

POLICY COUNCIL MEETING
Thursday 1st December 2016

PRESENT – Councillor H. Akhtar (in the Chair), Councillors Akhtar P., Ali, Bateson, Brookfield, Casey, Connor, Daley, Davies, Desai, Entwistle, Foster D., Foster k., Gee, Groves, Gunn, Hardman, Harling, Hollings, Humphrys, Hussain F., Hussain S., Jan-Virmani, Kay, Khan M., Khan Z., Khonat S., Liddle, Mahmood A., Mahmood Q., Marrow, Maxfield, McFall, McGurk, Mulla, Murray, Nuttall, Oates, Patel, Pearson J., Rigby C., Riley, Roberts, Shorrock, Sidat, Slater Jacqueline, Slater John, Slater Julie., Slater Neil., Smith D., Smith J., Surve, Talbot, Tapp, Taylor, Vali, Whittle and Wright.

RESOLUTIONS

38. Notice Convening Meeting

The Chief Executive read the notice convening the meeting.

At this point of the meeting a minutes silence will be observed in memory of Councillor Mike Johnson, Lord Taylor and former Councillor Freda Barker.

39. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Fazal, Hussain I., Lee, McKinlay and Rigby J.

The Leader of the Council made reference to the ongoing ill health of Councillor Don McKinlay and requested Policy Council grant a dispensation for his ongoing absence – which was agreed unanimously.

40. Minutes of the Council Forum Meeting held on 6th October 2016.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Council Forum meeting held on 6th October 2016 be approved as a correct record.

41. Declarations of interest

No Declarations of Interest were received.

42. Petition relating to the proposed introduction of car parking charges on two car pars at Witton Country Park

Council received a report relating to a petition that had been received objecting to proposals to introduce car parking charges at Witton Park. The petition contained over 4,200 signatures and under the Constitution therefore required debate at a meeting of the Full Council.

The comment which accompanied the petition is stated below:

“Do not implement Witton Park car parking charges as this will have a huge impact on the local and wider community. We need to encourage people to become healthy and happy in our community and this facility encouraging many people to do this. Charging a car park fee will only deter people from coming to Witton Park and to Blackburn and we feel that this is the wrong thing to do”.

Policy Council were advised that the Petition Organiser would be given 5 minutes to present the petition at the meeting. The Executive Member would then have up to 10 minutes to respond and present his report. The Petition would then be debated by Members for a maximum of 15 minutes.

The Council would then decide how to respond to the Petition, with three options being available: 1. Take the action requested in the Petition; 2. Not to take the action stated in the Petition; or 3. Commission further investigation to the matter, for example by a relevant Committee.

In the absence of the Lead Petitioner the Executive Member for Leisure Culture and Young People responded to the petition, moving the report he wished to thank Abby Bartlett for taking the trouble of collecting the petition signatories. Mindful of the interest that had been generated by the petition, Councillor Talbot reminded Policy Council of the July Council Forum meeting where the decision had been made regarding Witton Park, and the significant budget pressures the Council faced, coupled with no credible alternatives to the introduction of charges.

Following a brief discussion, a Named Vote was requested. Policy Council voted on the recommendations in the original report as follows:

For

Councillors: Akhtar (H), Bateson, Brookfield, Casey, Desai, Entwistle, Groves, Gunn, Harling, Hollings, Humphrys, Hussain (F), Hussain (S), Jan-Virmani, Kay, Khan (M), Khan (Z), Khonat (S), Liddle, Mahmood (A), Mahmood (Q), McFall, McGurk, Mulla, Nuttall, Oates, Patel, Riley, Roberts, Shorrock, Sidat, Smith (D), Smith (J), Surve, Talbot, Taylor, Vali, Whittle, Wright.

Against

Councillors: None.

Abstention

Councillors: Ali, Connor, Daley, Davies, Foster (D), Foster (K), Gee, Hardman, Marrow, Murray, Pearson, Rigby (C), Slater (Ja), Slater (Jo), Slater (Ju), Slater (N), Tapp.

RESOLVED –

That

1. Members noted the petition and;
2. Maintain the current proposals to introduce parking charges on the two main car parks in Witton Country Park

At this point of the meeting, the Chief Executive advised that in line with the Constitution, the Policy Council would now be held in Committee.

