

COUNCIL FORUM

Thursday 26th January 2023

PRESENT – *The Mayor, Councillor Suleman Khonat, Councillors Akhtar P, Ali, Baldwin, Browne, Casey, Connor, Desai M, Fielding, Floyd, Gee, Gunn, Harling, Hardman, Hussain I, Hussain M, Irfan, Imtiaz, Jackson, Khan S, Khan Z, Mahmood, Liddle, Marrow, McCaughran, McGurk, Patel Ab, Patel Alt, Raja, Rawat, Rigby, Riley, Russell, Salton, Shorrocks, Slater Jacq, Slater Jo, Slater Ju, Slater N, Smith D, Smith J, Talbot, Taylor, and Whittingham.*

RESOLUTIONS

48 Welcome and Apologies

The Chief Executive read out the notice convening the meeting.

There then followed Prayers by the Mayor's Chaplain.

A minute's silence was then held in memory of Council officer Paul Stewart who had tragically recently passed away.

Apologies were received from Councillors Akhtar H, Brookfield, Desai S, Fazal, Humphrys, Hussain S, and Sidat.

Councillor Phil Riley requested the Council grant a dispensation for Councillor Samim Desai, who was recovering from ill health and would not be able to attend meetings for the foreseeable future. This dispensation was unanimously agreed by the Council Forum.

49 Minutes Of The Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the Policy Council Meeting held on 1st December 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

50 Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were received.

51 Mayoral Communications

The Mayor reported on events he had attended since the last meeting, including a large number of Christmas events and activities, in particular the Songs of Praise broadcast on Christmas Day at Blackburn Cathedral.

The Mayor also referred to the work of the Climate Change People's Jury, which was an agenda item later in the meeting, as well as the Holocaust

Exhibition at Blackburn Cathedral, and Holocaust Memorial Day, the usual event for which would be held the next day in the Council Chamber.

Finally, the Mayor reminded Members and Officers to buy tickets for the Mayor's Ball on Friday 24th February at Stanley House.

52 Council Forum

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Procedure Rule 12.

53 Motions

The Chief Executive announced that no Notices of Motion had been submitted under Procedure Rule 10.

55 Blackburn with Darwen People's Jury on the Climate Change Crisis

Members received a report and watched a video, which outlined the outcome of the Blackburn with Darwen People's Jury on the Climate Change Crisis.

The Jury's recommendations were launched at an event on 23rd January 2023 at King George's Hall, and would inform future iterations of the Climate Emergency Action Plan for the Borough.

Members of the Oversight Panel would continue to meet twice-yearly to review progress, in liaison with members of the Jury, many of whom were keen to work with the Council and others on the climate emergency.

Each stakeholder organisation on the Oversight Panel had also agreed to take the recommendations to a governance and/or decision making body and to take action to help deliver on the recommendations.

RESOLVED –

Council Forum:

- Notes the report on the People's Jury on the Climate Change Crisis (**Appendix 1**);
- Notes that a progress report and updated Climate Emergency Action Plan, taking account of the Jury's recommendations, will be submitted to the March meeting of the Executive Board.

55 Members Allowances Scheme 2022/23

The Council Forum was informed of the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP), who had met recently to discuss the Members Allowances Scheme for 2022/23 following the recent staff pay award.

Whilst in most years the NJC pay award had been determined as a percentage increase on each pay point, the pay agreement for 2022-23 reached in November 2022 was that all local government staff receive a pay award of £1925 (pro-rata for part-time employees). This equated to a 10.5% rise for the lowest paid staff and 2.72% for the highest paid on the Council's staff grading structure (for the majority of staff on 'Green Book' NJC terms and conditions).

As the main increase had been agreed as a flat rate, it became necessary to convene a meeting of the Independent Remuneration Panel to consider the Members Allowances Scheme 2022-23 for Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council.

Following discussion the Panel felt that the best solution would be to recommend that in years where a flat rate was paid to staff, that a lowest percentage increase on the Council's staff grading structure (which for 2022/23 is 2.72%) should be applied to Members Allowances. In years where a single percentage increase only was awarded to staff, the same rate of increase should also apply to Members Allowances. Mileage and subsistence rates were recommended to remain in line with those paid to staff.

