

COUNCIL FORUM

Thursday 28th January 2021

PRESENT – *The Mayor Councillor Iftakhar Hussain, Councillors Afzal, Akhtar H, Akhtar P, Batan, Bateson, Brookfield, Browne, Casey, Connor, Daley, Davies, Desai, Floyd, Gee, Gunn, Hardman, Harling, 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 Jo, Slater Ju, Slater N, Smith D, Smith J, Talbot, Taylor and Whittle.*

RESOLUTIONS

42 Welcome and Apologies

The Chief Executive read out the notice convening the meeting and the Mayor advised how the remote meeting would operate. Apologies were received from Councillor Tasleem Fazal.

43 Minutes Of The Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Policy Council meeting held on 3rd December 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

The Chief Executive reminded Members that it was agreed at the Policy Council meeting that the Finance Council meeting would be moved back a week to Monday 1st March 2021.

44 Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were received.

45 Mayoral Communications

The Mayor noted with sadness the lives lost due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

The Mayor also reflected on recent events and activities, including Remembrance commemorations, Christmas engagements and activities and his involvement in the on-line Holocaust Memorial Day Event the previous day.

46 Council Forum

The Chief Executive reported that three questions had been received from members of the public under Procedure Rule 12 as follows:

To Councillor Damian Talbot, Executive Member for Public Health & Wellbeing:

From Bill Stemp (Indoor Bowling Working Party):

Bowling has over 8,000 registered players in Lancashire and is the 2nd most participated sport in the county after junior football. The positives regarding physical health and social interaction for all age groups and abilities cannot be underestimated and is surely a council priority concern, especially after this pandemic. There are over 300 purpose built indoor bowling centres in England (despite a southern bias, there are 11 in Yorkshire and even 3 in Cumbria) but NONE in Lancashire. Bowlers are reduced to limited playing time in the local leisure centre on an uneven floor with rolled up mats because our only other option is to travel to Leeds or Penrith to play at the nearest custom built site. Would you agree that this is totally unjustifiable and undertake to support us in rectifying this unacceptable situation?

From John Schofield:

We are aware that local council funding would not be an option in financing the construction of a custom built indoor bowling venue. We would however be supporting the council's public health objective and responsibilities, and indeed fulfilling our own ambition, to provide and promote health and wellbeing at no cost to the Council themselves. Therefore, if alternative funding became available, would the council be prepared to work with us to identify an accessible Council owned location at zero or minimal rent?

To Councillor Mohammed Khan:

From Rick Moore

In recent times it has become clear that the Chinese Communist Party is the biggest threat on the globe to Western Civilisation and Values.

The Chinese government's treatment of the Uighurs - which includes forced sterilization of women, murder, physical and psychological torture and abuse, forced labour in detention and "re-education" camps - is an egregious example of a systematic attempt to destroy and break the will and identity of an entire group of people. The likes of which we have not seen since the defeat of the National Socialist German Workers Party in the 1940's !

The imposition of the National Security Law on Hong Kong by China gives the CCP the means to destroy the freedom and autonomy the territory has enjoyed since the 1997 handover from Britain. This Law is deliberately so vague that it can, potentially, cover any form of political speech or organisation, offences punishable with up to life imprisonment. This clearly breaks the international agreement "one country – two systems" between China and the UK made in 1997 when the colony of Hong Kong was handed back to China.

As a Council we should not, in good conscience, stand idly by while the CCP commit such atrocities on our fellow human beings. We should set an example by totally condemning the Human Rights violations of the CCP.

I ask Mohammed Khan, as the Leader of Blackburn with Darwen Council both personally and on behalf of Blackburn with Darwen Council whether he will totally and unconditionally condemn the Chinese Communist Party for their Human Rights violations against the Uighurs and the people of Hong Kong, and their anti-democratic actions against the same.

Councillor Talbot gave responses to the first two questions and supplementary comments, advising of Council support for bowling but it was not at the present moment, in a financial position to provide capital or revenue investment to a dedicated facility, but continued to offer support and advice to Mr Stemp and the group.

Whilst the Council could not commit that there was a suitable council owned building, Councillor Talbot was happy to arrange to meet with the group and officers, as early as practically possible and would be absolutely willing to support and advise the group should alternative funding be identified.

In response to Mr Moore's question and supplementary comments, Cllr Khan stated that the suppression of anyone on religious or cultural grounds was wrong, regardless of where it existed in the world. It was not something the Council could influence, and was a matter for the Foreign Office. However, the Council can pass on Mr Moore's concerns to local MP's Kate Hollern and Jake Berry, who may be able to raise them directly with the Foreign Secretary.

47 Motions

The Chief Executive reported that one Motion had been received under Procedure Rule 10 as follows:

No cuts to Universal Credit – let families keep the £20 increase

Aim: To maintain the income of low and middle income families.

This Council notes:

Next April the government plans to cut the benefit level for millions of claimants by ending the time limited increase to the basic rate of Universal Credit (and the tax credit equivalent) announced by the Chancellor on 20th March as part of his pandemic response package.

The £20 a week boost reflected the reality that the level of benefits were not adequate to protect the swiftly increasing number of households relying on them as the crisis hit. Exactly because that increase was a very significant and welcome move to bolster low- and middle-income families' living standards, its removal will be a huge loss.

Pressing ahead would see the level of unemployment support fall to its lowest real-terms level, since 1990-91, and it's lowest ever relative to average earnings. Indeed, the basic level of out-of-work support prior to the March boost was – at £73 a week (£3,800 a year) – less than half the absolute poverty line.

