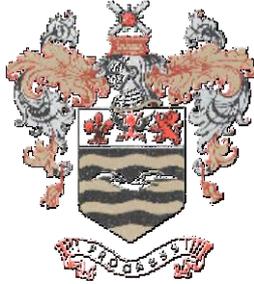


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BLACKPOOL COUNCIL

Tuesday, 17 November 2020

To: The Members of Blackpool Council

Lady Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen

You are hereby summoned to attend a meeting of **Blackpool Council** to be held via Zoom Conference Call on Wednesday, 25 November 2020 commencing at 6.00 pm for the transaction of the business specified below.



Director of Governance and Partnerships

Business

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members are asked to declare any interests in the items under consideration and in doing so state:

(1) the type of interest concerned either a

- (a) personal interest
- (b) prejudicial interest
- (c) disclosable pecuniary interest (DPI)

and

(2) the nature of the interest concerned

If any member requires advice on declarations of interests, they are advised to contact the Head of Democratic Governance in advance of the meeting.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 30 SEPTEMBER 2020 (Pages 1 - 4)

To agree the minutes of the last meeting held on 30 September 2020 as a true and correct record.

3 RESOLUTION OF CONDOLENCE AND MINUTE'S SILENCE

This Council and the people of Blackpool were deeply saddened to learn since its last meeting of the sad deaths of the following:

- former Councillor Philip Dunne, former Mayor of the Borough in 2005/2006 and ward councillor for Talbot,
- former Councillor Craig Matthews, Executive Member for Community Services and ward councillor for Highfield ward 1995/2003; and
- former Mayoress Mrs June Preston who was Mayoress to her husband, the then Councillor John Preston in 1993/1994.

Group Leaders/ representatives will be asked to pay tribute to the work and dedication of these former civic office holders.

The Lady Mayor will then move the following resolution of condolence.

“The Council sends its deepest sympathy to the families and friends of former Councillor Philip Dunne, former Councillor Craig Matthews and former Mayoress June Preston for their loss and places on record its recognition of the dedication to office of these former civic office holders.”

Following the passing of this resolution, Council will then hold a minute’s silence, as a mark of respect.

4 ANNOUNCEMENTS

To receive official announcements from the Mayor.

5 DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH UPDATE REGARDING THE PANDEMIC

Dr Arif Rajpura, Director of Public Health to provide a verbal update regarding the pandemic.

6 EXECUTIVE REPORTS, COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY REPORTS AND CHAIRMAN OF THE SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP BOARD REPORT (Pages 5 - 34)

To consider the attached reports to Council from the Corporate, People and Place Portfolios, the Combined Fire Authority report and the Chairman of the Scrutiny Leadership Board report.

Members are reminded that:

- The Lead Executive Member * has up to three minutes to present the report, after which there will be a period of no longer than 25 minutes per report for questions/comments (a green card will give a one minute warning, red for the end of the debate).
- There will be three minutes per question/ comment from any Councillor on anything within the portfolio and no limit to the number of times a Councillor can ask a question.
- There will be a period of up to 25 minutes for responses from any Cabinet Member * on their area of responsibility at the end of the questions/ comments for each report.

* or Combined Fire Authority representative or Chairman of the Scrutiny Leadership Board.

7 AUDIT COMMITTEE INDEPENDENT MEMBER (Pages 35 - 38)

To consider the appointment of an Independent Member/s to the Audit Committee.

8 FIREWORKS (Pages 39 - 42)

To consider the following motions which have been submitted in accordance with Procedure Rule 12.1.

Other information:

For queries regarding this agenda please contact Yvonne Burnett, Democratic Governance Senior Adviser, Tel: (01253) 477034, e-mail yvonne.burnett@blackpool.gov.uk

Copies of agendas and minutes of Council and committee meetings are available on the Council's website at www.blackpool.gov.uk.