Although it was not on the original agenda for the IRP Meeting, discussion led under 'Any Other Business' onto appropriate remuneration for Independent Members of the Standards Committee which had not been reviewed since 2012. It was considered appropriate for the equivalent of 50% of the Vice Chair SRA payment (around £400 p.a) to be paid to the Independent Members, and that this be considered by Full Council for approval.

Members then debated the report and proposals before moving to the vote.

RESOLVED –

That Council Forum:

1.1 Note the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel (**Appendix 1**);

2.1 Approve the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel set out in section 5 of the report as follows:

- The Panel recommend to Full Council that paragraph 5.2 of the Members' Allowances Scheme (May 2022) be amended so that in years where a flat rate is paid to staff, that a lowest percentage increase on the Council's grading structure should be applied to Members Allowances. In years where a single percentage increase only is awarded to staff, the same rate of increase should also apply to Members Allowances. Mileage and subsistence rates are recommended to remain in line with those paid to staff.
- Accordingly for 2022/23, Member Allowances be increased at the rate of 2.72%.

Also:

- In terms of payments to Independent Members of the Standards Committee which had not been reviewed since 2012, the equivalent of 50% of the Vice Chair SRA payment (around £400 p.a) to be paid to the Independent Members,

56 Updates from Other Committees

Council Forum received an update from the Chairs of the Standards Committee and the Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees on the progress of their work.

The Chair of the Standards Committee, Councillor Parwaiz Akhtar advised that the Committee received a presentation on the new digital process for updating the Register of Members Interests, and the legal framework for submission of interests, and also considered the new TRACK Council values and behaviours at its December meeting, and felt that these should be incorporated into the Member/Officer Protocol.

RESOLVED – That Council Forum;

1. Notes the requirement to register interests and approves the digital process for submitting and updating the Register of Members Interests;
2. Approves the review of the Protocol on Member/Officer Relations and the incorporation of the Council's organisational values: Trust, Respect, Ambition, Collaboration, Kindness (TRACK) and notes that the revised draft Protocol on Member/Officer relations will be reported to Council for consideration and adoption; and
3. That the updates from the Overview and Scrutiny Committees be noted.

57 Reports of the Executive Members with portfolios

The Leader and Executive Members presented their reports, providing updates as appropriate.

RESOLVED - That the reports of the Leader and Executive Members be noted.

58 Questions from Members

One question from Members had been received under Procedure Rule 11 as follows:

From Councillor Altaf Patel to Councillor Jim Smith, Executive Member for Environment and Operations:

Twice a year 1100 taxi and Hackney cab drivers are forced to use the councils own vehicle servicing station for the taxis MOT as the council has created a monopoly for its self for this service, whilst also charging some of the highest MOT fees of any borough in the North west. Sadly I have had complaints from my taxi colleagues about the poor standard of the waiting area at the motor vehicle testing centre.

As customers are expected to sit in a cold hall way where people passing through are constantly opening the outside door and there is a lack adequate heating, which is unacceptable especially in cold weather, as a dedicated waiting room would be provided if this was in the private sector.

Also as drivers are taking their break there, tea making facilities or a coffee/tea vending machine should be provided as part of the service, after all the customers are paying the council a premium for the service with no facilities.

Will you Cllr Smith look into improving the facilities at the councils motor vehicle service centre for the customers and members of the public who are forced to use the councils MOT testing station?

Councillor Jim Smith responded to the question, advising that the Motor Vehicle Service Station (MVSS) reception had adequate seating for 5 people, and gave details of the heating arrangements, and also advised that the DVSA did not require MOT testing stations to provide a television, or tea or coffee facilities so as a result many MOT testing stations did not provide these facilities. A free water dispenser in the MVSS reception was available for customers to use. The taxi drivers waiting for their taxi to be tested could access TV and news via personal mobile phones.

Councillor Smith also pointed out that in light of the Council's ongoing financial challenges, his priority was to ensure provision of as much funding as possible to protect front line Council services for residents, rather than funding a TV and tea/coffee facilities in the reception of the MVSS.

59 Year Planner 2023/24

The Council were asked to approve the Final Year Planner for 2023/24, a draft of which had been submitted to the Policy Council meeting in December.

RESOLVED – That the Year Planner 2023/24 be approved.

Signed at a meeting of the Finance Council

On 27th February 2023

(being the ensuing meeting of the Council) by

MAYOR