43. Corporate Plan and priorities to 2020

A report was submitted outlining the Corporate Plan and priorities to 2020.

In line with the Council's policy and decision making framework, the report provided an update on the six corporate priorities, the key strategies in place to achieve these priorities, the budget context, policy challenges and the future direction for the Council.

The Leader of the Council explained that building upon previous Corporate Plans and the Corporate Priorities, the report proposed that the same corporate priorities be brought forward and used as the basis for the setting of Council policy until 2020.

It was proposed that the six Corporate Priorities and four main themes remain up to 2020:

1. Creating more jobs and supporting business growth;
2. Improving housing quality and building more houses;
3. Improving health and well-being;
4. Improving outcomes for our young people;
5. Safeguarding the most vulnerable people; and
6. Making your money go further.

The four main themes being:

1. Image and Marketing of the borough
2. Fairness/Equality/cohesion
3. Partnership working – residents/business/other key stakeholders
4. Digital First

The Chief Executive explained to Policy Council the staff briefings that had taken place, following which one of the videos shown to staff was watched by Members. The Chief Executive advised Members that there were five main key partnerships and income targets that would support key strategy and delivery of the Corporate Plan; the Hive, Together a Healthier Future, Digital First, Capita Partnership, and Your Community Your Call.

It was highlighted to Members that of the 500 redundancies initially anticipated, a significant number of voluntary redundancies had already been agreed, which would reduce the estimated total, however Policy Council were advised that a further 100-150 posts may still be required: In context it was explained that the number of compulsory redundancies throughout the whole process would be approximately 300-320.

In moving the report, the Leader of the Council emphasised that over recent years the Council had played an integral role in re-focusing existing partnerships and shaping emerging new partnerships in Blackburn with Darwen and across Lancashire: In particular the Local Strategic Partnership, the Lancashire Shadow Combined Authority and the Pennine Lancashire Transformation Programme for health and social care.

The report highlighted achievements already made over the last twelve months against each of the corporate plan priorities, whilst emphasising the backdrop in which the Council still had challenges to face, including the continued budget pressures (a further £48 million to be cut by 2020), increasing service demand, resident skill shortage, poor health outcomes, enduring health inequalities, a low wage economy, increase in crimes and the uncertainties of Brexit especially with regards to European Union funding.

Specific financial challenges facing Blackburn with Darwen were referenced: The adult social care budget caused by rising demands from an ageing and increasingly vulnerable adult population (on average £1.5m-£2m increase per annum in the Borough) and the National Living Wage (approx. £1m cost per year).

The report outlined where the Council wanted to be and the journey it would need to take to get there: Members were reminded that Local Government was expected to be more self-sufficient, reflecting the changes to the way councils received their income. To support this, a series of measures were referenced; an increase in business rate and Council Tax base to secure long term sustainability and new ways of working, fully utilising technology, having a more commercial outlook to public sector service provision, focussing on new ways to deliver services, facilitating the community to become increasingly self-sufficient in the way it engaged and received support from a modernised and flexible Council, with more limited resources than ever before. Further detail was referenced in an update on the Medium Term Financial Strategy elsewhere on the agenda for how it would help to ensure the Council had the revenue to support and invest in its priorities leading to improved outcomes for residents in the Borough.

In summation the Leader explained that despite the financial challenges that had affected all Council services, and the knock on impact this would have for residents, he emphasised that the Council had made significant progress and continued with its ambitions and commitments to improve the lives and opportunities for residents and businesses. The coming year would be a demanding and challenging time, with increasing demand on services, the

financial pressures, local government boundary review, the beginning of the process in reviewing our Core Strategy, developing new models of delivery for health and care and ensuring the Council pressed ahead and continued with a positive focus on the image of Blackburn with Darwen to encourage investment into the Borough.

There followed a debate during which several references were made to the following key areas: Adult Social Care, car parking, the Councils contribution to PCSOs, child safeguarding and bin collections.

RESOLVED –

That Policy Council:

1. Re-affirmed the Councils six corporate priorities and four themes up to 2020.
2. Approved that Executive Members through consultation review the performance measures and targets 2017/18 for their relevant portfolio.
3. Delegated final sign off of the updated performance measures and targets to the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive.
4. Noted the content of the report and consider the new models of delivery and direction of travel for the Council.

