

COUNCIL FORUM

Thursday, 14 March 2024

PRESENT –*Councillors Akhtar P (The Mayor), Casey, Connor, Fazal, Floyd, Gee, Gunn, Harling, Khonat, Liddle, Mahmood, Marrow, Patel Ab, Smith D, Smith J, Taylor, Akhtar H, Hussain I, Hussain M, Hussain S, McGurk, Rigby, Riley, Shorrocks, Sidat, Slater Jacq, Slater Jo, Slater Ju, Slater N, Talbot, Baldwin, Desai M, Desai S, Fielding, Irfan, Patel Alt, Russell, Ali, Imtiaz, McCaughran, Raja, Whittingham, Gibson, Shaw and Patel S.*

RESOLUTIONS

67 Prayers by Mayor's Chaplain followed by 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 Brookfield, Hardman, Humphrys, Jackson, Khan S and Khan Z.

At this point of the meeting a Minutes Silence was held for all victims of the conflict in Israel and Gaza.

68 Minutes Of The Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Finance Council Meeting held on 26th February 2024 were submitted for approval.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the Finance Council Meeting held on 26th February 2024 be approved as a correct record.

69 Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were received.

70 Mayoral Communications

The Mayor, Councillor Parwaiz Akhtar, updated Council Forum on recent events and activities he had attended since the last meeting, including the Big Sing at King George's Hall, Disability Information Day, an exhibition at Blackburn Cathedral, a Prince's Trust event at BAE Systems, and the opening of Café Akbar's.

Particular reference was made to a very successful Mayor's Ball, which had been a very enjoyable night and a great fundraiser for his Mayoral Charities, and the Mayor thanked all who had supported the event and in particular the organisation by Andrew Thomson in the Mayor's Office and staff who helped on the night.

71 Council Forum

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under

72 **Motions**

The Chief Executive announced that the following Motion had been received under Procedure Rule 12:

BWD Council is proud to be viewed as one of the best examples of community cohesion in the country and welcomes the recent opportunity for officers of the council to be able to showcase examples of best practice on an international stage. Sadly, however, this accolade occurs at a time when examples of race hate are growing in society and are becoming increasingly common in public discourse and this is a cause for serious concern among the communities of the borough.

Tell Mama, the public service that records and monitors anti-Muslim incidents, has recorded a 335% increase in anti Muslim hate cases in the last 4 months compared to the similar period in 2022/2023 and the recent verbal attacks on the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, by senior members of the Conservative Party set an alarming precedent in the run-up to what is likely to be an intense set of elections in 2024. At the same time, the number of recorded anti-semitic incidents is growing, often accompanied by physical violence and this is leaving some members of the Jewish community afraid to walk out on the streets of their towns and cities.

Islamophobic and anti semitic incidents and rhetoric of this kind have no place in the political arena or anywhere in public life in the UK and we call on the Chief Executive to write to the Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, and Sir Kier Starmer, leader of the opposition asking them to ensure that any examples of such rhetoric within their parties are treated with the utmost seriousness and that politicians who indulge in this kind of rhetoric are not tolerated within the mainstream political parties.

Moved by Councillor Phil Riley
Seconded by Councillor Quesir Mahmood

Members then debated the Motion, with Councillor Mustafa Desai, seconded by Councillor Salim Sidat, moving the following amendment, to be inserted at the end of the Motion:

“The justified zero tolerance benchmark established towards antisemitism needs to be consistently applied towards Islamophobia and towards protecting all faiths”.

There then followed debate on the suggested amendment, with Councillor Mustafa Desai agreeing an alteration to remove ‘benchmark’ if the rest of the amendment was incorporated into the original Motion. This was agreed by Council, with the amended Motion, as altered, now reading as follows:

BWD Council is proud to be viewed as one of the best examples of community cohesion in the country and welcomes the recent opportunity for officers of the council to be able to showcase examples of best practice on an international stage. Sadly, however, this accolade occurs at a time when examples of race hate are growing in society and are becoming increasingly

common in public discourse and this is a cause for serious concern among the communities of the borough.

