste collection and processing in anticipation of new Government legislation. The County Council has also asked Lancaster district to consider potential new locations for pay and display on street parking. We have received assurances that new sites will only be delivered where there is agreement with local partners, and therefore we have agreed to enter discussions as a non-binding exploration of the issue.

On the 22nd of January the Chief Executive submitted Lancaster City Council's response to the devolution deal consultation. We are now waiting for the County Council to collate and publish responses, and of course, to deliver a meaningful response.

On the 5th of February myself and the Finance portfolio holder attended a meeting of the Joint Revenues & Benefits service committee. Lancaster and Preston continue to work together to deliver a number of services in order to deliver efficiencies and cost savings to both authorities. Minutes of the meeting are available to members online via the extranet.

3.5 Supaskips Emergency

It is worth remembering that the city council has no specific duty to manage this emergency, or spend our reserves dealing with it, but despite this we stepped up to the plate for the sake of residents, businesses and to protect the environment. I believe that was the right thing to do, but it has meant contributing just shy of £1m to help clear the site of waste, but to finish the job will cost another £450k. To put that into context, it could add up to approximately 13% of our available allocated reserves, or 7% of our entire net revenue budget for 2023/24.

Unfortunately, a significant amount of waste remains, and deep-seated pockets of heat mean that potential flare-ups are likely for some time to come. The Council continues to work with partners in other agencies, and continues to try to seek financial support in order to finish the work of clearing the site. Some partners

have indicated that they are unable to contribute financially to dealing with the emergency response, others we have yet to have an answer from. Frustratingly HMRC have informed us that there is no mechanism by which they can waive the landfill tax we have to pay, which accounts for more than half the cost of the action taken to clear the site so far. Crucially we continue to await a response from Government Minister's about what financial support they are able to offer us. Rather than leaving the council to carry the financial can by itself, the question is, do we now say that we've done enough and it's time for another partner to dig deep and put their hands in their pockets? This is not an easy question to answer, and we have been consulting with residents to try and determine a route forward.

I hope to be able to verbally report on some significant progress by full council.

4.0 Decisions

The following decisions were scheduled to be considered by Cabinet on 06 February 2024:

Budget & Policy Framework Update 2024/25 to 2028/29
Capital Strategy & Capital Programme 2024/25 to 2028/29
Treasury Management Strategy
Medium Term Financial Strategy
Housing Revenue Account and Capital Programme
Decision to Consider Sustainability of a Council Housing Dwelling Block

The following decisions were scheduled to be considered by Cabinet on 20 February 2024:

Hackney Carriage Fare Review 2024
Licensing Act 2003 - Revised Statement of Licensing Policy (2023-2028)
General Fund Budget & Policy Framework 2024/25
General Fund Capital Programme 2023/24 - 2032/33 & Capital Strategy (Investing in the Future)
Treasury Management Strategy 2024/24
Medium Term Financial Strategy Update
Housing Revenue Account and Capital Programme
Commercial Property Sale, Lancaster

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

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

ICMD 19	Decorating Support Scheme for Council Housing Tenants	Taken by: Cllr Caroline Jackson Published on: 06/02/24
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ICMD 20	Eden Project Development Funds	Taken by: Cllr Catherine Potter Published on:08/02/24
ICMD 21	Provision of Disabled Adaptation to Council-Owned Dwellings	Taken by: Cllr Caroline Jackson Published on:12/02/24
ICMD 22	Commercial Property Letting	Taken by: Cllr Tim Hamilton-Cox Published on: 13/02/24

Background Papers

Cabinet agendas of the meetings held on 06 and 20 February 2024.