

POLICY COUNCIL

Thursday, 5 December 2024

PRESENT –*The Mayor Councillor , Councillors Akhtar P, Casey, Connor, Fazal, Floyd, Gunn, Hardman, Hussain M, Hussain S, Khan Z, Khonat, Mahmood, Marrow, Riley, Shorrocks, Sidat, Slater Jacq, Slater Jo, Slater Ju, Slater N, Smith D, Smith J, Talbot, Desai M, Imtiaz, Patel Alt, Raja, Humphrys, Khan S, Ali, Jackson, McCaughran, Whittingham, Patel S, Shaw, Whalley, Hussain, Khan, Johnson, Mahmood, Masters and Patel.*

RESOLUTIONS

20 Prayers by the Mayor's Chaplain followed by Welcome and Apologies

21 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were submitted.

22 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

23 Mayoral Communications

The Mayor informed Council of a number of engagements he and his Mayoresses had attended since the last meeting:

- Reopening of St. John's Ambulance in Darwen
- CVS Community Awards
- Numerous Remembrance Services within the Borough
- Duke of Lancaster Regiment Service at the Cathedral
- Festival of Diwali
- Light switch on events at Darwen and Blackburn
- Council Staff Awards and the Gritter Naming Competition
- Lancashire Fire and Rescue Princes Trust Blackburn Team 109
- WEC Annual Apprentice of the Year Awards

The Mayor thanked all the young people and the Salvation Army Band who attended the Remembrance Concert; thanked Council staff who had helped out on Remembrance events and in particular Andrew Thompson for his guidance and organising skills; and all those who had attended the Mayoresses Charity Fashion Show in October.

The Mayor advised Council of two upcoming events, the first being the Christmas Experience on 12th December in the Town Hall where refreshments would be available along with a raffle for the Mayor's Chariry. The second was a Charity Curry Night on 15th December at Waheed's restaurant and tickets were available from Councillor Shaukat Hussain.

Finally, the Mayor thanked the Deputy Mayor and Deputy Mayoress for helping to cover engagements during this busy time and wished everyone a happy Christmas and New Year.

24 Questions from the Public

The Chief Executive announced that one questions had been submitted by a member of the public under Procedure Rule 10:

Rick Moore said with the many areas of responsibility that this Council has as a Unitary Authority, those areas of responsibility do not include International Affairs. There are so many areas the council, could, should, and needs to use it's time productively, so why is it instead wasting its time, and taxpayers money on performative political gestures that will have absolutely no influence on the situation in Gaza whatsoever.

In response the Leader said this was part of the democratic process of the Borough and this issue of Gaza and Palestine was one that was of great importance to many residents and had been very exercised over it over the last twelve months. The Leader also said that Members spent a large amount of time on issues that reflected the interest of the people of the Borough.

In a supplementary statement Mr. Moore said he had noticed that in the Motion (minute number 58(a)) there was no mention of trying to establish a safe return of the hostages that were still being held by terrorists in Gaza, including a British hostage. He also referred to other areas where acts of terrorism were taking place and asked when motions relating to these would be before the Council.

In response the Leader said if any members wished to bring a motion to a future meeting then this would be debated in the usual way.

25 Questions from Members

No questions from members had been received under Procedure Rule 11.

26 Notices of Motion

(a) Ban on arms sales to Israel, immediate unconditional ceasefire and compliance with the International Criminal Court and International Court of Justice rulings

For nearly a year, Blackburn with Darwen residents have gathered in solidarity, protesting the ongoing conflict in Gaza. Many have expressed deep concerns to their local representatives, urging action to stop arms sales to Israel and calling for an immediate ceasefire.

The trauma from witnessing the devastation in Palestine has deeply affected our communities, leading to a rise in Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism. As a Council, we must listen to our residents and press the government to work towards lasting peace and justice.