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Present:

Councillor Burdess (in the Chair)

Councillors

Baker	G Coleman	Jackson	R Scott
Benson	Collett	Kirkland	Smith
Blackburn	Cox	Matthews	Stansfield
Brookes	Critchley	Mitchell	I Taylor
Cain	Farrell	O'Hara	Walsh
Callow	Galley	Owen	L Williams
Mrs Callow JP	Hobson	Robertson BEM	T Williams
Campbell	Hugo	Roberts	Wilshaw
Clapham	Hunter	D Scott	Wing
D Coleman	Hutton	Mrs Scott	

In Attendance:

Neil Jack, Chief Executive

Dr Arif Rajpura, Director of Public Health

Mark Towers, Director of Governance and Partnerships/Monitoring Officer

Lorraine Hurst, Head of Democratic Governance

Yvonne Burnett, Democratic Governance Senior Adviser

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Baker, D Coleman, Farrell, Hugo, Jackson, O'Hara, Owen, Robertson and Stansfield declared prejudicial interests in agenda item 5 'Call-In – Referral to full Council' as members of the Planning Committee. Councillors Mrs Callow and Callow declared personal interests in the same item as they lived in the vicinity of Stanley Park Golf course.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 20 JULY 2020

Resolved: That the minutes of the Council meeting held on 20 July 2020 be signed by the Deputy Mayor as a correct record.

3 ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor announced the sad death on 29 August of former Mayoress Betty Crichton and, on behalf of the Council, expressed condolences to her family.

Members then observed a minute's silence.

4 EXECUTIVE REPORTS AND COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY REPORT

Prior to consideration of the Executive and Combined Fire Authority reports, Dr Arif Rajpura, Director of Public Health was invited to address members of the Council in respect of the Covid-19 pandemic. Dr Rajpura outlined the latest pandemic developments and government guidance, as well as the impact upon the Blackpool locality. He went on to answer questions from councillors in relation to arrangements that were in place to protect residents including local testing and 'track and trace' systems.

The Executive Lead Members for the meeting then presented reports to the Council on work undertaken in the Corporate, Place and People portfolio areas. The reports covered corporate, strategic and policy issues, together with work being undertaken in transforming services and with partners. The report from representatives on the Combined Fire Authority was also considered.

Questions, comments and debate were invited from all councillors on each of the report areas and the following members offered written responses to questions raised at the meeting:

1. Councillor L Williams agreed to provide a written response to Councillor Walsh on the number of hotels and guesthouses that were being leased by the Council, along with details of the financial support for payment of leases/rents to those establishments that had been unable to trade during the national lockdown.
2. Following comments from Councillor M Scott, Councillor L Williams offered to provide details of the planned structure to support the young people in the Council's care into apprenticeships.
3. Councillor Smith offered to provide Councillor Walsh with details of the regulations regarding the compulsory purchase by the Council, of properties that had been problematic/ derelict for over ten years.
4. Councillor D Scott left the meeting prior to consideration of the report from the Combined Fire Authority representatives.
5. Having declared prejudicial interests in agenda item 5, Councillors Baker, D Coleman, Farrell, Hugo, Jackson, O'Hara, Owen, Robertson and Stansfield left the meeting prior to consideration of the item.

5 CALL IN - REFERRAL TO FULL COUNCIL

Members considered the referral from the Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee in respect of the Executive Decision EX29/2020 'Proposed appropriation and open space land at Stanley Park Golf Course, Blackpool'.

Motion 1: Councillor T Williams proposed (and Councillor Clapham seconded):

'That the Council refers the item back to the Executive, that it listens to the people of Blackpool and overrides the decision to develop the site in order for the Council to protect and maintain this land for future generations in perpetuity'.

MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 30 SEPTEMBER 2020

In moving his motion, Councillor T Williams referred to the number of representations that had been received that objected to the development on the site and his reasons for call-in of the item including that he had considered that there had been a lack of consultation on the proposed development and that it should be reserved for open green space.

A range of views were expressed on the motion. A number of members supported the proposal to refer the decision back for review, citing that unlike other developments, the land was not historically a campsite and should be protected as an opportunity to develop the site for all users as the proposed development was aimed at tourists rather than the town's residents. It was also stated that the current use provided aesthetic green space for the town and the proposed development was not in line with the objectives in the Council's Green and Blue Strategy or the Council's climate change declaration to protect the environment. Concerns were expressed that it would be difficult to change any concept once a planning application had been submitted, that many developers gained planning consent on appeal and that not all members had been involved in considering alternative proposals.

