



Leader's Report

22 January 2025

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 meeting held 22 October 2024. The minutes of the meetings held 3 December and 14 January 2025 will be included in the agenda for the February meeting of Council.

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 Budget matters

Finalising the budget has been the main priority over the past six weeks. Since the end of November the cabinet have met with officers on six occasions to finalise the budget through consideration of the Local Government Finance Statement, final capital budget, the HRA budget, fees and charges and matters arising from officers' final figures on business rates and other points. AT the moment of writing we do not know the extent of government promised support on National Insurance: any shortfall may require further changes.

3.2 **Fit for the Future groups**

The overall strategy and co-ordination group has met to consider the remits of the working groups and their link to the Council Plan priorities; a new group on Williamson Park has been set up. The OBR assets group has received final reports on the condition of assets and the outcomes have been reflected in budget allocations this year and going forward into a planned ten-year programme of works.

3.3 **Local Energy Action Plan**

This was successfully launched at the beginning of December following its adoption at October cabinet. The action plan is now to be worked through with partners in order to progress towards the long-term vision of decarbonising the district by 2040 beyond our internal 2030 target. It sets out the changes and developments required to decarbonise homes, businesses, travel and other key areas, including addressing fuel poverty.

3.4 **Museums and Culture**

The second meeting to review the future of the museums considered the work ongoing to maintain and improve the funding including the successful City Museum shop. It is likely the museums could successfully attract substantial external funding to update and remodel the current offer if the city council can ensure the availability of match funding. There is further work to be done to establish this and to find a sustainable model beyond the end date for external funding.

There are on-going discussions regarding how we strengthen and unify the culture, arts and heritage work, within cabinet and possibly across the council, especially in view of future threats to the sector.

3.5 **Eggcup**

A further meeting has been held in Morecambe with partners. The new board under its new chair are working towards a refreshed, sustainable vision for the future of EggCup within the district system to support those in food poverty. In the meantime operations are continuing at the current premises and EggCup is able to occupy them and continue its work at least until March. The city council is supporting this on-going work.

3.6 **Peer Challenge Review**

Part of the Peer Challenge team that undertook the original work will be returning 23rd January to look at our progress against their suggested actions. Cabinet has been briefed on the report and action plan and the peer team have received extensive responses including our estimation of progress. Budget spend has been aligned with Council Plan priorities where possible. All the information is available to all members. Cabinet and the Leader will meet with the Peer team to discuss progress so comments to us from members on anything in the report are welcome: the Peer Challenge is an open discussion and the integrity of the council in recognising and responding to difficulties is essential.

3.7 **Royal Visit**

Lancaster welcomed HRH Duke of Gloucester on a visit just pre-Christmas to witness the re-dedication of the War Memorial. The Duke had an informal visit to the City Museum before the rededication in the Ashton Hall and Memorial Garden. The ceremony was well-attended and followed by a reception and lunch. Many thanks to all the officers involved in making the visit go well and to the Mayor for looking after the Duke.

3.8 **Devolution and local government re-organisation**

District councils have met and allocated district leaders to their observer roles within the committees that will run the new combined authority. The agreement made by Lancashire, Blackburn and Blackpool is proceeding as agreed. The upper tier authorities did not wish to be placed within the first tranche of areas developing Foundation Strategic Authorities and saw no reason to cancel county elections.

The government White Paper published just before Christmas confirmed previous ministerial statements that government intends that all second tier (district) councils will cease to exist within the next 3 years and will instead become absorbed into unitary authorities of five thousand residents or more. The plans have already absorbed a good deal of Leader and Chief Executive time in webinars and meetings at ministerial, MHCLG, Local Government Association and District Councils' Network level.

We have responded as a council through a meeting of all party leaders before Christmas and the Chief executive is bringing a report within the January Full council meeting that outlines a way ahead in coming to decisions about how we should respond to the situation.

3.9 **Thanks and Christmas parties**

The new cabinet has needed to pick up slightly altered responsibilities, budget finalisation, and the prospect of radical re-organisation. My thanks to them for the amount of time given to meeting weekly for informal discussion as well as their portfolio responsibilities and the intensive budget work.

In case we forget it was Christmas less than a month ago, two brief cheerful reflections. Tenant Voice is a tenant-led organisation that speaks for all our residents and considers often weighty matters like repairs, damp and mould, fire safety etc. Such is the renewed enthusiasm in our tenant body that their Christmas party this year was so well attended that Cllr Chris Harris and I had to stand outside with the officers who couldn't get inside.

Finally, the Mayor's Christmas Disco was really well attended this year, raised £600 and was witness to an amazing 'dance off'. Congratulations to everyone who was there and don't miss future events!

4.0 Decisions

The following decisions were scheduled to be considered by Cabinet on 14 January 2025:

Empty Homes Strategy
Adoption of the Climate Emergency Review of the Lancaster District Local Plan
Corporate Fees & Charges 2025/26
Budget and Policy Framework Update 2025/26 to 2029/30
Housing Revenue Account and Capital Programme

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

The following Individual Cabinet Member Decisions have been taken since the last Leader's report.

ICMD 12	Asset and Compliance Team Secondment	Published on 17.10.24 Taken by: Cllr Tim Hamilton-Cox
ICMD 14	Eden Project Morecambe – Levelling Up Fund Next Steps	Published on 12.11.24 Taken by: Cllr Philip Black
ICMD 15	Overage Clauses (exempt)	Published on 11.12.24 Taken by: Cllr Tim Hamilton-Cox
ICMD 16	Council Housing Tenant Voice Strategy, and Resident Engagement Strategy: Building Safety	Published on 02.12.24 Taken by: Cllr Caroline Jackson
ICMD 17	Toilet Cleaning, Toilet Maintenance and Income Coin Collection	Published on: 20.12.24 Taken by: Cllr Paul Hart

Background Papers

Cabinet agenda of the meeting held on 14 January 2025