Airstrikes have continued and intensified the humanitarian crisis, causing significant civilian casualties, including children, and further

escalating the situation. These actions are part of what the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and global human rights organisations have confirmed as genocide, with Israel's policies in occupied Palestinian territories violating international law, including illegal settlements and systematic oppression. The humanitarian crisis demands urgent international intervention.

This Council calls on the government to:

Revoke all arms export licenses to Israel and suspend future sales.

Advocate for an unconditional ceasefire and prioritise the protection of civilians.

Increase diplomatic pressure to halt illegal settlements and resume peace talks, in line with the ICJ rulings.

Support international investigations into human rights violations, including the confirmed genocide and war crimes.

Welcome and comply with the International Criminal Court's (ICC) arrest warrants for Benjamin Netanyahu, Yoav Gallant and Mohammed Deif.

Facilitate peace talks that respect the security and rights of both Palestinians and Israelis, while holding all parties accountable to international legal standards.

The Council further requests that:

The Chief Executive and Leader of the Council write to the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary to halt arms sales, call for an immediate ceasefire, and ensure adherence to international law, including compliance with ICJ and ICC rulings.

The Council resolves to support humanitarian aid efforts, foster local dialogue to counter hate, and back peaceful initiatives that promote justice and long-term peace for both sides of the conflict.

Additionally, the Council urges the government to review trade agreements with companies involved in illegal activities in the region, ensure no complicity in acts of genocide, and increase humanitarian support for Gaza's civilians.

Moved by Councillor Salim Sidat
Seconded by Councillor Mustafa Desai

Following debate, an Amended Motion was circulated to Members as follows (amendments in italics and bold):

Amendment to the Motion on the ban on arms sales to Israel, immediate unconditional ceasefire and compliance with the International Criminal Court and International Court of Justice rulings

For nearly a year, Blackburn with Darwen residents have gathered in solidarity, protesting the ongoing conflict in Gaza. Many have expressed deep concerns to their local representatives, urging action to stop arms sales to Israel and calling for an immediate cease fire.

The trauma from witnessing the devastation in Palestine has deeply affected our communities, leading to a rise in Islamophobia and Antisemitism. As a Council, we must listen to our residents and press the government to work towards lasting peace and justice.

Airstrikes have continued and intensified the humanitarian crisis, causing significant civilian casualties, including children, and further escalating the situation. These actions are part of what the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and global human rights organisations have confirmed as genocide, with Israel's policies in occupied Palestinian territories violating international law, including illegal settlements and systematic oppression. ***While the humanitarian crisis demands urgent international intervention, it is vital that the international community recognises that the only long-term solution will be through a two-state solution secured through UN involvement.***

This Council calls on the government to:

Revoke all arms export licenses to Israel and suspend future sales.

Advocate for an unconditional ceasefire and prioritise the protection of civilians, ***with release of all hostages and prisoners on both sides, whilst working towards lasting peace and a two-state solution as agreed per UN resolution.***

Continue to monitor the conflicted area and make sure access for humanitarian aid is allowed in Gaza.

Increase diplomatic pressure to halt illegal settlements and resume peace talks, in line with the ICJ rulings.

Support international investigations into human rights violations, including the confirmed genocide and war crimes.

Welcome and comply with the International Criminal Court's (ICC) arrest warrants for Benjamin Netanyahu, Yoav Gallant and Mohammed Deif.

Facilitate peace talks that respect the security and rights of both Palestinians and Israelis, while holding all parties accountable to international legal standards.

The Council request that:

The Chief Executive and Leader of the Council write to the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary to halt arms sales, call for an immediate ceasefire ***with lasting peace and a two-state solution as outlined in the Labour Party manifesto***, and ensure adherence to international law, including compliance with ICJ and ICC rulings.

The council resolves to support humanitarian aid efforts, foster local dialogue to counter hate, and back peaceful initiatives that promote justice and long-term peace for both sides of the conflict.

Additionally, the Council urges the government to review trade agreements with companies involved in illegal activities in the region, ensure no complicity in acts of genocide, and increase humanitarian support for Gaza's civilians.