A number of members spoke against the notice of motion, stating that accessibility of the site to residents was currently limited and as such the land was underused by a limited number of people who were golf club members. It was stated that golf courses were not natural environments and therefore did not support indigenous wildlife, were ineffective at carbon capture and that the developer had planned to plant more trees and commission an environmental survey. In terms of the Executive decision, it was expressed that it had been necessary to determine appropriation whatever the future outcome on use, that the recent petition included people who were unlikely to use the land, that a diligent tender and decision-making process had been followed and that the planning process would determine the appropriate use of land. Members also stated that the development would create potential local jobs and opportunities for suppliers in the area.

Prior to voting, five members of the Council requested that the vote on the motion should be recorded. The voting was as follows:

For the motion: Councillors Mrs Callow, Callow, Clapham, G Coleman, Cox, Galley, Roberts, Mrs Scott, R Scott, Walsh, T Williams, Wilshaw, Wing - total 13.

Against the motion: Councillors Benson, Blackburn, Brookes, Burdess, Cain, Campbell, Collett, Critchley, Hobson, Hunter, Hutton, Kirkland, Matthews, Mitchell, Smith, Taylor, L Williams – total 17.

Abstentions: None

Motion lost: The motion was therefore lost.

Motion 2: Councillor L Williams proposed (and Councillor Taylor seconded):

'That no further action be taken'.

MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 30 SEPTEMBER 2020

In moving the motion, Councillor L Williams referred to the reasons given by the scrutiny committee for referral and explained the tender process that had been followed and went on to highlight the best value advantages and stated that the Executive had balanced the benefits and disadvantages in making the decision with appropriate weight attributed to the points presented.

For the motion: Councillors Benson, Blackburn, Brookes, Burdess, Cain, Campbell, Collett, Critchley, Hobson, Hunter, Hutton, Kirkland, Matthews, Mitchell, Smith, Taylor, L Williams – total 17.

Against the motion: Councillors Mrs Callow, Callow, Clapham, G Coleman, Cox, Galley, Roberts, Mrs Scott, R Scott, Walsh, T Williams, Wilshaw, Wing - total 13.

Abstentions: None

Motion won: The motion was therefore carried.

Mayor

(The meeting ended at 9.12 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
Lorraine Hurst, Head of Democratic Governance
Tel: (01253) 477034
E-mail: lorraine.hurst@blackpool.gov.uk

CORPORATE PORTFOLIOS

The 'Corporate' portfolio consists of:

- Councillor Lynn Williams – Leader of the Council
- Councillor Ivan Taylor – Cabinet Member for Projects and Partnerships

The full details of the portfolio areas can be found on the Council's website at <https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/Your-councillors/Executive-members.aspx>

Strategic Issues

Exit from the European Union

As we approach the end of the Transition Period, the Council's EU Exit Task and Finish Group has reconvened from August 2020 and is meeting fortnightly. The Group is monitoring government communications via the daily Local Government Bulletin and is liaising closely with the Lancashire Resilience Forum to ensure that the Council is equipped to make the most of the relationship the UK will have with the EU from January 2021. The Group will advise on how we can react quickly to the potential impact it may have on the town, its businesses and its residents.

We are also addressing the impact of Brexit on some of our staff, encouraging employees to register for settled status. We have a small number of staff who we know to be impacted, who are receiving targeted support and we are ensuring that there is general communications to the wider workforce to ensure that everyone who needs assistance has access to it. Where it is known that employees require settled status both they and their managers have been written to and regular monitoring is being undertaken to ensure applications are made. Whilst the deadline to complete this work is June 2021, we have set an internal deadline of end of this year so that we can ensure there is no disruption to key roles or services.

Working in Partnership

Locally Supported Contact Tracing – controlling the virus

From 2 September, our Public Health Team has been leading on local contact tracing work, supporting the national service by contact-tracing those individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19, but which the National Team has been unable to reach. This work will be extended to cover COVID-positive household contacts once all Districts across Lancashire are undertaking this work.

The team operates seven days a week and consists of a range of staff from across departments, with individuals continuing to undertake their usual roles, again showing how our staff are going above and beyond to slow the spread of the virus. Additional staff are being recruited and trained to extend their work into the evenings from later this month.

The process involves sending an initial text message to the contact as soon as the data is received, advising that a contact tracer will be making contact with them and stating that they need to self-isolate. The contact tracer, supported by Vitaline, then tries to make contact for 48 hours. If this is unsuccessful, letters are delivered to the households to ask them to make contact, with checks made with the hospital and adult social care if there are concerns about the welfare of an individual. The team work with Benefits and Revenues, to double-check contact details and home addresses.

