

COUNCIL FORUM

Thursday 5th October 2023

PRESENT – *The Mayor Councillor Parwaiz Akhtar, Ali, Brookfield, Casey, Connor, Desai S, Fielding, Floyd, Gee, Gibson, Gunn, Harling, Hardman, Humphrys, Hussain I, Hussain M, Hussain S, Irfan, Imtiaz, Jackson, Khan S, Khonat, Liddle, Mahmood, Marrow, McCaughran, McGurk, Patel Ab, Patel Alt, Patel S, Raja, Riley, Russell, Shaw, Shorrocks, Sidat, Slater Jacq, Slater Jo, Slater N, Smith D, Smith J, Talbot, and Taylor.*

RESOLUTIONS

25 Welcome and Apologies

The Chief Executive read out the notice convening the meeting.

There then followed Prayers by the Mayor's Chaplain.

Apologies were received from Councillors Akhtar H, Whittingham, Khan Z, Desai M, Fazal, Baldwin, Slater Ju, and Rigby.

26 Minutes Of The Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the Council Forum Meeting held on 20th July 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

27 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Damian Talbot declared an interest in Agenda Item 10.4 – Digital & Customer Services update, which included reference to MP Complaints, as he is employed by the MP for Blackburn.

28 Mayoral Communications

The Mayor reported on events and activities he had attended since the last meeting, and highlighted his Mayoral Charities, and his business card which had a Just Giving QR code, which Cllr Denise Gee had assisted in producing, and which had been circulated round the Chamber.

The Mayor also encouraged Members to join him at the Nightsafe Sleep Out at Ewood Park on 17th November. The Mayor also highlighted a Charity meal on 8th November and asked Members to participate in the Remembrance Weekend events in November.

29 Council Forum

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

30 Motions

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

31 Corporate Peer Challenge

Members received a report updating Council Forum on the outcome of the recent Corporate Peer Challenge and to agree the Council's response and action plan in response to the recommendations.

The Council invited the Local Government Association (LGA) to undertake a corporate peer challenge (CPC) during the week of Tuesday 11th – Friday 14th July 2023, to provide an external perspective on the performance of the Council and its capacity to deliver on the new corporate plan and priorities. During the peer review a series of meetings and focus groups took place with a range of people from across the organisation which included elected members, senior officers, managers, supervisors, front line staff and with key partners.

The LGA has adopted five high-level themes which provided the framework for the CPC: Local priorities and outcomes, Organisational and place leadership, Governance and culture, Financial planning and management, and Capacity for improvement.

The Council was required to publish the full report alongside a response and action plan.

Members of the peer review team were very impressed with both the organisation and support they received throughout their four day stay in the Borough.

The report highlighted the Council as having:

- Strong, visible and well respected political and managerial leadership with senior leaders having a clear understanding of Blackburn with Darwen as a place, its opportunities and challenges.
- High levels of ambition and determination to think big and unlock the borough's potential including a £1 billion vision for the future for investment and commitment to growing the cultural offer with a well-crafted Corporate Plan with missions for both the council and wider borough

- An impressive track record of managing significant challenges including the ongoing reductions in spending power since 2010 with robust financial monitoring arrangements in place.
- Many examples of projects which are testing new ways of working and which have been recognised on a national scale with an impressive entrepreneurial spirit in the borough
- Clear commitments to tackling inequalities and strengthening equality, diversity and inclusion across the council and borough
- A working culture that is very supportive with opportunities for staff to participate in learning and development

The final report made 11 recommendations, with each recommendation responded to in the action plan.

Following publication of the final report and action plan, a progress review with the LGA peer team had to take place no later than May 2024. The progress review report was expected to be published by July 2024.

RESOLVED –

That Council Forum:

- Note the LGA's final Corporate Peer Challenge report
- Agree the Council's response and action plan
- Note the timetable for the progress review.

32 Council Appointments Update

Council Forum received an update on the composition and the political balance of the Council, and were requested to note the change to appointments to Committees and approve the Vice-Chair of the Planning & Highways Committee for the remainder of the municipal year.

The report referenced the resignation of Councillor Hussain Akhtar from the Council's Labour Group, with Cllr Akhtar now serving as an Independent Member.

In light of the change to the political composition, the proportionality and allocation of seats on council committees to political groups had been reviewed and was detailed in the report submitted.

As an independent member could not constitute a political group there was no requirement to consider them when calculating proportionality based on Council's political composition, and allocate seats to them.

The allocation of seats to the Labour and Conservative political groups remain unchanged. The Labour Group Leader had therefore nominated the following to the two seats on committees previously held by Councillor Akhtar:

- Councillor Suleman Khonat: Planning & Highways Committee
- Councillor Salma Patel: Children & Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

As Councillor Akhtar was also the Vice-Chair of Planning & Highways Committee, the Council needed to approve a new appointment for this position, for the remainder of Council year 2023/24.

RESOLVED – That Council:

- 1) Notes the current political composition and political balance on the Council, as referred to in this report;
- 2) Notes the new appointments to the Planning & Highways Committee and the Children’s & Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee; and
- 3) Approves the appointment of Councillor Sabahat Imtiaz as Vice-Chair of Planning & Highways Committee for the remainder of Council year 2023/24.

33 Updates from Other Committees

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

RESOLVED –

1. That the updates from the Overview and Scrutiny Committees be noted.

34 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.

35 Questions from Members

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

At the close of the Meeting, Councillor Phil Riley thanked the Mayor for his Chairing of the Meeting.

Signed at a meeting of the Policy Council

On 30th November 2023

(being the ensuing meeting of the Council) by

MAYOR