

COUNCIL FORUM

Thursday, 16 July 2020

PRESENT – *The Mayor Councillor Iftakhar Hussain, Councillors Afzal, Akhtar, H, Akhtar P, Batan, Bateson, Brookfield, Browne, Casey, Connor, Daley, Davies, Desai, Fazal, Floyd, Gee, Gunn, Hardman, Harling, Hussain I, Hussain M, Hussain S, Jan- Virmani, Kay, Khan M, Khan Z, Khonat, Liddle, Mahmood, Marrow, McFall, McGurk, Oates, Patel, Rawat, Rigby C, Rigby J, Riley, Salton, Sidat, Shorrocks, Slater Jacq, Slater Ju, Slater N, Smith D, Smith J, Talbot, Taylor and Whittle.*

RESOLUTIONS

13 Welcome and Apologies

The Chief Executive read out the notice convening the meeting and the Mayor advised how the remote meeting would operate.

Apologies had been received from Councillor John Slater.

14 Minutes Of The Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held of the Annual Council meeting held on 4th June 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

15 Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were received.

16 Mayoral Communications

The Mayor updated the Council Forum on recent engagements he had attended, noting that they were all on-line events, and advised that he was looking forward to attending in person events when possible.

The Mayor also noted the difficulties of promoting his chosen charities in the current climate, but this was being looked into and he highlighted the great work being undertaken by the East Lancs Hospice.

17 Council Forum

One Question had been received from members of the public under Procedure Rule 12 as follows:

I would like to put the following question to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Mohammed Khan.

Given the experience of Leicester and the mayor's view that a city wide lockdown was not needed, will Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council undertake to make any lockdown to be targeted to specific areas and

specific venues or businesses rather than a borough wide approach.

Martin Kerry

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Mohammed Khan, provided a response, advising of the measures and restrictions that the Council had put in place, with the Borough designated as a Covid-19 Prevention Zone, and if reported cases did not decrease, it may be necessary to introduce further local measures aimed at specific problems and issues. The Leader finished by confirming that there were no plans to implement a Borough-wide Lockdown.

18 Motions

The Chief Executive reported that no Motions had been received under Procedure Rule 10.

19 Council response to Covid-19 Pandemic

A report was submitted which advised of the Council's initial emergency response to Covid-19 and the preparations for the next phase and transition to longer-term recovery.

The report outlined how some of the key services and functions had adapted to the pandemic.

The Leader outlined the key actions and initiatives introduced to respond to the pandemic, thanking the local community, Members and staff for their efforts in responding to pandemic.

Members thanked staff for going above and beyond in their response to the emergency and highlighted the new ways of working that had successfully assisted the Council's response.

RESOLVED – That Council note the content of this report.

20 Combined Authority

Members received an update on the current position on devolution, combined authorities and the progress to form a Lancashire Combined Authority.

Over recent months, Lancashire Leaders had positive discussions in relation to a Combined Authority. At their meeting on 10th June, Leaders agreed to explore a Combined Authority for Lancashire with an Elected Mayor, acknowledging that delivery of Local Government functions may need to be reviewed and simplified in the Combined Authority area as has been indicated by MHCLG.

A decision to establish a Lancashire Combined Authority would need consent of all of the local authorities covered by the area – in this case 15 councils.

Lancashire Leaders had agreed, in principle, to work with the Local Government Association, or other independent body, to undertake an options appraisal. If a business case was developed, a local consultation would be undertaken before submission and any final decision to join a Lancashire Combined Authority would be made by full Council.

The Government were keen to work with areas to develop Combined Authorities, ideally with elected Mayors, particularly as Council's re-start the economy.

The Government were due to publish their Devolution White Paper in Autumn and have said that this would set out further details on both combined authorities and local government re-organisation.

Based on the current local government arrangements, a Lancashire Combined Authority would have 15 Council Leaders and an Elected Mayor involved in decision making. This was much higher than the existing Combined Authorities which ranged in membership from 3 councils to 10 councils. Many decisions would also need unanimous agreement.

Feedback from civil servants suggested that this was too many and that the Government would be keen to see simplified local governance in areas such as Lancashire for the Combined Authority to be most effective. With 15 local authorities Lancashire had the largest number of councils in its area than anywhere else in the country.

Members were reminded that the Leader of the Council and Opposition Leader jointly wrote a letter to the Secretary of State in October 2019, requesting an invitation to develop a business case for a new Pennine Lancashire unitary authority. The letter indicated that the area could cover the existing council areas of Blackburn with Darwen, Rossendale, Hyndburn, Burnley and Pendle. This area had a population of over 480,000 residents comprising 32% of the geographical county of Lancashire's whole population. It would not be a merger of any councils. Pennine Lancashire would be a brand new unitary authority and the electorate would determine who represents them and their areas on the new Council, in line with the current election arrangements.

A new Pennine Lancashire unitary authority would be responsible for all council services such as children's services, schools, adult social care, libraries, museums, household waste recycling centres, bin collection, leisure facilities, roads, parks, environmental health.

RESOLVED – That the Council reconfirms its support for a Lancashire Combined Authority with a directly Elected Mayor.

21 Updates from Other Committees

An update from the Standards Committee was submitted, containing recommendations for adoption by the Full Council.

The recommendations related to adoption of a local guide relating to handling intimidation for Councillors, updated guidance for Councillors on Personal References, and adoption of an additional paragraph in the 'Arrangements for dealing with complaints about the Code of Conduct for Members'.

RESOLVED –

- 1) That Full Council adopt the local Guide (Appendix A) to supplement that produced by the LGA (including the Social Media Guidance), with both Guides to be available on the Council's website for easy access.
- 2) The updated Guidance for Councillors on Personal References (Appendix B) be adopted by the Full Council.
- 3) That the Council Forum adopt the additional paragraph in the 'Arrangements' as set out in the report.

22 Reports of Executive Members with Portfolios

The Leader and Executive Members presented their update reports to the Council Forum, providing verbal updates as appropriate.

In moving their reports and in discussions following, Members were unanimous in their thanks to staff for their fantastic response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

RESOLVED – That the reports of the Leader and Executive Members be noted, and thanks be passed to all staff for their response to the pandemic.

23 Questions from Members

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

In his closing comments, thanking the Mayor for his running of the meeting, the Leader asked all to spread the message to the local community about the importance of pulling together to stop the rise of the virus in the Borough. The Leader also advised that the Prime Minister had called him the day before to discuss the Council's approach to the pandemic.

Signed at a meeting of the Council Forum
on Thursday, 1 October 2020
(being the ensuing meeting on the Council Forum) by

MAYOR