At this point of the meeting, the Chief Executive advised that in line with the Constitution, Policy Council would move out of Committee.

44. Medium Term Financial Strategy update and flexibility to use Capital receipts.

Council was provided with an update on the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2016-20 and savings programme, and approval was sought to adopt the Government's flexibility in the use of capital receipts. The report referenced the MTFS and the impact of austerity since 2010/11, balancing the budget 2016/17 to 2019/20, progress to date and the flexible use of Capital receipts.

RESOLVED –

That Policy Council:

1. Noted the update on the MTFS;
2. Approved progression of the savings options outlined in Appendix A and the following, in order to close the budget gap;
3. Approved a fundamental review of in-house adult social care services for older people and adults with a learning disability, and to note that a further report detailing the outcome of the review will be brought to a future Executive Board meeting with recommendations for consideration and approval;
4. Approved a service delivery review of adolescent services and a review of supported accommodation, and to note that a further report detailing the outcome of the review will be brought to a future Executive Board meeting with recommendations for consideration and approval;

5. Approved in principle a reduction in public transport bus subsidies, and to note that a further report will be brought to a future Executive Board meeting with details of the proposed routes affected following consultation, and recommendations for consideration and approval;
6. Agreed to reduce expenditure on highways and associated infrastructure assets in the financial years 2017/18 and 2018/19;
7. Agreed to cease the Council's contribution to the Lancashire Constabulary in respect of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs); and
8. Approved the facility for flexibility in the use of capital receipts, the option for which was introduced by the Government in the 2016/17 Financial Settlement, and to note that a report detailing the proposed use of such receipts in 2016/17 will be presented to Finance Council in February 2017 for consideration and approval.

45. Revenues and Benefits digitalisation project

Council received a report setting out the digital roadmap for the Revenue and Benefits Service, and the proposed policy and procedural changes required to maximise on-line take up by customers, and provide the necessary savings and efficiencies needed to support the financial challenges facing the council.

The report outlined two options for the promotion and take-up of on-line and self-serve services: Namely;

1. Offer the online options to customers and allow take up to be incremental, i.e. as and when customers wish to use the digital modules, or;
2. Strongly promote and direct customers to the on-line and self-service modules whenever possible.

In order for the Revenues and Benefits service to deliver the expected workforce review savings, it will be necessary to strongly promote and direct customers away from the traditional contact channels of telephone, face to face and white mail to the more automated and self-service channels.

The proposed changes in relation to Council Tax, Business Rates, Housing Benefits and Council Tax support were outlined in the report submitted.

RESOLVED –

That the Executive Member for Resources be authorised to implement all digital modules listed in this report and the appropriate changes to policies and procedures that will ensure maximum customer take up.

46. Treasury management mid-year review for 2016-17 and the annual report 2015-16.

Council were updated on the Treasury Management position to date and proposed Strategy for the remainder of 2016-17, and to formally report the Treasury outturn for 2015-16, as previously reflected in reporting to Audit and Governance Committee, and in the 2015-16 Outturn Corporate Monitoring Report (14th July Executive Board).

RESOLVED –

That Policy Council

1. Agreed the continuation of the existing Treasury Management Strategy, and Treasury and Prudential Indicators for 2016-17, as set at Finance Council in March 2016, and
2. Noted the Outturn position for 2015-16.

47. Constitution Update – Section 6 Code of Governance.

Council were advised that the Constitution Section 6 Code of Corporate Governance had been updated. Following work to revise and update the Corporate Code of Governance in response to the publication by CIPFA and SOLACE of the publication “Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Guidance Notes for English Authorities (2016 Edition)”. Council were further informed that the proposed updated Constitution remained publicly available on the Council’s website with the Agenda for this meeting and was available in full printed form in the Group rooms.

RESOLVED –

Policy Council agreed the amendments made to Section 6 of the Constitution Code of Corporate Governance.

48. Draft year planner 2017-18

Further to the submission of the draft year planner for 2017-18 to the last meeting of Council Forum in October, the year planner for 2017-18 was submitted for approval.

RESOLVED –

That the year planner for Policy Council noted the draft year planner for 2017-18 be approved.

Signed at a meeting of the council
on the day of
(being) the next ensuing meeting of the Council) by

MAYOR