***Moved by Councillor Quesir Mahmood
Seconded by Councillor Mahfooz Hussain***

This amendment was put to the vote and CARRIED, the amended Motion, now being the Substantive Motion, was put to the vote:

RESOLVED – That the Substantive Motion be CARRIED.

(b) Council Tax

At Prime Ministers Questions on 13th November Keir Starmer was non-committal when asked by the Leader of the Opposition to confirm if he would keep the cap on Council Tax.

This failure to rule out changes came amid fiscal reforms rolled out by the Chancellor during the Autumn Budget.

Downing Street has since said that the 5% cap will remain, this is three times the current rate of inflation; and if fully enacted by councils will add to the financial pressures being felt by households. Whilst this was a definite statement of intent it will not inspire public

confidence given the chancellors propensity to change the tax raising promises she repeatedly made during the General Election.

At the Executive Board meeting on 13th June this year, the Executive Member for Growth and Development highlighted the performance of the borough's growth programme which included:

- House building continuing to perform well with 598 housing completions delivered in 2023/24 – the highest ever recorded in the borough including new build homes as well as re-purposing existing buildings.
- Since 2015/16 there have been 3,415 housing completions across the borough; with 2,934 new homes and 481 conversions.
- The new Local Plan identifying a pipeline of circa 7,000 homes over the net 15 years with 56% already benefitting from planning permission.
- In 2015/16 the council forecasted a total Section 106 income of £1.4m for infrastructure investment as a result of development, with the current Section 106 developers' contributions forecast now being more than £12m and growing.
- More than 6,000 additional jobs generated since 2017 with the borough home nearly 5,000 businesses with one of the highest rates of new business growth in the North West.

This council recognises the contribution this level of growth has made to generating significant income.

In order to remove doubt about future Government policy changes to Council Tax and to protect our residents from further financial hardship, we request that the Executive member for Finance and Governance present to the Finance Council a budget that will include a recommendation to cap Council Tax at the rate of inflation or 5% whichever is the lower until 2026.

Further there is a commitment that any proposed change by Government to banding or single persons discount will be vigorously resisted.

Moved by Councillor Kevin Connor
Seconded by Councillor John Slater

Following debate, the Motion was put to the vote:

RESOLVED – that the Motion be LOST

In line with the Constitution page 111 (3.2 (ii)) the Policy Council meeting moved into Committee.

27 National Policy Reflections, Delivering the Corporate Plan and Achieving Borough Wide Outcomes

A report was submitted which provided progress and key achievements on the Council's Corporate Plan 2023/2027 and requested Council reaffirm the core missions within it.

The Plan identified some of the key national and local policy drivers impacting on the Council and how those missions were contributing to delivering the government's priorities. Also included were updates on work to widen out the outcomes in the Corporate Plan to incorporate partnership activity and articulate how the Council was working to ensure there was no one left behind in the borough. There was also an update on performance against the Corporate Plan's core missions over the last six months.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That the core missions in the Council's Corporate Plan 2023/27 be reaffirmed and it be noted how the missions were aligned to government priorities.
- (3) That plans to widen out the outcomes in the Corporate Plan be progressed to incorporate partnership activity and ensure there was no one left behind in the borough.
- (4) That 2nd April 2025 be agreed as the date for the next Partnership Conference and themes highlighted within the report for discussion be noted.
- (5) That the commissioning of a new residents' survey within the next 12 months be agreed.
- (6) That the performance of the Council between April to September 2024 be noted.

The meeting then moved out of Committee.

28 Year Planner 2025/26

The draft Year Planner for 2024/25 was submitted ahead of submission of the final version to Council Forum on 30th January 2025.

RESOLVED

That the draft Year Planner for 2025/26 be noted.

Signed at a meeting of the Policy Council
on Date Not Specified
(being the ensuing meeting on the Policy Council) by

MAYOR