

CABINET

6.00 P.M.

3RD DECEMBER 2024

PRESENT:- Councillors Caroline Jackson (Chair), Martin Bottoms, Gina Dowding, Tim Hamilton-Cox, Paul Hart, Peter Jackson, Sally Maddocks and Sue Tyldesley

Officers in attendance:-

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Mark Davies | Chief Executive |
| Luke Gorst | Chief Officer - Governance and Monitoring Officer |
| Liz Bateson | Principal Democratic Support Officer |

43 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 22 October 2024 were approved as a correct record.

44 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS AUTHORISED BY THE LEADER

The Chair advised that there were no items of urgent business.

45 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made at this point.

46 PUBLIC SPEAKING

Members were advised that there had been no requests to speak at the meeting in accordance with Cabinet's agreed procedure.

The Leader welcomed new members of Cabinet to the meeting and confirmed that any non-Cabinet members in attendance would be permitted to ask questions on the various reports as they were presented (Cabinet Procedure Rule 17 refers).

47 APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES

Cabinet received a report from the Chief Executive to enable Cabinet to make appointments to a number of Outside Bodies and Partnerships following the revisions to the composition of Cabinet.

Councillors were reminded that Members nominated to outside bodies, partnerships and boards by Cabinet were representing the views of Cabinet in such positions, rather than any views they might hold as individuals. It was recommended that appointments be aligned as closely as possible to individual Cabinet Members' portfolios.

It was proposed by Councillor Caroline Jackson and seconded by Councillor Dowding:

"That the appointments to the Outside Bodies be agreed and appended to the minutes."

Resolved unanimously:

That the appointments to the Outside Bodies be agreed and appended to the minutes.

Officer responsible for effecting the decision:

Chief Officer Governance

Reasons for making the decision:

Representation on Outside Bodies is part of the City Council's Leadership role.

48 LOCALISED COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT**(Cabinet Member with Special Responsibility Councillor Hamilton-Cox)**

Cabinet received a report from the Assistant Director (Head of Revenues and Benefits) to enable Cabinet to consider the existing Localised Council Tax Support ("LCTS") Scheme and the options available, ahead of formal consideration and approval by Council for application in 2025/26.

The options, options analysis, including risk assessment and officer preferred option, were set out in the report as follows:

The challenge for the Council is to adopt a scheme that fits with its ambitions and priorities and is considered fair, deliverable and affordable, given statutory obligations and competing pressures for resources. Council is presented with two basic options:

Option 1:

Retain the existing Localised Council Tax Support (LCTS) scheme, subject to minor consequential amendments to match changes in Housing Benefit rules.

- The existing scheme is considered soundly structured and works well, and offers maximum support for low-income families, who may otherwise find themselves in mounting debt.

- Current forecast assumes the continuation of the existing LCTS system and as such, maintaining current levels of support would normally have no impact on the Council's financial forecast. However, costs have increased in recent years with increased take-up due to Covid-19, the cost-of living crisis and annual Council tax increases. 2024/25 has seen a small reduction in residents receiving LCTS from 9,574 in 2023/24 to 9,310 in 2024/25. Should this trend continue, this could reduce costs of the scheme in the long term.

- Retaining existing policy principles of keeping various positive entitlement provisions for LCTS in line with other key welfare benefits promotes equality.

Option 2:

Make changes to the existing Localised Council Tax Support (LCTS) Scheme to reduce benefit entitlement for working age claimants.

- Currently 9,310 residents claim LCTS in the Lancaster district. As pensioners make up

38% (3,565) of claimants, it means any cut in the level of support provided falls on the remaining 62% (5,745) of working age people on low incomes.

- A reduction in the levels of support provided could arguably provide claimants with further incentives to work, reducing their reliance on benefits, although the jobs market is particularly uncertain at this difficult time.
- This option will have greater adverse financial impact on working age households but would help protect other Council services by requiring less savings to be made by them.
- If levels of support are reduced, the Council would be tasked with the difficulty of collecting this debt from the more vulnerable members of our society, increasing workloads and costs associated with council tax recovery.
- Additional costs associated with developing new scheme options, consultation exercise, legal changes to scheme etc.

| | Option 1: Retain the existing LCTS scheme | Option 2: Amend the LCTS scheme to reduce entitlement |
|---------------|--|---|
| Advantages | The current scheme provides support up to a level of 100% and assists those on low incomes | Financial savings to Lancaster City Council and the other precepting authorities. |
| Disadvantages | The Government does not fully fund the cost of a 100% LCTS scheme. The additional cost falls on Lancaster City Council and the other precepting authorities. | A reduction in support would result in Council Tax increases for those on low incomes. The Council Tax team would need to recover more money, often from those least able to make payments. |
| Risks | The cost of the scheme may increase due to an increase in new claims as the cost-of-living crisis progresses. | Reduced collection rates and increased debt. Potential reputational damage. |

The officer preferred option is to retain the existing Localised Council Tax Support Scheme for 2025/26 (Option 1). This will assist financially vulnerable Council Tax customers in the Lancaster City Council District.

The Council’s existing LCTS scheme works well in terms of providing support, but at a cost, particularly for the County Council. To date the Council has attached a high priority to maintaining council tax support levels available to working age claimants (pensioners being unaffected by the Council’s decision).

Adoption of a particular option should be informed by the Council’s views regarding the relative priority of LCTS, compared with other services and activities in support of future corporate priorities.

