

LEADER'S POLICY DEVELOPMENT BOARD

Monday, 10th February, 2025

Present: Councillors Munsif Dad BEM JP (in the Chair), Councillors Noordad Aziz (Vice Chair) and Kath Pratt

Apologies Councillors Zak Khan and Danny Cassidy (as substitute for Councillor Khan)

28 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Zak Khan and Danny Cassidy (who was unable to substitute for Councillor Khan on this occasion).

29 Minutes of the last meeting

The Minutes of the last meeting held on Monday, 22nd October 2024 were submitted for approval as a correct record.

Agreed - **That the Minutes be received and approved as a correct record.**

30 Matters arising (other than those already included on the agenda)

1) Replacement Mayor's Car (Minute 20)

Jane Ellis, Executive Director Legal and Democratic Services, reported that the authority had extended the lease on the current Mayoral car for a further year. For future years, officers would consider the use of a procurement framework for the lease of a replacement vehicle, as the existing contractor had ceased to provide a vehicle leasing service to the Council.

2) Town Twinning (Minute 24)

Julian Joinson, Member Services Manager, reported that the visit of the delegation from Khust, Ukraine, scheduled to take place over the weekend of 14 – 16 February 2025 would not now take place. It had not been possible for the delegates to obtain visas within the timeframe available. It was hoped that the additional time provided would allow for a more comprehensive itinerary to be developed for a future visit. The new date could potentially be linked to the Mayor Making ceremony or some other established civic event.

3) Mayor's Cadet (Minute 23)

Mr Joinson indicated that the Army Cadets regional body had not supported the proposals to establish a Mayoral Cadet, citing safeguarding concerns. However, they had not provided any detailed explanation of their concerns or suggested how these might be mitigated.

Agreed - **To request the Member Services Manager to respond to the Army Cadets organisation about the proposed**

Mayoral Cadet Protocol, to invite them to outline their concerns and to suggest amendments which would satisfy their requirements.

31 Appointment of Alderman and Freeman

Councillor Munsif Dad BEM JP indicated that the Labour Group were considering proposing the appointment of a number of Aldermen and Freeman in 2025. The Labour Group meeting was due to take place this evening and it was likely that the appointment of three Aldermen and three Freeman would be recommended. The group were also proposing to recommend that one honorary position (either an Alderman or a Freeman) be offered to the Opposition Group.

Mr Joinson reminded members of the cost of the honour, which included the purchase of a formal badge at approximately £500 per person and complimentary meals for the recipient and a specified number of guest at the Mayor Making event. Ms Ellis suggested that it might be necessary to reduce the number of free meals offered if a large number of honours were granted. Mrs Joinson added that space in the Council Chamber was close to the assessed safety limited and that multiple guests might not be possible at the ceremonial event, but that space would be available at the meal in the Ballroom.

Agreed - To note the proposals to appoint a number of Aldermen and Freeman in 2025.

32 Boundary Review

Members considered a report of the Executive Director (Legal and Democratic Services) on the Boundary Review.

Members were reminded that the review would look at:

- the total number of councillors needed;
- the number of wards;
- the number of councillors per ward;
- ward boundaries; and
- ward names.

The review would give the Council a chance to consider whether it currently had too many councillors or too few, given the changing demands on councillors since the last review had been carried out. The authority could look at things like changes to population, changes to its services, changes to its statutory responsibilities and the demands of its political management arrangements (e.g. how many councillors it needed to enable Cabinet and the Committees to operate effectively and were councillor workloads manageable, etc). The Local Government Boundary Commission for England had guidance available to support this process.

Since the last review, the law had changed in respect of electoral arrangements. This meant that the Commission would require the Council to have three-member wards if it continued to hold elections by thirds. If the authority moved to 'all out' elections every four years it was permitted to retain a mixed patterns of 1, 2 and 3 member wards. The electoral arrangements were a matter for the Council to determine and would not be part of the review process. However, the electoral cycle would impact significantly upon the warding arrangements and the Commission had asked the authority to indicate before the

review started whether the Council wished to change its electoral cycle or retain election by thirds.

Process for the review

The Council was required to submit a lot of preliminary information to the Commission when the review started e.g. detailed maps, population information and 5 year electorate forecasts.

The review would first consider how many councillors the Council needed. Both the Council and the individual political groups could submit a proposal to the Commission about this.

Having formed a view of councillor numbers, the Commission would then look at ward boundaries. The Commission would consult the Council and public about this before producing an initial proposal. There would then be further consultation on the draft proposal before final recommendations were produced by the Commission. The Commission's recommendations would then be laid before Parliament in order to bring them into force at all out elections.

