



Report of:	To:	Date
Councillor Michael Vincent, Leader of the Council	Council	12 September 2024

Executive Report: Leader of the Council
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1. Purpose of report

- 1.1** To inform Council of progress on key objectives and the current position on a number of issues, as set out below.

2. National policy changes

- 2.1** In the first King's Speech of the new Government, 40 bills were announced and the detail of these are now starting to emerge. Officers are closely monitoring these and other policy changes as more information becomes available to understand the implications for the council.
- 2.2** There are two to bring to your immediate attention. The first is in relation to planning reform and the proposal to revise the National Planning Policy Framework and the second is the English Devolution Bill which aims to create a new more standardised devolution framework for moving powers away from Westminster.
- 2.3** On 30 July, the government published its initial proposals to reform the planning system in the form of a draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and draft revised Standard Method. The proposals make clear that the outcome of the Standard Method is mandatory and sets the minimum number of homes the Local Plan should plan for.
- 2.4** The revisions to the Standard Method would increase the borough's housing requirement from a minimum 275 homes per annum, as calculated under the current Standard Model and identified in the Local Plan Issues and Options document, to a minimum of 637 homes per annum.
- 2.5** The Local Plan Issues and options document estimated that circa 1,400 additional homes would need to be allocated over the plan period (2022 – 2040). However, it is now estimated that under the proposed planning reform this would increase to circa 6,000 additional homes. Further information about the impact this will have on our Local Plan development is provided in the Planning Policy and Economic Development Portfolio Holder update report.

- 2.6** Public consultation on the proposed planning reform is now underway and we will be responding to clearly set out our concerns before it closes on 24 September. The government have indicated that the changes will be implemented before the end of the year.
- 2.7** Following the General Election and the election of the new Government, the Deputy Prime Minister wrote to all Council Leaders on 16 July 2024 setting out the next steps for devolution.
- 2.8** The letter from the Deputy Prime Minister was followed on 25 July, by a letter to upper tier Chief Executives, from the Director General responsible for Devolution, inviting Expressions of Interest for New Devolution deals by the end of September.
- 2.9** Whilst these letters refer to new deals, not existing deals, it is not clear at this stage where the previously negotiated Lancashire deal sits. In addition, the Minister of State for Devolution, Jim McMahon, told a recent LGA Councillors forum that he was uncomfortable that the role of the district councils in combined authorities had not been resolved.
- 2.10** Following the Deputy Prime Minister's letter, the Leaders of nine of the 12 District Councils in Lancashire, excluding ourselves, Ribble Valley and Fylde, have written to both the Deputy Prime Minister and the Members of Parliament for Lancashire. The letter asks that the Lancashire Devolution deal not to be progressed as currently proposed, to allow the District Councils to submit an alternative proposal by the end of September in line with timescales for expressions of interest for new devolution deals.
- 2.11** Together with the Leaders of Fylde and Ribble Valley, I have also written to the Deputy Prime Minister and Lancashire MP's asking for greater district involvement but requesting that the Lancashire deal is approved as soon as possible. The letter also sets out our strong opposition to a directly elected Mayor for Lancashire and any calls for local government reorganisation.

3. Transformation Strategy development

- 3.1** Work has started on our Transformation Strategy. Initial sessions have been held with Corporate Management Team to scope out our approach. We also made the most of the recent Local Government Association Peer Challenge to seek the input from the Peer Challenge team.
- 3.2** Transformation will mean lots of different things to different people, and we want to take the time to develop a 'vision' for transformation at Wyre which will describe what transformation means for us. From this we will identify a set of transformation priorities to focus our transformation work on things which will help us to use our resources more efficiently, improve customer focus and modernise the way we work.
- 3.3** There will be lots of opportunities for council colleagues to get involved in shaping our Transformation Strategy and Transformation Programme from 'snap surveys' and workshops to drop-in sessions and focus groups. We will also be creating a Transformation Champions Network made

from staff across the council who want to play a lead role in driving forward transformation across the council.