The increase in benefits has had a positive effect on the lives of thousands of local claimants who are better able to pay for life's essentials such as food, clothing and utilities, many of which have increased for families as children are once again learning from home.

The local economy has also benefited from the increase in benefit levels as claimants spend their money locally thereby supporting local businesses and jobs.

That this matter was debated in the House of Commons on 19th January and a non-binding motion was passed calling for the extension of the £20 increase to Universal Credit beyond 31st March 2021.

This Council requests the Chief Executive to:

Write to the Chancellor, Rishi Sunak and to the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson demanding that the £20 increase to Universal Credit is made permanent and extended to claimants on legacy benefits.

Write to both Blackburn and Darwen and Rossendale MPs and also write to Rishi Sunak and to the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson demanding that the £20 increase to Universal Credit is made permanent and extended to claimants on legacy benefits.

Moved by: Councillor Vicky McGurk

Seconded by: Councillor Maureen Bateson

In moving the report, Cllr McGurk requested that both local MPs be asked to write to the Chancellor and the Prime Minister to demand that the £20 increase to Universal Credit was made permanent.

Following debate, the Council moved to a vote.

RESOLVED – That the Motion be unanimously carried.

48 Constitution Update – Revised Petitions Scheme

A report was submitted containing proposals to update the Council's Petitions Scheme.

Ahead of discussion of the item, the Chief Executive advised that a revised report had been submitted to Members earlier in the week, and if agreed, would become the substantive report.

The Leader then read out the revised recommendation in the report:

Approve Option 1 as outlined in the report, requiring a minimum of 50 signatures for a petition to be considered, unless there are exceptional circumstances and the petition calls for local action. (*The Chief Executive having discretion to ask the relevant Chief Officer to consider in exceptional circumstances petitions of less than 50 that call for local action. The primary*

criteria being the low number of residents affected being determined by general circumstances).

The report advised that the Council's petitions scheme has been in place since 2010 and whilst it was no longer a requirement to have a petitions scheme, Members may feel that petitions should still be considered, but that in doing so that realistic parameters be established to ensure such a Scheme was fit for purpose for the Councils current governance arrangements. The majority of petitions received were considered at the Executive Board, with the remainder considered at the Planning and Highways and Licensing Committees as appropriate.

If Members were minded to agree the retention of a Petitions Scheme it was proposed that the qualifying threshold for a petition be increased from a minimum of 6 to a minimum of 50, given signatures could now be collected far more quickly, easily and electronically. No changes are proposed to the thresholds for petitions requiring debate, or those that hold employees to account. No changes were proposed to the current criteria relating to who can sign a petition – signatories must live, work or study in the Borough.

As referred to by the Leader, it was also proposed that the Chief Executive have discretion to ask the relevant Chief Officer to consider in exceptional circumstances petitions of less than 50 that call for local action. The primary criteria being the low number of residents affected being determined by general circumstances.

Members then debated the report, and moved to the vote, with the Conservative Group voting against the proposed changes to the Petitions Scheme.

RESOLVED – That Council Forum:

Approve Option 1 as outlined in the report, requiring a minimum of 50 signatures for a petition to be considered, unless there are exceptional circumstances and the petition calls for local action. (*The Chief Executive having discretion to ask the relevant Chief Officer to consider in exceptional circumstances petitions of less than 50 that call for local action. The primary criteria being the low number of residents affected being determined by general circumstances*).

And,

Authorise amendments to the Petition Scheme reflecting the changes referred to in Option 1 updating the Constitution accordingly.

49 Community Governance Review – Parish of Livesey

Following approval by Policy Council on 3 December 2020 to commence the community governance review (CGR), Members received a report on the outcome of the consultation. The report also requested authority to implement the recommendations to take effect from 1 February 2021.

There has been one response to the consultation which was supportive of

realigning the boundary. Subject to Council approval of the recommendations and the making of the community governance order, polling districts LP5 and LP6 will be merged to align with Livesey Parish Council boundary, and the amendments reflected in the electoral register. A draft of the Order was attached to the report.

RESOLVED –

That Council Forum:

1. Note the outcome of the consultation undertaken as part of the Community Governance Review.
2. Agree the final recommendation to merge polling districts LP5 and LP6 to align and approve the making and publishing of the community governance order (attached), which is to take effect from 1 February 2021.
3. Authorise the Chief Executive (as the Electoral Registration Officer) to make the necessary changes to the electoral register in readiness for publication on 1 February 2021.

50 Updates from Other Committees

The Chairs of the PEOPLE, PLACE and Policy and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committees provided updates on the recent work of their respective Committees.

RESOLVED – That the report and updates be noted.

51 Reports of Executive Members with Portfolios

The Leader and Executive Members presented their reports, providing updates as appropriate. Members of the Council thanked Council staff, volunteers, fellow Councillors and all involved in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the positive work of a number of people and groups was highlighted.

RESOLVED – That the reports of the Leader and Executive Members be noted, and thanks be passed to the staff, volunteers and all others involved in responding so positively to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic.

52 Questions from Members

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

53 Year Planner 2021-22

Members received the Final version of the Year Planner for 2021-22, a draft of which had been submitted to Policy Council in December.

RESOLVED – That the Year Planner for 2021-22 be noted.

Signed at a meeting of the Finance Council

on Monday 1st March 2021

(being the ensuing meeting on the Council) by

MAYOR
