



Leader's Report

26 February 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 meetings held 3 December and 14 January 2025.

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 The work of the council continues apace, involving all officers and many members, residents and stakeholders and I have done my best to represent the range of things achieved or in train.

3.2 Budget

Over the last month the Budget 25/26 has been finalised, consulted on through the public Budget and Performance scrutiny meeting and brought to Cabinet. We have held our annual meeting with local media representatives and answered some searching questions. The main recent change has been the reduction in expected government support with the National Insurance rise.

Government promised to cover the cost but in the event Lancaster received far less than 100%. This means the amount set aside to be put into reserves will be reduced. The amount of core funding has risen only by less than 1% so overall a cut when considered against inflation.

3.3 Corporate Peer Challenge Review

The core team returned to look at progress against the priorities we were given for action. A range of officers, members and stakeholders were involved in interviews with the team. Their overall report was very positive and they concluded that we had undersold our success in several areas.

3.4 Cabinet matters

Cabinet has met twice in the last month, its business mainly the budget matters which are coming to Full Council but also to welcome the adoption of the Climate Emergency Local Plan and to renew the strategy for Empty Homes. Informal cabinet continues to meet weekly. Following the Peer Challenge Review it has focused on looking at the priorities from the Council Plan which are currently in play and how they might be prioritised. A joint meeting with Senior Leadership Team in March will develop this work in partnership. MP Lizzi Collinge met with informal cabinet for a lively discussion on business rates, core spending, housing funding, climate and nature followed by further consideration of Morecambe Master Plan and other linked matters. All cabinet have been briefed on the Museums Review and the report should be available in March along with work on acquiring further funding for developing the museums.

3.5 Partnerships

Partnerships were seen as an outstanding area in the Peer Challenge. This month has seen a meeting with Morecambe Town council to develop the draft Memorandum of Understanding and with Carnforth Town Council to explore ways forward. On a wider front the Leader has attended the Civic Dinner at Lancaster University focused on partnerships with and between universities to further specific aims for the region's economic and skills agenda. We have also continued to contribute to the national campaign for Securing the Future of Council Housing initiated by Southwark Council. We have met with Arts and Festivals representatives and are hoping to bring a wider group of councillors together as an advisory group soon as possible. Unfortunately, the first meeting had to be cancelled due to councillor illness.

3.6 UKSPF

The allocation of UKSPF funding passported directly from Lancashire County Council is very welcome. Unfortunately, this government allocation arrived late, is much lower than previously and appears to be for one year only. There are more than fifty bids to consider so officers and members are working at pace to make funding decisions in the next few weeks.

3.7 Assets and former assets

Further work has taken place regarding the future of Ryelands House and officers are currently looking at establishing what commercial value it might have whilst considering strong community interest and expertise. Williamson Park Cafe has been a serious concern for several years because the temporary

building had persistent problems with leaks, however the most recent storm did such serious damage that it is now closed and cannot be re-opened. A working group had already been established and is now looking at both immediate needs to provide facilities and the longer-term future. 1 Lodge Street (Musicians Co-op) is now re-roofed and watertight, the next phase of work is being worked through by the Co-op board, contractors and the city council.

3.8 Devolution and Local government Re-organisation Landscape

The Lancashire Combined Authority has now officially come into being. The shadow organisation has been meeting over the past year and the first official meeting will be 11th March. The city council working group on Local Government Reorganisation has met twice so far. The group membership has extended to include an MBI participant observer. Meetings have considered the requirements of the letter from the Minister, proposals to put forward as part of the countywide response in March and the principles on which we wish to make those proposals. At district and county-leaders level the same discussions have taken place. All involved have agreed that no one set of proposals could be agreed to at this stage and that our response will be to present the range of proposals which will be refined over the months leading to the November deadline. Chief Executives are tasked with setting out the range of information we will need to make these decisions and how we will proceed to acquire it. There is no appetite at present to employ consultants.

The Chief Executive and Leader have met with counterparts from Preston and Wyre: both meetings have been very useful in developing our thinking and joint understanding of LGR and the effect upon districts and Lancashire as a whole. A further meeting is planned with Ribble Valley.

3.9 Eden

The Leader has met with the Chair of the Eden Trustee Board and there has been a briefing for cabinet members. The design for the domes continues to be refined and the Community Conversations in Morecambe are due to restart. It is public knowledge that Eden Cornwall faces serious challenges but funding for Eden Morecambe is assured, and the Project Manager post recently advertised should have been filled by the time of Full Council.

3.10 Events

As a city we have seen Chinese New Year celebrated with a two week long programme of events including a big variety show showcasing North-West Chinese cultural heritage and the annual Dragon Dance in the centre of town. The city council organised the Holocaust Memorial this year: it was well attended and everyone agreed it was a fitting way to commemorate the day. Many thanks to officers who came together to make it happen. The Chief Executive and Leader were invited to the Chief Rabbi's visit to Lancaster University and had the opportunity to meet him and listen to his address.

We are about to welcome and support Bay Light this weekend and I hope to see many of you on Friday and Saturday during the event. Looking ahead there will be a National Day of Remembrance for Covid on 9th March. The city council will organise a short ceremony at 12 noon in the Remembrance Garden

and there will be a walk of witness to remember those who died. Please do come along if you can.

Caroline Jackson

4.0 Decisions

The following decisions were scheduled to be considered by Cabinet on 11 February 2025:

Review of Lancaster City Council Housing Allocation Policy
General Fund Budget & Policy Framework 2025/26
General Fund Capital Programme & Capital Strategy
Housing Revenue Account and Capital Programme
Treasury Management Strategy
Medium Term Financial Strategy Update
Q3 Delivering our Priorities
Purchase of Housing Stock (Exempt from Publication)

No Officer Delegated Key Decisions have been taken since the last Leader's report.

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

ICMD 18	Refresh of Lancaster City Council's Tenancy Strategy and Tenancy Policy	Published on 12.02.25 Taken by: Cllr Caroline Jackson
ICMD 19	Procurement of Food Waste Caddies for Segregated Food Waste Collection	Published on 03.02.25 Taken by: Cllr Paul Hart Call-in Waived

Background Papers

Cabinet agenda of the meeting held on 11 February 2025