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The justified zero tolerance established towards antisemitism needs to be consistently applied towards Islamophobia and towards protecting all faiths.

There then followed debate on the amended Motion, during which the Members of the Conservative Group left the Council Chamber and did not return for the remainder of the Meeting.

Following debate, Council Forum then moved to a vote on the amended Motion, which was carried and now became the Substantive Motion.

Council Forum then moved to a vote on the Substantive Motion, which was carried.

RESOLVED – That the Motion be carried.

73 Devolution to Lancashire - Proposal to create the Lancashire Combined County Authority

A report was submitted which sought approval of the Proposal to create the Lancashire Combined County Authority for the areas of Lancashire County Council, Blackpool Council and Blackburn with Darwen Council.

Members were reminded that in November 2023, Lancashire County Council, Blackpool Council and Blackburn with Darwen Council (the 'Constituent Councils') each unanimously agreed to undertake statutory consultation on a proposal to establish the Lancashire Combined County Authority ('LCCA') across Lancashire, Blackpool and Blackburn with Darwen, in accordance with the provisions of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 ("the Act"). This consultation ran for a period of 8 weeks from 1 December 2023 to 26 January 2024.

To progress the area's devolution deal, under the legislation, the three Constituent Councils had to submit to the Government a LCCA Proposal ('the Proposal') that took into account the results of the consultation and thereby the views of residents and other stakeholders. It was important to note that the obligation on the Constituent Councils under the Act was to carry out a consultation "across the proposed area" and consider the results of that consultation. This was a requirement for each Constituent Council to consider all of the consultation responses not just those provided in their own area.

A summary of the key points raised in the consultation was set out in the report submitted, and a full consideration of the consultation responses was set out at Appendix 1 and had to be considered in full alongside the summary of the Ipsos Consultation Report at Appendix 3 in deciding how to proceed.

The Proposal had been amended to take account of the outcomes of that consultation. The Proposal was attached at Appendix 2, and Council was now asked to give final approval to the Proposal and agree that it be formally submitted to the Secretary of State subject to the delegations set out above which were required to ensure submission can be made after all three Councils (which will form the Constituent Councils of the LCCA) had approved the Proposal. Agreeing to submit the Proposal at the meeting was key as otherwise it risked the timetable to establish the LCCA in the autumn of this year.

A report in substantively similar terms was also being presented to all three Constituent Councils.

RESOLVED –

It is recommended that Council Forum agrees to:

- i. Consider the outcomes of the consultation on the draft Proposal published in November 2023, as set out in this report and its appendices;
- ii. Approve the updated Proposal (the Proposal) attached at Appendix 2 to this report, taking into consideration and having due regard to the consultation responses and the Public Sector Equality Duty, to create the Lancashire Combined County Authority (LCCA) for the areas of Lancashire County Council, Blackpool Council and Blackburn with Darwen Council;
- iii. Note how the Proposal has been amended to take account of the results of the Consultation, as set out in this report and in more detail within Appendix 2 (the Summary of the Consultation and the Constituent Councils' Response), Appendix 3 (Executive Summary of the Ipsos Consultation Report), and Appendix 4 (the Summary of Communications and Engagement Activity);
- iv. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive to submit the Proposal to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Secretary of State) after consultation with the Chief Executives of the other two constituent councils to confirm that all constituent councils approve the amended

- proposal for submission;
- v. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive to approve any typographical or technical amendments to the Proposal which the Chief Executives of the other two constituent councils also agree on, on behalf of Blackburn with Darwen Council, prior to submission; and
 - vi. Consent to the making of the necessary Regulations to create the Lancashire Combined County Authority in accordance with the arrangements and principles set out in the report, and delegates to the Chief Executive, after consultation with the Leader of the Council, and subject to the approval of the other two Constituent Councils, final approval of the draft Regulations, subject to those regulations reflecting the principles agreed in the Proposal document and this report.