As at 8 November, the team has handled 704 cases, completing 71% (487) of the cases, which the national system has been unable to trace. The remaining 29% (217) are cases where the contact details are incorrect, no address can be located or where individuals are in hospital or are deceased.

Whilst significant challenges persist in delivering the work in a timely manner due to issues with the national system, this is a very positive outcome which clearly demonstrates the benefit of using local community knowledge in the track and trace system.

Enhanced COVID-19 testing capacity for Blackpool

The new Local Testing Site for Blackpool has now opened and offers appointment-based testing. Appointments are available seven days a week through the online booking system and through the phone booking system by calling 119. The capacity of the testing site is meeting the current demand and we work with the provider to monitor this closely. The Lancashire Resilience Forum oversee the capacity and demand across the county and has the resources to meet any local surges in demand with mobile testing facilities. For anyone who is not able to get to the testing site and requires a home test, there are no reports of delays in accessing these tests or receiving prompt results.

New lateral flow testing, currently being used for the mass testing in Liverpool, offers a really exciting development and we are working with the national team to support a roll out of this testing capacity in Blackpool.

Care and Nursing home testing continues to support our most vulnerable residents, with staff testing weekly and residents every 28 days across the town. We have seen some outbreaks in care facilities, with many asymptomatic cases identified through the testing regime. Identifying these allows people to self-isolate until they are safely able to return to work and for residents to be well supported and monitored where required and ongoing transmission halted. The amount of work involved in organising the testing, carrying it out and managing the consequences should not be underestimated and our heartfelt thanks go to everyone involved in this work, which really is making an effective difference.

Supporting Winter Plan preparations

We have now submitted the winter plan after close collaboration with the local health commissioners and providers and have put in place key strategies to ensure that we are doing all we can as a system to manage the winter surge in the health system, alongside the current and anticipated additional pressures that COVID brings. The winter plan describes all of the interventions and additional investment, which we are putting in place and their anticipated outcomes and allows the whole system to work together to make best use of our collective resources. A comprehensive flu vaccination programme is underway, which we would encourage all eligible people to participate in and we are now working collaboratively across the Integrated Care System with the NHS to make preparations to roll out the COVID-19 vaccination to our frontline staff and most vulnerable residents.

Growing Full Fibre Internet Connectivity in Blackpool

As the main fibre infrastructure is almost complete, members of the Fibre Blackpool co-operative has been able to invest in connecting businesses in Blackpool to the network. One member has already connected over 30 businesses, whilst a second has announced the launch of a gigabit fibre product costing just £20 per month. According to figures from Ofcom, with the average UK internet speed being around 64 mbps (megabits per second), Fibre Blackpool's ability to deliver 1,000 mbps or "gigabit internet" potentially gives businesses within reach of the network a competitive advantage.

Corporate Issues

Remembrance Day arrangements

In line with guidance from the Government and the Lancashire Resilience Forum, the traditional Remembrance Day service in Blackpool was adapted so that it complied with pandemic restrictions. In view of the current legislation, the popularity, location and demographic of those who normally attend the service, the risk of possible COVID-19 infection spread was thought to be too great to allow the event to go ahead in its usual format.

To mitigate the risk of a crowd gathering at the War Memorial on Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day, we encouraged people who wished to lay wreaths to do so at any time during the Poppy Appeal period (22 October – 15 November). For those who could not lay a wreath, people were invited to follow the British Legion's virtual "Plant a Poppy" initiative online.

As a further tribute and to further discourage attendance at the War Memorial at 11am on 8 and 11 November, VisitBlackpool produced a virtual service that was shown during what would have been the normal service hours on both Remembrance and Armistice Days. Led by Reverend Steve Haskett, the short, socially-distanced service was recorded in the veterans' area of St John's Church. He was accompanied by representatives from the Royal British Legion, Royal Marines' Association, Fylde Ex-Service Liaison Committee and Friends of the Burma Star Association.

The service featured a moving tribute to the Armed Forces past and present, the Last Post/Reveille and a two-minute silence at 11am. A wreath was then shown to be laid at the Blackpool War Memorial by Councillor Paula Burdess, Deputy Mayor on behalf of Blackpool. The virtual service was repeated on the Council's social media channels at 10.54am on Armistice Day.

