

Summary of questions - employee conference

September 2025

Our employee conference covered several key topics, focusing on budget, SEND, LGR and staff recognition. Below is a summary of the key topics:

Staff recognition

- Mark highlighted the importance of recognising the good work being done and the awards that several teams are shortlisted for. He mentioned several teams, including the Road Safety Fleet and Public Integrated Transport Team, the Virtual Schools Employment Support Team, and Children Services, all of which are shortlisted for multiple awards. The county council also won the Menopause Friendly Employer of the Year award last year and is looking to retain it this year.
- He reminded people that our annual staff awards are open for nominations.

Council updates:

- Mark discussed the new administration and the positive working relationship with the new cabinet. He emphasised the importance of working with new councillors and the fresh perspectives they bring. He also mentioned the national messages and the challenge of converting those messages into what it means for Lancashire.

Key priorities:

- Improvement plans for SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) and Adult Social Care were highlighted as major priorities. Mark acknowledged the hard work of the teams involved and the progress being made, although there is still a way to go.
- Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) was discussed, with a survey out for feedback and submissions due by the end of November. Mark encouraged staff to fill in the survey and share their views.
- Financial sustainability was emphasised, with an overspend of about £30 million in the current year. Mark mentioned the ongoing efficiency reviews and the need to look at everything the council does and how it can be done more effectively.
- Mark encouraged staff to participate in the staff suggestion scheme and the upcoming staff survey. He also mentioned the creation of a staff panel to get ideas and feedback from staff across different directorates.

County Councillor Stephen Atkinson

- Councillor Atkinson began by expressing his gratitude for the warm welcome he has received so far, highlighting staff professionalism and focus. He emphasised his passion for Lancashire and his commitment to the county, having worked with Lancashire County Council for over six years in his role as Leader of Ribble Valley Borough Council.
- He shared his journey. He explained that Reform UK asked him where he would like to stand, and he chose Lancashire because of his passion for the area and its democratic representation.
- He discussed the success of Reform UK in the elections, winning 53 of the 84 seats, which is the second-highest majority since 1974. He attributed this success to the desire of the people for a real focus on how the council impacts their lives.
- Councillor Atkinson stressed the importance of competency, professionalism, and courtesy in achieving the council's objectives. He mentioned the positive working relationship with Mark Wynn and council officers, emphasising the need for collaboration and mutual respect.
- He addressed the issue of local government reorganisation (LGR), expressing his opposition to it due to the lack of a mandate and the potential for distraction. However, he acknowledged the reality of the political situation and the government's determination to proceed with LGR.
- Councillor Atkinson highlighted the council's priority of financial sustainability, emphasising the need to avoid issuing a Section 114 notice, which would suspend all discretionary spending. He mentioned the importance of making the pension funds more efficient without affecting people's benefits.
- He also discussed the council's commitment to addressing the backlog of education healthcare plans and improving adult social care, acknowledging the hard work and dedication of the staff involved.

Question and answer session summary:

- How is the council addressing the Social Care Support Officers strike?

The issue has been ongoing for three years. Councillor Atkinson mentioned some of the examples of industrial action elsewhere. Mark Wynn confirmed discussions with Unison are active and the council is committed to resolving the matter.

- Are councillors allowed to wear non-LCC lanyards?

Councillor Atkinson responded by emphasising the importance of freedom of expression for councillors, who are not employees of the council. He mentioned that openness is the best route to dialogue and that councillors should be able to express their political beliefs.

- Will elected members have access to staff panel feedback?

Mark Wynn confirmed the staff panel is strictly an officer-only forum. Feedback will not be shared with elected members, ensuring confidentiality and open dialogue.

- Why doesn't the LGR survey ask for preferences on proposals?

Laurence Ainsworth responded by explaining that the survey was a collaborative effort across the 15 councils of Lancashire. A government consultation is expected in the new year, which will allow more detailed feedback.

- What should staff do if HR/FM queries go unanswered?

Deborah Barrow provided direct contact numbers: Ask HR – 535355, Ask FM – 535015. Staff are encouraged to call if email queries are unresolved.

- Can directorate away days be reinstated?

Laurence supported the idea and suggested using council venues to reduce costs. He emphasised the value of cross-team networking and idea sharing.

- What is the plan for shared services post-LGR?

Laurence stated shared services are likely for specialist teams. Final arrangements depend on agreements between future councils. Examples could include emergency planning and resilience teams.

- How can frontline staff contribute to adult social care efficiency?

Helen Coombes encouraged staff to attend town halls, participate in directorate meetings, and use the empty chair initiative. She highlighted the importance of co-production and feedback.

- What is the status of devolution?

Phil Green confirmed strategic plans for growth, employment, and transport have been approved. Stephen raised concerns about centralising power under a mayoral model and emphasised the need for clarity on capital investment.

- How is the council responding to rising community tensions?

Mark Wynn said the council monitors tensions through partnerships with police and community groups. Stephen stressed respectful tone and dialogue in public discourse.

- Is voluntary redundancy being considered?

Mark Wynn confirmed there are no current plans for a council-wide scheme. Laurence added that most staff would most likely transfer under a form of TUPE if LGR proceeds. Decisions will be communicated transparently.

- Will the working from home policy change?

Mark explained that the council is currently reviewing its working from home practices and that there is no definitive policy yet. He emphasised the importance of balancing business needs with staff recruitment and retention. Councillor Atkinson added that the review would be a measured approach, considering the pros and cons of different working arrangements.

- What spending cuts are expected?

Mark explained that all budget lines are under review. The council is focusing on smarter commissioning, digital transformation, and reducing property estate. Stephen highlighted procurement inefficiencies and the need for creative solutions.

- Will DOGE come to LCC?

Stephen noted DOGE is being piloted elsewhere, but LCC has already undertaken similar internal reviews. External oversight is welcomed with attention to data sensitivity.

- Is ICT capacity sufficient for automation?

Laurence and Pete Lloyd confirmed a new digital model is in place. Training and flexible resources are prioritised to support automation and innovation.

- What is Reform's stance on climate change?

Stephen acknowledged climate change but prioritised economic prosperity. He cited UK emissions as less than 0.1% globally and compared energy costs with the US and China.

- Will staff networks be involved in policy changes?

Deborah and Mark confirmed staff networks will be included in the staff panel. The goal is unified communication and inclusive engagement.

- What is the status of the business support review?

Mark committed to providing an update and acknowledged the contributions of affected teams. He recognised the need for better communication on the review's progress.

- How is staff morale and wellbeing being supported?

Deborah highlighted existing support resources and the importance of team connections. Mark urged staff to speak up about capacity issues and reassured them of leadership's commitment to listening.

- What role will digital services play in the new council?

Laurence and Pete described digital services as central to transformation. They emphasised collaboration with service teams and the use of AI and automation.

- Is LCC learning from other councils on LGR?

Laurence confirmed ongoing engagement with councils like Cumbria and North Yorkshire. Lessons from recent reorganisations are being applied to improve implementation.