Councillor Hamilton-Cox proposed, seconded by Councillor Dowding:-

“That the recommendation, as set out in the report, be approved.”

Councillors then voted:-

Resolved unanimously:

That the existing Localised Council Tax Support Scheme for 2025/26 (Option 1 to the report) be retained.

Officer responsible for effecting the decision:

Chief Officer Resources

Reasons for making the decision:

The decision is consistent with the Council Plan:

The LCTS scheme is developed in support of ambitions within the Council Plan regarding “Healthy and Happy Communities” to optimise access for those that need it most, together with welfare benefits and related support. The ambition is to continue with a LCTS scheme for the Council, which supports the objective of simplicity, but protects the most vulnerable residents in the district. The Council must continue to ensure that it has due regard to equality in making its local scheme, including how it will minimise disadvantage.

49 DELIVERING OUR PRIORITIES - QUARTER 2- 2024-25**(Cabinet Member with Special Responsibility Councillor Hamilton-Cox)**

Cabinet received a report from the Chief Executive and 151 Officer to provide members with an update on financial performance during the first two quarters of 2024/25 (April – September 2024).

As the report was for commenting and noting no options were provided. The Cabinet Member with Special Responsibility talked to the report and responded to questions.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

Reasons for making the decision:

Performance, project and resource monitoring provides a link between the Council plan and operational achievement by providing regular updates on the impact of operational initiatives against strategic aims.

50 PROJECTS AND PERFORMANCE**(Cabinet Member with Special Responsibility Councillor Hamilton-Cox)**

Cabinet received a report from the Chief Executive to provide members with an update on performance and projects during quarter two of 2024 - 25 (July - September 2024).

As the report was for commenting and noting no options were provided. The Cabinet Member with Special Responsibility talked to the report and made particular reference to the reduction in both statutory homeless figures and sickness absence.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

Reasons for making the decision:

Monitoring of strategic projects and key performance indicators provides a link between the Council Plan 24-27 by providing progress updates.

51 STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER**(Cabinet Member with Special Responsibility Councillor Hamilton-Cox)**

Cabinet received a report from the Chief Executive that provided an update on the authority's progress in updating the Strategic Risk Register.

As the report was for noting no options were provided. Councillor Philip Black suggested that there might be several projects masked under a broader heading that might deserve an independent line e.g. Mainway and Skerton High. These were currently within SR08 and the Leader confirmed that this would be considered further.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

Reasons for making the decision:

The Council have a Risk Management Policy which is written to provide guidance on the management of risk. Risk Management is identified in the Council Plan 2024-27.

52 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE 2025/26 - 2029/30**(Cabinet Member with Special Responsibility Councillor Hamilton-Cox)**

Cabinet received a report from the Chief Finance Officer to provide an update on the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy forecasts for 2025/26 to 2029/30 and outline the approach to balancing the budget.

The options, options analysis, including risk assessment and officer preferred option, were set out in the report as follows:

As the report is for consideration and alternative options are put forward, the Cabinet could make supplementary recommendations regarding any matters.

It must be reiterated that the current forecasts do not include any interventions by Cabinet, Senior Leadership Team or the outcomes of the Local Government Settlement. Whilst some savings have been delivered, the forecasts show that potential annual and cumulative budget deficits still remain over the next 5 years and continue to need to be addressed. In light of this, balancing the budget both in the short and the medium term remains a tough task and all Members must work together and recognise that they will face a number of difficult but key decisions as part of the forthcoming budget and over the coming financial years which will affect the manner in which it delivers its services.

Councillor Hamilton-Cox proposed, seconded by Councillor Dowding:-

“That the recommendations, as set out in the report, be approved”.

Councillors then voted:-

Resolved unanimously:

- (1) That the draft future years estimates as set out in the report as the latest information available, accepting that this is an interim position be noted.
- (2) That the update be referred on to December Council for information.
- (3) That the Council Tax Base for 2025/26 as set out in paragraph 3.12 to the report be noted.

Officers responsible for effecting the decision:

Chief Finance Officer

Reasons for making the decision:

Performance, project, and resource monitoring provides a link between the Council Plan and operational achievement, by providing regular updates on the impact of operational initiatives against strategic aims.

Chair

(The meeting ended at 7.03 p.m.)

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Liz Bateson, Democratic Support - email ebateson@lancaster.gov.uk**

MINUTES PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY 5 DECEMBER, 2024.

**EFFECTIVE DATE FOR IMPLEMENTING THE DECISIONS CONTAINED IN THESE MINUTES:
FRIDAY 13 DECEMBER, 2024.**

CABINET APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES – DECEMBER 2024

BID Company Ltd (Morecambe) *Cllr Bottoms*

Community Safety Partnership (Cabinet Member and reserve) *Cllr P Jackson (Cllr C Jackson reserve)*

Growth Lancashire Limited (Cabinet Member and reserve) *Cllr Wilkinson (no reserve appointed)*

Health and Wellbeing Partnership (Cabinet Member and reserve) *Cllr P Jackson (Cllr C Jackson reserve)*

Lancashire Leaders Meeting (Leader of the Council) *Cllr C Jackson*

Lancashire Waste Partnership *Cllr Hart*

Lancaster Community Fund Grants Panel (1 place; the other place is by nomination and voting at Council) *Cllr P Jackson*

Lancaster Business Improvement District (BID) Management Group *Cllr Wilkinson*

LGA General Assembly (Leader of the Council) *Cllr C Jackson*

Yorkshire Dales National Park Board *Cllr P Jackson*