Financial Monitoring – Unprecedented Demands

The operational and consequential financial demands being placed upon the Council this year are entirely without precedent. From the very outset, the introduction of the Government's lockdown and restriction measures resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted in a variety of ways from increasing service demand and cost, to curtailing income sources. This is true not just for Council services, but also our private sector providers, our wholly-owned companies and our partners. We have employed every financial mechanism available to keep things afloat, including supplier reliefs and subsidies, cash flow loans, other support measures and budgetary overspends. In addition, we also prioritised delivery of a rapid response to Government policy initiatives such as business support grants, business rate reliefs and infection prevention and control grants. As covered in previous reports, our aim was to ensure that money quickly made its way to where it was most needed.

The full-year forecast position at the end of month 5 of 2020/2021 shows a marked deterioration in the Council's financial standing when compared with the draft unaudited position as at the close of 2019/2020. We expect working balances to fall by the current forecast overspend of £8,872,000. Taking into account that funding of £11,282,000 has so far been received from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for financial year 2020/2021, that a contribution of £2,810,000 is anticipated from Blackpool Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) for Enhanced Hospital Discharges and that an estimated £7,917,000 will be received from MHCLG in respect of the Sales, Fees and Charges compensation scheme, £5,163,000 of this overspend is COVID-related. We expect this figure to be reduced further by the Government's fourth tranche of financial support to local government. The bulk of the remaining overspend is due to continuing pressures in Children's Social Care, which have been planned for within a refreshed medium-term financial strategy.

The Sales, Fees and Charges compensation scheme addresses non-commercial income lost based upon 75% recovery over and above a 5% excess. The scheme compensates eligible authorities for irrecoverable losses compared to budgets, with three separate application processes covering periods to 31 March 2021. We submitted our first bid to MHCLG for the sum of £3,486,000 covering the period 1 April 2020 – 31 July 2020 on 30 September 2020, with further bids planned in line with MHCLG deadlines accounting for the remainder of the estimated that the full-year effect of £7,917,000.

General Fund Working Balances and Earmarked Revenue Reserves

The Council's Revenue Budget for 2020/2021 set a target level of General Fund working balances of around £6m. As part of good financial management practice, we aim to maintain at least this level for the medium term. Earmarked revenue reserves at the start of the financial

year stood at a record high of £46,772,000, though with known in-year commitments against this the balance will fall to an estimated £29,490,000 by the end of the year. This should still be sufficient to underwrite the current year's financial risks and we have put in place a separate financial plan in place for the Council's wholly-owned companies. In light of recent positive announcements about the potential of one of the candidate vaccines, we hope that by the end of the calendar year there will be sufficient clarity regarding COVID and future funding policies for local government to enable a refresh of the medium-term financial sustainability strategy, together with an updated medium-term financial plan of another six years' horizon. We are also expecting the announcement of a one-year Spending Review and Settlement around 25 November, a key piece of information in developing our financial assumptions for 2021/2022.

Further financial support for residents

Our benefits team has been assessing self-isolation payments since 28 September, following their introduction for people who have tested positive or been asked to self-isolate by NHS test and trace. Based on certain eligibility criteria, there are two elements to the scheme, the main one having set national criteria and the discretionary scheme with limited funding where we have set local criteria. To date we have processed 162 applications, making payments of £500 to 74 people. Separately and as a result of receiving a grant of £261,000 from DEFRA for essential supplies, we have been able to help 2,531 Blackpool families financially impacted by COVID restrictions by providing money towards uniform costs for 4,465 children.

Benefit Processing Times

Despite resources being moved to support other COVID related activity and an increase in the number of claims for Council Tax Reduction over recent months, the Benefits Service has maintained remarkably good performance. The cumulative number of days to pay new claims for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction was 11 days and five days for changes in circumstances, ensuring payments are made quickly to those who need them. In addition to this, in line with government guidelines, we are continuing to apply Council Tax Reduction Hardship Grants to all Working Age customers in receipt of Council Tax Reduction. To date around £2.376m has been awarded and awards will continue to be made for the rest of the financial year.

