

COUNCIL FORUM

Thursday, 3 October 2019

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

RESOLUTIONS

23 Welcome and Apologies

Following the reading of the notice convening the meeting by the Chief Executive, the Mayor welcomed all to the meeting. Apologies were received from Councillors Kevin Connor, Vicky McGurk, John Pearson, Lilian Salton, Salim Sidat and Jacque Slater.

A minutes silence was observed in memory of former Councillors and Mayors Edna Arnold and Gordon Toole.

24 Minutes Of The Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18th July 2019 were agreed as a correct record.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Mohammed Khan provided an update on the responses received to date from the Government and Kate Hollern MP on the Motions agreed at the last meeting.

25 Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were received.

26 Mayoral Communications

The Mayor updated Council Forum on recent events and activities including the 1940's weekend and Morphgate event and in particular the very successful DIY SOS Children in Need project, which had seen many people in the Borough giving up their time to assist the project.

The Mayor also reminded Members about the Remembrance Day Concert on Monday 11th November at King George's Hall.

27 Council Forum

No questions had been submitted from Members of the public under Procedure Rule 10.

28 To consider Motions submitted under Procedure Rule 12

One Motion had been submitted as follows:

Human Rights Violation in Kashmir

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council is deeply concerned that the Indian Government has revoked Articles 370 and 35A of the Indian Constitution. This decision is in violation of United Nation Security Council Resolution 47. There is a huge concern among the BwD BME Community and also many people from Indigenous community about the ongoing human rights violation in Kashmir.

In occupied Kashmir, the imposition of a strict curfew, the detention of the entire political leadership, large-scale arrests of thousands of innocent Kashmiris coupled with the extremely harsh suppression of all human rights and a freeze of land line, mobile and internet communications is fast leading to a major humanitarian crisis for more than 8million people. The supply of food, medicine and other necessities of life are also deliberately withheld.

Since 5th August India has transformed Jammu and Kashmir into the largest prison on the Planet.

The Indian Government has moved 18,000 troops into Kashmir in addition to the existing 700,000 occupational armed forces. They use Cluster ammunition, pellet guns and heavy artillery in flagrant disregard of the fundamental norms of International humanitarian law.

The Kashmiri people in the occupied territory have been waiting for seven decades for their right of self-determination and now they face grave threats to their lives from a murderous, misogynistic and xenophobic regime.

The Council:

a) Request the Chief Executive to write to the both MPs of Blackburn with Darwen requesting them to ask the Government to make representation to all whom they can to demand India to reverse the revocation of Articles 370 and 35A and to raise with the Foreign Office the need to work for the implementation of UN Resolution 47 on Kashmir and push for a diplomatic solution.

Also

b) that the Chief Executive write to Dominic Raab the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs - to

i) Urge the Indian government to immediately restore power and to lift all communications and media blackouts and the draconian curfew conditions and to allow the people of Kashmir to have immediate access to food and medicine.

ii) To demand that all political leaders are freed and all obligations under the United Nations Security Council Resolutions and various human rights instruments restored as required by international law.

iii) To request that the International Human Rights Observers Group in Kashmir, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Human Rights Commission are allowed access again and that the Indian armed forces immediately cease unlawful operations in Kashmir.

Moved – Councillor Mustafa Desai
Seconder – Councillor Andy Kay

Following debate, the meeting moved to a vote.

RESOLVED – That the Motion be unanimously carried.

29 **Hate Crime Update**

Members received a report which provided an update on progress in dealing with Hate Crime.

The Council had a strong history and track record of promoting cohesion and in the fight against racism and discrimination in all its forms.

Council Forum was reminded that the Council passed a motion at Council Forum on Thursday 21st July 2016 on Hate Crime, and in recent months there had been a number of challenges faced by people across the UK triggered by national and international events. The Council recognised these sensitive times and as the leader of 'place' it had stood firm on its principles to defend all communities.

Recently an inquiry by the all-party parliamentary group on British Muslims held sessions in Manchester, London, Birmingham and Sheffield. Members heard about a wide spectrum of Islamophobic experiences, including multiple incidents of physical and verbal abuse. Those who worked on the definition of Islamophobia wanted it to capture the reality that, while Muslims were not a race, abuse against them amounted to a form of racism. At the same time, it was felt important that the definition did not silence non-racist criticism of Islam.

The definition was produced by the group to build a common understanding of the causes and consequences of Islamophobia. It was decided upon after a six-month consultation with academics, lawyers, elected officials, Muslim organisations, activists, campaigners, and communities. More than 750 British Muslim organisations, 80 academics and 50 MPs have backed the definition.

The definition read:

“Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness.”

There had also been a number of antisemitic incidents in the UK and these had been rising over the years. To support the Jewish community against hate crime, the Council supported the definition of Antisemitism as:

“Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”

The Council would not tolerate prejudice and discrimination against any group in society on the ground of religion, race, gender, age sexuality and disability.

Blackburn with Darwen was one of five national Integration Areas invited by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to work closely with them on innovative plans to address social integration. The Borough was selected because of its strong track record for building bridges between diverse communities and its willingness to try new approaches.

MHCLG was funding a three-year programme in Blackburn with Darwen that aimed to boost the Borough's economic prosperity and build stronger, more integrated communities. This work was an important priority for the Council and we have worked with a wide range of local partners to develop Blackburn with Darwen's social integration programme – called Our Community, Our Future.

The Our Community, Our Future strategy set out how partners would work together to strengthen relationships between people from different backgrounds, to help the Borough become a place where diversity is valued, and where people's faith and cultures are understood and respected.

The strategy had four priorities for making our Borough stronger:

1. To increase economic prosperity for all the borough's communities as an essential prerequisite for social integration
2. To strengthen relationships between the borough's diverse communities
3. To build connections and strengthen relationships between young people who live in the borough's diverse communities
4. To connect the borough's disadvantaged communities to shared spaces – linking people and neighbourhoods to zones of employment, physical assets, community shared spaces and social action.

RESOLVED - That the Council:

- condemns any form of discrimination, racism, xenophobia and hate crime unequivocally and supports people of faith as well as non-faith; and
- adopts the definitions of Islamophobia and Antisemitism as outlined above.

30 Updates from other Committees

The Chairs of the Policy and Resources, Place and People Overview and Scrutiny Committees updated Council Forum on the work of their Committees.

RESOLVED – That the updates from the Policy and Resources, Place and People Overview and Scrutiny Committees be noted.

31 Reports of the Executive Members with Portfolios:

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

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

32 **To consider any questions received from Members under Procedure Rule 11**

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

Signed at a meeting of the Policy Council meeting
on Thursday 5th December 2019
(being the ensuing meeting of the Council) by

MAYOR