74 Mayoralty 2024-25

A report was submitted that requested that Members consider arrangements for the nominations to office of Mayor and Deputy Mayor for 2024/25.

Annual Council formally appoints Members of the Council to the office of Mayor and Deputy Mayor for the forthcoming Municipal year. The Member appointed to the position of Deputy Mayor would normally be appointed to the office of Mayor in the following year.

At the Council Forum Meeting on 22nd July 2022, the Council agreed the next 5 year rotation, which helped to facilitate this year's nominations. It was agreed then that, based on the proportionality that the rotation of Mayoral nomination for the five year period would be as follows:

2023/24 Labour
2024/25 Labour
2025/26 Conservative
2026/27 Labour
2027/28 Labour

A report on the appointment of the Mayor was submitted to the Annual Council each year, and in the event that the proportionality of the Council changes going forward in a way that would affect the nomination of Mayor for a particular year, a report on the matter would be submitted for Council's consideration.

In accordance with the above, it was for the Labour Group to nominate the Mayor for 2024/2025, who in line with usual practice would be the serving Deputy Mayor, which was Councillor Sylvia Liddle, and it was the turn of the Conservative Group to nominate the Deputy Mayor for 2024/25.

RESOLVED –

That Council Forum:

1. Notes that Councillor Sylvia Liddle will be formally nominated as

Mayor for 2024/25 at Annual Council.

2. Confirms that in accordance with the rotation arrangements agreed at Council Forum on 22nd July 2022 that the Conservative Group nominates the Deputy Mayor for 2024/25, who will be formally nominated at Annual Council.

75 Review of Overview & Scrutiny Committees

Members received a report which provided an update on the Overview & Scrutiny (O&S) arrangements and highlighted recommendations for improvement.

Following the recent Peer Review, a review of the Council's scrutiny arrangements had been carried out, which included a resourcing review to ensure scrutiny was carried out as it should be, with policy support and research resources to be reviewed going forward within the Council's budget constraints.

Current scrutiny members and chairs had suggested that additional training would be useful for more in-depth understanding of overview and scrutiny. Therefore, it was recommended that Officers assess and commission training for Committee Chairs and all Members of the O&S committees. In addition, it was also recommended that general overview and scrutiny training be offered to all Elected Members.

It was suggested that further consideration be given to allow for current O&S Committee Members to continue into the new municipal year, to allow for consistency in progressing the priorities, improve outcomes and to fully embed the culture of effective overview and scrutiny across the Council.

RESOLVED -

That Council:

- a) Requests the Chair of each Overview and Scrutiny Committee, in consultation with Committee members in the new municipal year, to consider and make recommendations whether Independent Members should be invited to sit on each O&S Committee.
- b) Notes that the structure of the 4 existing Overview and Scrutiny Committees will be maintained with the Policy & Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee as the lead committee.
- c) Agrees to introduce mandatory training for all Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs, as well as specific scrutiny training for all O&S committee members and relevant Council Officers as outlined in the report.
- d) Notes the updates to overview and scrutiny processes as outlined in the report.

76 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.

77 Reports of the Executive Members with Portfolios

77.1 Leader

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

77.2 Report of the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

77.3 Report of the Executive Member for Growth & Development

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

77.4 Report of the Executive Member for Public Health, Prevention and Wellbeing

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

77.5 Report of the Executive Member for Digital and Customer Services

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

77.6 Report of the Executive Member for Adult Social Care & Health

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

77.7 Report of the Executive Member for Finance and Governance

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

77.8 Report of the Executive Member for Environment & Operations

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

78 Questions from Members

No questions had been submitted by Members under Procedure Rule 11.

At the close of the Meeting, Councillor Phil Riley thanked the Mayor for his chairing of the meeting and passed best wishes to all the retiring Councillors who were not standing for election.

Signed at a meeting of the Annual Council on 16th May 2024
(being the ensuing meeting on the Council Forum) by

MAYOR