Transforming Services

Agile System developments during the pandemic

One of the positives which has come out of the pandemic has been the flexibility and innovation which our teams have shown in many areas, including digital working. The ICT service has rapidly developed a number of systems including case management systems in record time in order to support the Council's COVID response. We are keen to maintain this progress into the future, not just for the current lockdown, but in anticipation of working differently and even more efficiently in the future. In total, thousands of cases have been processed through the Corona Kindness Hub Case Management system, the Discretionary Grant for Businesses application system, the local lockdown support grant system and the

homelessness support referral system. In addition, we have tracked and allocated over 900 devices to vulnerable children.

Staff have also been quick to take advantage of existing tools to aid productivity, with peak times seeing over 1,300 simultaneous remote connections from employees homes. Since the start of the pandemic nearly 36,000 meetings have been held via Microsoft Teams, covering everything from one-to-one supervision meetings through to team meetings and conference-style workshops involving large numbers of external parties. Virtual working is also benefiting the transparency agenda, with over 40 virtual committee and council meetings having been streamed on YouTube since the start of the pandemic generating a total of 5,196 viewings.

Awarded Contracts

The following contracts have been awarded:

CONTRACT	PROVIDER (Locations)	TERM (including extensions)	CONTRACT VALUE	NO. OF INITIAL BIDS	NO. OF BIDDERS WITH FY POSTCODE
Revenues and Benefit OnDemand Support	Civica UK Ltd (London)	42 months (12 months)	£175,000	Call off contract	0
Grange Park Development	Cassidy & Ashton (Preston)	24 months + novation	£140,000 approx.	16	0
Tramway Maintenance – Lot 1 (Sub-Arc Welding): Awaiting Award £172,410	Lot 1 – Keltbray (Surrey)	2 months	Lot 1 - Sub-Arc Welding £172,410	3	0
Tramway Maintenance - Permanent way track tamping	Lot 2 - ESL (Manchester)	2 months	Lot 2 - Tamping £180,098	3	0
Tramway Maintenance - Rail Replacement	Lot 3 - Keltbray (Surrey)	2 months	Lot 3 - Rail Replacement £144,431	3	0

CONTRACT	PROVIDER (Locations)	TERM (including extensions)	CONTRACT VALUE	NO. OF INITIAL BIDS	NO. OF BIDDERS WITH FY POSTCODE
Analysis & Research of Visitors	Visitor Insights Ellandi (Kent)	12 months	£20,000	2	0

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PEOPLE PORTFOLIOS

The 'People' portfolio consists of:

- Councillor Lynn Williams - Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services
- Councillor Kathryn Benson - Cabinet Member for Schools, Education and Aspiration
- Councillor Jo Farrell - Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health
- Councillor Maria Kirkland - Cabinet Member for Community Cohesion and Leisure

The full details of the portfolio areas can be found on the Council's website at <https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/Your-councillors/Executive-members.aspx>

Strategic Issues

Supporting vulnerable people through the pandemic

With increased case rates in October and new national restrictions from the 5 November, we have continued to provide coordinated support to vulnerable people and households across the town in partnership with our providers and third sector organisations. Work is underway to contact all of the people who have been identified as clinically extremely vulnerable in Blackpool and are subject to more restrictive advice than the general population, to ensure they have access to the support they need. We continue to receive calls, emails and forms asking for our support from the corona kindness campaign and the efforts of our staff and volunteers are helping people to comply effectively and safely with the requirement to isolate if they exhibit symptoms or receive a positive test result. It has been fantastic to see the supportive response from local businesses to the impact of the virus on our communities, with the availability of locally-based and flexible delivery shopping services proving very popular across the town.

Our provider support hub continues to work with the fantastic carers who are supporting our residents to live safely at home and in care and nursing homes across the town, by coordinating access to the latest advice and guidance, supporting them to get the right PPE and helping them to access the infection control funds, which are available to enhance the protection for both staff and service users. Our emergency workforce provision is in place to enable providers to access staffing support quickly if they have staff self-isolating. We continue to see an incredible amount of peer support across our provider networks, the sharing of good practice and creative ideas to support both staff and service users and we want to thank all of the staff, managers and leaders across our health and social care providers for their continued hard work and dedication.