Review timetable

The Council had received an indicative timetable from the Commission, but this had slipped slightly as a result of the General Election and it might be that the authority would receive an updated timetable from them. However, in broad terms, the timings were expected to be as follows:

July 2024	Boundary Commission reps to meet with Leader and portfolio holder
Autumn 2024	Boundary Commission presentation to Council
Spring 2025	Council / political groups to submit size proposal Boundary Commission to consult on ward boundaries etc
Summer / Autumn 2025	Boundary Commission to publish draft proposals and consult on these
Spring 2026	Boundary Commission to publish final proposals These then required Parliamentary approval
May 2027	New boundaries etc implemented at all out elections

Following the recent announcement by the Government about devolution and local government reorganisation, Ms Ellis confirmed that she had asked the Commission if the review would now be halted. At this stage, the Commission had confirmed that they intended to continue with the review. She had also sought advice about whether a minimal submission could be made. However, this would not be acceptable to the Commission. Accordingly, a detailed submission would be required and this would need to be progressed soon. In particular, there was now a need to determine whether the Council wanted to continue to elect in thirds or if it wished to move to 'all out' elections and the total number of councillors. She commented that, if reorganisation were not to go ahead, the continuing Council would need to be able to operate effectively within the new electoral arrangements as determined by the review.

Councillor Dad expressed a preference for continuing to elect by thirds, with 13 wards across Hyndburn, and a total of 39 councillors. Councillor Pratt indicated that this structure was also likely to be acceptable to the Opposition Group.

Ms Ellis commented that the Commission would produce a first draft of the map of ward boundaries. However, it was noted that they might have limited resources to carry out this task due to widespread local government reorganisation. It was possible that the boundaries for any new unitary authorities might be based upon existing County Council boundaries.

The submission would be required in March 2025.

Agreed - **To note the report on the Boundary Review and the indicative proposals of the political groups regarding the Council's future electoral arrangements.**

33 Review of Members Allowances

The Executive Director (Legal and Democratic Services) reported that the changes proposed to the Members Allowances Scheme at the Board's meeting on 22nd October 2024 had been approved at the Council meeting on 7th November 2024. The intention was to implement the changes with effect from 1st April 2025. The new pay rates would take effect from that date and details of the changes would be forwarded to Payroll in advance.

In response to a query, Ms Ellis indicated that the increase in the level of basic and special responsibility allowances was not the same as the 3% increase identified in the Council's draft Budget report for staffing, as this was only the estimate of the budget requirement to fund the staff pay award for 2025/26. The increase provided for within the Allowances Scheme was the amount of the most recent staff pay award (namely, the 2.5% agreed for staff for 2024/25). The 2025/26 staff percentage pay rise would be applied automatically to Members Allowances with effect from 1st April 2026, in accordance with the agreed index.

Members were reminded that the allowance for the Vice-Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny Committees would be reduced with effect from 1st April 2025.

Agreed - **To note the update on the review of Members Allowances.**

34 Committee Management System - Cyber Security

Members considered a report of the Member Services Manager on the committee management system and cyber security issues.

The Council currently operated Civica's modern.gov software (committee management system), which had been in use with effect from 2014. The system provided a public facing interface for core democratic services functions, including a database of councillors' information, committee memberships and meeting dates, as well software for publishing agendas, reports, minutes and public notices for executive (Cabinet) decisions. The system also hosted a library of key governance documents, including the Constitution and members' allowances information.

The software was currently operating on a Council based server. However, this server was now obsolete.

The Case for an Upgrade

Officers had identified a need to upgrade the system some time ago for a variety of reasons.

a) Market Testing

Since signing the original contract, the Council had not tested the market to ensure on-going value for money for this system. There were elements of functionality of the current system that were unused, such as committee report clearance workflow. It was believed that a market testing exercise might identify savings to be made if a new system could be purchased without redundant options. There were effectively two competitors in the marketplace:

- Civica – modern.gov;
- Astec – CMIS.

A tender specification had been drafted, but not yet let, for the reasons mentioned in the Conclusion section of the report.

b) Upgrade Request

A request to Civica for an upgrade to the latest version of the software in 2022 had revealed that the Council's server (Windows Server 2008) was not compatible with the latest upgrade available. An upgrade was desirable for the following reasons;

- provision of the latest functionality and enhancements;
- latest bug fixes to software; and
- improved cybersecurity measures.

c) Public Service Network

An IT Health Check carried out by a 3rd party company in 2023 to ensure network compliance to the meet the Public Sector Network (PSN) requirements that enabled the Council to communicate with the DWP, had identified that continuing to use the old server was a potential risk to security. Quotes had been received from Civica for two options for an upgrade, the financial implications of which were set out in the report.

