



Leader's Report

23 April 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 No meetings of Cabinet have occurred since the last Leader's Report. The next scheduled meeting will take place on 15 April 2025, after the publication of Council 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 I preface this report by marking the death of Peter Williamson district councillor 2007-2019 and leader of the Conservative group. He was a hard-working councillor and always engaged with the business of meetings. Some of us will remember his wry humour and his budgets, always properly checked with officers and presented to Full Council with the words, "I know you won't take any notice of this but .."
- 3.2 This month has been very busy as ever and includes some significant strides forward in our operation as a council deeply committed to partnerships and partnership working.

Local Government Re-organisation

- 3.3 All fifteen authorities within Lancashire signed one joint letter to MHCLG regarding Local Government Re-organisation. Chief Executives are to be thanked for the drafting and all leaders showed significant willingness to be flexible in order to achieve a unanimous voice. This month we have met with Ribble Valley and Preston to discuss the possibilities in unitarisation. Preston have declared an intention to be part of a unitary in this configuration. The Chief Executive and I have also met with the new leader of Ribble Valley separately.
- 3.4 I attended LGA Councillors' Forum where Minister McMahon answered questions. I was pleased that, in answer to a question from me, the minister said he was looking for flexible, innovative answers to the problems of local government. District leaders in Lancashire are similarly concerned that we provide "the right services at the right levels" as we look at the overall re-organisation plans.
- 3.5 The new Lancashire County Combined Authority has met for the first time with two district leaders in attendance but without voting rights. The Lancashire District Leaders' Constitution was accepted with minor amendments.

City Council Priorities

- 3.6 Senior Leadership Team have met jointly with Cabinet to map, review and align draft priorities within the outcomes of the Council Plan. The meeting was extremely useful in reviewing how much is intended happen over the next two years, despite the uncertainties introduced by LGR. Work continues to map draft resources, timelines and outcomes. Fit for the Future joint working groups are being revised to ensure coverage of key projects and efficiencies and step down those that are now conducting business as usual. Further joint meetings are now being scheduled at six weekly intervals.

Eden Project

- 3.7 There has been welcome renewed activity by all parties involved with Eden Project Morecambe. The first Community Conversation for 2025 was held at the Winter Gardens show casing the extent of the Morecambe Bay Curriculum work hosted by Lancaster University. City council officers and Si Bellamy attended to present progress and answer questions. Since then
- 3.8 Eden has taken a significant step in appointing John Pye as Project Director and Lancashire County Council transport officers are leading on the detailed plans to accommodate visitors arriving by road and rail. The recent all member briefing provided councillors with more detailed information and opportunity for questions.

Funds and Economic Growth Plans

- 3.9 The Lancashire Economic Growth Plan consultation has drawn a detailed response from the city council, filling county council in on some of the missing aspects in its presentation of our district. A joint cabinet and senior leadership team meeting considered a draft Economic Strategy for the district and concluded that more work needed to be done to express our commitment to inclusive growth and community wealth. The consultants will be returning next month.
- 3.10 Unfortunately, both the UKSPF funding for this year and the Household Support Fund are delayed in arriving with the district and in the case of HSF7 significantly reduced. Money from the Household Support Fund goes both directly to support those on low wages and benefits for household goods and bills but also to Food Clubs – currently we only have notice of six months of funding.

Assets and Development

- 3.11 Progress has been made in developing plans for the Ryelands House site including soft marketing to ascertain any commercial interest and detailed work towards possible community use. With the expert help of MIAA our auditors, the GreenBook case for funding Skerton site alongside Mainway, is being brought together. Government has recently announced funding for social housing to be brought forward in June. A Fit for the Future group has been meeting to discuss the future of Williamson Park café following the storm damage. There is a consultant's report expected shortly to look at options to replace the café. Rapid plans have been put into action to provide cabins for sales of food and drink in the park along with signage and social media to keep visitors informed. Thanks to all the officers involved.

Cabinet meetings

- 3.12 Cabinet has been briefed on the need to revise the timetable and costings for the Local Plan following the revisions to the NPPF. More detail is available in the portfolio holder's report. The Risk Register was presented with additional risk recognised to recruitment and delivery of services as a result of LGR, alongside risks to the implementation of the waste strategy. Cabinet also considered the revised Enforcement Policy which links usefully to a priority concern about responding to fly-tipping and littering.

Partnership achievements

- 3.13 In a brave move, Jo Wilkinson Chief Officer for Housing and Property, invited an officer from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government to come and visit our social housing and see how we had responded to the 2023 Social Housing Regulation Act. After two days of visiting housing, meeting officers and tenants, observing meetings and engaging with our records and systems, the MHCLG officer expressed himself as very impressed by the immense progress we had made over two years and the excellent evidence

that we are a tenant-led service. He was keen to maintain the dialogue with Lancaster in the future.

- 3.14 The official launch of the Full Fibre Network took place on 14th March at White Lund depot with a group of partner organisations involved in the design and construction, including Tony Doyle from Blackpool council. The next step will be the installation of the sustainable data centre at Salt Ayre. All credit to officers and portfolio holder Tim Hamilton-Cox for having the vision to carry this through.
- 3.15 The Lancaster District Strategic Partnership met to consider the role of arts and culture in the economy and life of the district and ways to support and maintain the sector in the face of reductions in funding and LGR. Lancaster Arts Partnership and the city council will continue to explore ways to access Arts Council Place Partnership funding.
- 3.16 Most recently, through David Wood of Promenade Music, we have expressed our support for Lancashire Music Association and the work it does in this area.

Local events

- 3.17 I have been pleased to represent the city council at a number of enjoyable events this month including: the International Film Festival, the Storey Makers exhibition, the Judges Lodgings talk by Lela Harris on Defiance, Dignity and Agency in Art, the LEAP Recycled Fashion Show, a small Covid Reflection Day ceremony and the first civic commissioners meeting for the Poverty Truth Commission.

Caroline Jackson

4.0 Decisions

The following decisions were scheduled to be considered by Cabinet on 15 April 2025

Corporate Enforcement Policy
Publication of an updated Local Plan Preparation Timetable
Projects and Performance: Q3 2024-25
Strategic Risk Register Management

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 22	SPARK Grant Funding Proposal: Morecambe to Heysham Battery Train Scheme Feasibility Study.	Published on 05.03.25 Taken by: Cllr Gina Dowding
ICMD 23	UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Grant Award. Theme: Healthy, Safe and Inclusive Communities and Thriving Places.	Published on 25.03.25 Taken by: Cllr Martin Bottoms
ICMD 25	UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Grant Award. Theme: Healthy, Safe and Inclusive Communities.	Published on 20.03.25 Taken by: Cllr Peter Jackson
ICMD 26	Procurement of Food Waste Vehicles for Segregated Food Waste Collection.	Published on 21.03.25 Taken by: Cllr Paul Hart

Background Papers

None.