Children in Care numbers starting to fall

Children and families are now receiving more proportionate support from those best placed to deliver it. Despite the impact of COVID-19, we are also beginning to see more children leaving public care and a fall in the headline number of children in our care. For some of our key measures, numbers are now lower than the long-term levels in Blackpool over the past five years or longer.

The impact of a more robust process at the “front door” has delivered a 28% reduction in entrants to the system for the first six months of 2020/2021, compared to the full year rate for 2019/2020. This is mirrored through the entire social care system, with a decrease in child protection enquiries by 21%, initial child protection conferences decreasing by 28%; and new child protection plans decreasing by 23%. This partly reflects the high levels of presenting demand in 2019/2020, but also reflects a necessary shift towards less intervention.

However, there is no room for complacency. The number of children subject to child protection plans has risen through the latter part of COVID-19 lockdown due to a slowing in the number of plans ceasing, although numbers of those becoming subject to a plan for a second or subsequent time has settled at around the national average as new approaches bed in.

Moreover, the high number of child protection plans ceasing in the latter part of 2019 and early part of 2020 was partially driven by escalation of some of those children into public care – a reflection itself of the work of the permanence panel and its scrutiny of families in pre-proceedings. This culminated in the number of children in care peaking at 668 in May 2020, as court proceedings slowed, a number which has fallen to 622 at time of writing. This reflects both a slowing of entry into care, but also the conclusion of delayed court proceedings in September and October, where the local authority was seeking discharge of a full care order. It also reflects initial court proceedings concluding without a full care order.

Whilst we need to do more to ensure that full care orders are reserved only for those who need it, there has been definite positive movement in this area during 2020. More children in settled placements have left care to special guardianship orders, more care orders have been discharged where children are placed at home and we are seeing fewer children placed at home on full care orders – there are currently 25 children, whereas there were 40 a year ago.

Meeting service delivery challenges to deliver real outcomes

There is no question that the last seven months have been challenging for both families and workers – requiring a number of changes to our approach to service delivery – but delivering a quality service whilst safeguarding our young people has been a constant focus. We have continued to support virtual family time during lockdown, reintroducing face to face family time soon after lockdown eased, whilst feedback from the Judiciary suggests that Blackpool is amongst the more proactive local authorities in seeking to expedite proceedings for the benefit of children and young people. We have not seen the kinds of major problems as other places, such as missed identification of very vulnerable babies and young infants and subsequent non-accidental injuries. Local services have so far held up well under the strain and still provided a

strong safety-net for local children and families. In the circumstances and given the ever-present and increasing levels of social need in the town, this represents a good achievement.

We recognised that care leavers were especially vulnerable during COVID-19 and lockdown, being more likely to be without a family or wider network of support. We maintained regular contact with every care leaver, especially our most vulnerable young people throughout and were particularly zealous in securing support from health colleagues for those young people who were really struggling. We know from the young people themselves that this support was highly valued and we believe that this softened the impact of the pandemic on them, which sadly cannot be said for all local authorities.

We also recognise that too many children in our care are placed in residential homes and that too many are placed with independent fostering agency foster homes, when compared to the regional averages per head of population. The Medium Term Financial Strategy has specific initiatives designed to reinvigorate the council's fostering service, including changes in payment to carers together with a targeted recruitment campaign; and an innovative idea to step-down children from residential care into foster care using a therapeutic children's home. We hope to begin to change the long term pattern over the next year.

Outcomes achieved for care leavers have remained steady and generally better than the national average, in terms of the proportion of those with whom we are in touch and the proportion in suitable accommodation. Education, employment and training remains the key challenge especially for older care leavers (19 to 21 year olds), although levels have improved in the past six months and the proportion of care leavers in higher education remains comparatively good. We have several stunning examples of young people achieving exceptional academic outcomes, even during COVID-19.

Overall, in spite of the challenges of the past year, Blackpool's children's services are in a better position: services are better, children are safer, practice is improving, there is less drift and delay, we have a more stable workforce and, most importantly, tangible outcomes for children, young people and families are better.

Working with Partners

Lotus Free School – meeting the needs of our young people

The Lotus Free School opened in September 2020 as a partnership between the Champion Education Trust and the Council and is the first of its type in Blackpool. Aimed at children aged 10-16 with Social, Emotional, Mental Health Needs (SEMH) who have an Education, Health and Care plan, 18 pupils joined across years 6,7 and 8 as part of a phased opening agreed with the Department for Education.