Option 1 - Modern.gov (Civica) Hosting Solution

Option 2 - Move to new HBC server (This quote did not include the cost of purchase of a new server, which would need to be procured by ICT)

The preferred option from IT was a move to the system being hosted by Civica.

The costs in the quotes were in addition to the annual licence fees paid by the Council to Civica.

The upgrade had not been taken up pending the market testing exercise referred to at a) above and was dependent on a bid for capital funding being successful. The subsequent bid for funding in the Budget process for 2024/25 only resulted in funding being added to the capital programme for 2025/26 in the sum of £30,000.

d) Cyber attacks

UK public bodies had been subject to an increasing number of cyber-attacks in recent months. In view of this heightened threat level, ICT have sought permission from Member Services to shut down the public facing element of modern.gov for short periods, such as at weekends or holidays, to ensure that the system was not vulnerable, particularly when internal users and ICT officers were not available to monitor the operation of the system.

Previous Quotes

In 2022, officers had sought quotes from two companies who each provided this service to a large number of local authorities, Public-i and Auditel. The Council's then IT Manager had also been involved in the discussions with the two companies, which had focussed on enabling webcasting from the Council Chamber only.

A summary of the quotes was provided in the report, which included both initial set up costs and annual fees.

Subsequently, officers had invited both companies to undertake a return site visit to gain a better understanding of the Council's needs and financial constraints and to provide updated quotes. It was possible that the specification for the Council Chamber could be refined to provide a slimmed down offer (e.g. fewer monitors, fewer fixed speakers and use of shared microphone units) to keep costs lower. At the time of drafting the report, only Public-i had responded offering to meet and a date would be finalised subject to the Board's decision today.

Alternative Solutions

a) Conference System

Officers had considered the possibility of providing a simpler solution, comprising conference style microphones and speakers in the Council Chamber to improve sound quality for those participating in meetings. Typically, this system comprised a stand-alone base unit for each councillor (or one shared between two) with gooseneck microphone and integral speaker, as well as a Chair's master control unit. Some models allowed voting to be recorded. Units were usually battery operated, but certain models supported being hardwired in situ.

The 2022 quotes from Auditel and Public-i, included costings for a conference system, as this equipment formed the basic building block for a more comprehensive webcasting system. Prices quoted were set out within the report and were in the range £23k - £40k depending on the options specified:

Other providers offered similar conferencing solutions and further quotes could be obtained, if required, e.g. Televic.

Wireless options required the batteries to be topped up before usage and charging would need to be carried out in rotation, as the number of charging ports was usually be less than the total number of batteries required.

The conferencing system described would provide a basic audio system, but this would not be linked to any peripheral devices, which would enable sound to be directly recorded for broadcast purposes. It might be possible to upgrade a basic conference system at a future date to facilitate full webcasting, provided the equipment did not fall into obsolescence in the intervening period.

b) Basic Webcasting

A simple option for webcasting could be devised which would involve the use of portable or hand held AV devices such as an iPad or camcorder. Meetings could be either livestreamed to the Council's YouTube page (iPad only) or recorded and uploaded on the following day. Advantages were that equipment costs would tend to be relatively low, and

there would be flexibilities around a low-tech solution in terms of ease of operation. Disadvantages might include the amateur appearance of recordings and a more intense use of staffing due to the presence of an additional staff member at meetings to film the proceedings.

Equipment costs were estimated to be as follows:

- Basic iPad - from £329
- Camcorder - typically £300 - £600

The above costs did not include the cost of any peripherals, such as a camera/phone stand. Use of a YouTube account was free.

Options a) and b) were not mutually exclusive and could be used in tandem. It was not clear at this stage whether conferencing equipment from Option a) could be relocated to the QER, if needed. Any control unit or aerial device would need to be portable. Option b), basic webcasting, could be deployed in both the Council Chamber and QER.

Staffing Implications

Formal webcasting and the alternative options described above all had additional staffing implications.

Webcasting and the conferencing system (if using a wireless system) required staff time to set up the conference base units in the Council Chamber and to remove these for storage at the end of each meeting. It was estimated that this would take around 20-30 minutes for each meeting. This could be undertaken by a combination of an additional staff member for set up and the principal committee officer clearing up equipment after the meeting. Both would be entitled to time off in lieu (TOIL) for evening meetings. There would also be additional time required for the charging and rotation of batteries prior to programmed meetings, which could amount to 1 – 2 hours in the week before the meeting, including time taken to walk to/from the Town Hall.