- 3.4** In August 2024 we launched our Transformation Blog which will keep everyone updated with our plans, next steps and opportunities to get involved. Work is also underway to develop a 'Transformation Roadmap' which will visually show the journey we are taking to transform our organisation.

4. Economic Development Strategy development

- 4.1** Work to develop a Wyre Borough Economic Development and Visitor Economy Strategy has begun.
- 4.2** The Strategy will provide a clear statement of what the council aims to achieve over the medium to long term in these areas.
- 4.3** From June to August the areas identified in a 'big issues' briefing paper were investigated further through research and consultation activities. The team are now drafting the Strategy and some of the key considerations include:
- Setting a vision for economic development and visitor growth;
 - Designing key initiatives, and;
 - Prioritising resources.

5. Marine Hall update

- 5.1** We are continuing work to explore options for the future operation and development of the Marine Hall. The council's aspiration is for an innovative and economically viable 'Entertainment Hub' that offers an enhanced range of entertainment, leisure, cultural and commercial activities for both residents and visitors to this area.
- 5.2** A soft market testing exercise has been undertaken to allow interested organisations with appropriate experience to express an interest in running the Marine Hall. A number of organisations have expressed an interest in further discussions with the council and we will hold a market interest day in September at the Marine Hall. The next step following this would be a formal procurement exercise.

6. Leisure contract procurement

- 6.1** SLC (consultancy in public sector leisure and active wellbeing) have been commissioned to help the council undertake the procurement exercise for our leisure centres – Fleetwood, Thornton, Poulton, Garstang and Garstang pool. The current contract with Fylde Coast YMCA ends on 31 March 2026.
- 6.2** The project inception meeting took place in May and officers from a range of departments will now meet regularly with SLC to progress the procurement. So far SLC have been reviewing key council documents and engaging with internal and external stakeholders. Work has also begun on developing our procurement strategy so we can be very clear

of our requirements when we go out to tender. A workshop session was held with Cabinet members on 24 July to help inform the procurement strategy. Hopefully some members will have attended the pre-council slot which explained more about the procurement process and the timetable.

7. Potential land contamination

- 7.1** As has recently been publicised, the council has launched an investigation into potential contamination from the AGC Chemicals Europe Ltd plant at Hillhouse Technology Enterprise Zone in Thornton Cleveleys.
- 7.2** This relates to the historic use of a chemical called PFOA between the 1950's and 2012, which whilst used within the terms of an environmental permit and UK legislation at the time, has since been classified as carcinogenic to humans by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC).
- 7.3** Since receiving notification of the issue, the council has worked with a number of key agencies to gather further information, and in doing so has determined the need for a detailed investigation to be undertaken under Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. That detailed investigation has now commenced, and whilst the council is the lead regulator under Part IIA, it has requested that the Environment Agency undertake the detailed investigation on its behalf. This is due to the AGC site being a permitted site under the Environment Permitting Regulations and the Environment Agency being the regulator of that permit.
- 7.4** The information and data gathered during the investigation will be used to determine whether any land within the vicinity of the AGC site should be classified as contaminated land. Where land is classified as contaminated, it will be the responsibility of the council and Environment Agency to ensure that the responsible party undertakes remediation of the land to an acceptable standard. The investigation is likely to take time, therefore the council has set up a dedicated webpage <http://www.wyre.gov.uk/multi-agency> to keep the public informed of its progress.
- 7.5** Whilst the investigation is still in its very early stages, the webpage has been populated with frequently asked questions and answers in the hope of addressing any immediate concerns. A letter to residents from the Chief Executive is also available on the webpage and resident drop-in sessions are currently taking place for those residents who would like to find out more.

8. Comments and questions

- 8.1** In accordance with procedure rule 11.3 any member of council will be able to ask me a question or make a comment on the contents of my report or on any issue, which falls within my area of responsibility. I will respond to any such questions or comments in accordance with procedure rule 11.5.