A more significant cost would be for Option b) iPad/camcorder recordings. An additional staff member would need to be on hand for the duration of the meeting to film the session. This could amount to up to 2.5 hours for Council meetings (7pm - 9.30pm). If deploying the most junior member of staff to this role, and assuming there were 8 Council meetings per year, this might cost in the region of £400 per annum. To provide cover and a fairer rotation of staff duties, more senior members of staff might need to be deployed, from time to time, at additional cost. Cabinet meetings which were held during normal office hours (say 8 meetings per year at 1.5 hours each) would not incur additional staffing costs, but could place an additional burden of up to 12 hours on the staffing resource for webcasting.

Local Government Reorganisation

Members were reminded that The Government's Devolution White Paper proposed to create new unitary authorities. Those included in the Devolution Priority Programme would be set up by April 2027 and remaining unitary authorities by April 2028. One assumption was that a Pennine Lancashire Unitary Authority would be created under this process. Hyndburn had already placed on record its aspiration to be the administrative centre of such a unitary authority, due to its symbolic and central location and good infrastructure. The size of membership of any new unitary authority was, as yet, unknown, but it was conceivable that there would be a greater number of councillors than the available fixed seating in the Council Chamber could accommodate. Significant capital expenditure in the Council Chamber at this time might present a risk in terms of value for money.

Budget

The project was currently unfunded and a bid would need to be submitted to the capital programme 2026/27 for both full webcasting and Option a), given the large set up costs involved. Option b) may be achievable from within existing revenue budgets, but would incur some start up equipment costs and on-going additional staffing costs.

Councillor Kimberley Whitehead expressed a preference for Option a) (an audio only conference system), with base units shared between two or three users. If possible, this should be linked to a speaker in the public gallery of the Council Chamber. She noted that Pendle Borough Council currently used a mobile audio unit for their meetings. Ms Ellis reported that colleagues at Lancaster City Council were piloting a simple webcasting scheme, similar to Option b) above. However, viewing figures were currently low. Councillor Dad supported the proposal to limit improvements to enhancing the sound facilities only at meetings.

Agreed

- (1) To note the report on the provision of conference equipment / webcasting.**
- (2) To approve, in principle, the adoption of Option a), the purchase of conference equipment, on the basis of shared units between two or three users (with a number of spare units) and to request officers to seek quotes for a suitable system.**

36 Other Business

1) Dates and Times of Meetings

Councillor Dad noted that the Annual Council meeting for 2025/26 had been scheduled for 22nd May 2025. He requested that this be brought forward to 15th May 2025. He also noted that the Mayor Making meeting had been set for 7th June 2025 and requested that this be brought forward to 24th May 2025, subject to consultation with the Deputy Mayor. The above changes would be dependent on availability of the accommodation at the Town Hall.

In addition, Councillor Dad requested that the start time of the Council Meeting proposed for 26th February 2026 be brought forward to 4.00pm to take account of fasting during Ramadan. He also requested the proposed date for the Annual Meeting for 2026 be amended from 14th May to 21st May 2026.

Agreed

- To approve the above changes to Council meeting times and dates referred to above, subject to the consultation requirements and room availability issues identified.**

2) Mayors Allowance

Members considered a request to support an increase in the Mayoral Allowance in the sum of £500, due to additional travel costs incurred exceptionally in the current year. However, it was reported that the Civic Attendants were currently supporting supplemental transport arrangements, whenever practicable. Furthermore, any increase in allowance would need to be applied consistently in future years.

Agreed - **That the request for an increase in the Mayoral Allowance in 2024/25 not be supported.**

3) Access to Scaitcliffe House by a Member of the Public

The Executive Director (Legal and Democratic Services) reported that a member of the public had been observed filming in the Reception area at Scaitcliffe House, after having previously been issued with a warning not to do so, to ensure the privacy of other individuals accessing Council services. There was a need to consider whether, or not, to issue a final warning, or to ban the perpetrator from the premises. Any restriction would only apply to Scaitcliffe House, not to other Council premises.

Members considered that a ban from the building would be an appropriate response.

Agreed - **To request that the Executive Director (Legal and Democratic Services) issue a ban on access by the individual mentioned above from Scaitcliffe House.**

37 Date and Time of Next Meeting

To be confirmed.

Signed:.....

Date:

Chair of the meeting
At which the minutes were confirmed