Prior to the Lotus school there was no provision for SEMH needs in the Blackpool Local Authority area, with over 100 Blackpool pupils having to attend independent special schools elsewhere. Local mainstream settings do not have the capacity and resources to provide the

specialist provision required, with the complex needs of the young people preventing a successful reintegration back into mainstream school, whilst the Pupil Referral Unit has historically been over capacity. This often means that pupils travel for over 40 minutes to and from school, despite displaying challenging behaviours which can cause safety concerns for both staff and young people, in addition to the expense involved.

Once fully open, the school will cater for 48 pupils, ensuring they maintain strong links with the local community and ultimately providing a more stable education which should deliver better outcomes.

Providing holiday activities and food for our most vulnerable young people

The Council, together with the Opportunity Area and partner organisations, formed a partnership in 2019 in order to give children in Blackpool a full summer holiday activity programme, which included a food provision for our most vulnerable children. Its success has led to the partnership seeking funding and opportunities for the development of a sustainable programme to provide activities and food in all School Holidays. In December 2019, the Sunday Times ran a series of hard-hitting articles about the impact of poverty in Blackpool and the issues families faced during the holidays. The resultant appeal organised by the newspaper to help support and fund activities and food in 2020 resulted in Blackpool receiving a proportion of the money raised along with other Opportunity Areas, contributing towards the £209,000 cost of addressing these most fundamental issues well before the government's recent U-turn on this issue. Other funding came from Children's Services, the Opportunity Area, the Free School Breakfast Funding underspend, the Big Lottery Fund, FCAT and Christ the King/St Cuthbert's Schools.

This year's programme was inevitably somewhat different. The partnership recognised that it would need to provide food to those on Free School Meals, but was limited by restrictions on the number of children able to meet in groups. The final programme, Blackpool Summer of Fun, was developed by a willing collective of local organisations - Active Blackpool, the Family Hubs, Groundworks, the Magic Club, Blackpool Football Club Community Trust, the Boys and Girls Club, UR potential, Boat House Youth and Park Rangers – and included both virtual provision and a range of face to face activities. These included a sports camp with packed lunches provided, the purchase of "STEM Boxes" (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) for Year 5 children and the development of Nature boxes by our Park Rangers. Due to the tight timescales some of the boxes were instead used in the October Half term, with other provision including a sports camp and other face-to-face activities. The partnership are now considering a programme of activities and food provision for the Christmas Holidays and will make best use of the money allocated as part of the Winter Grant scheme to support our families.

Corporate Issues

Fun nature activities from the Early Years Park Rangers

Thanks to funding by Better Start and the support of the Parks Development Team, the Rangers did an amazing job throughout lockdown of engaging families through their social media

channels, providing ideas for fun nature activities in the local park and bedtime stories. The activities are continuing throughout the second lockdown and are proving to be a great way of keeping young children entertained! We would recommend keeping up to date with their activity by following Blackpool Park Rangers on Facebook.

Transforming Services

Returning to school

With the re-opening of schools from September being a key aspect of the government's approach to reducing the impact of the coronavirus on long term outcomes of children, we have taken every step possible to ensure that this was achieved in a safe and secure way. At the start of the original lockdown we made materials available to all schools to support COVID-19 secure routines, including the embedding of handwashing in schools' culture and social distancing signage from Print Blackpool. This was supported by regular sessions with an infection control specialist and the Director of Public Health to reinforce this in the day-to-day planning and activity of our school leaders, sessions which have continued through into the latest phase of lockdown.

This has been backed up by a comprehensive communications campaign that has sought to reassure the community and to reinforce these messages. Co-ordinated by the Council's Communications Team, key channels used included radio advertisements, leaflet drops, social media updates and notices in local and national newspapers. The schools communicated directly with parents over the summer holidays to emphasis that schools were reopening in September with these measures in place, with messages continuing throughout September to target any parents whose children had not returned to school.

The Council's Health and Safety Team undertook the role of reviewing and giving feedback on all of the educational establishments, excluding Further Education and Higher Education, in Blackpool. This included Local Authority schools, Academies with a Council Service Level Agreement and any school in the area requiring help, advice and guidance. This indicated that the vast majority of Head teachers and School Business Managers fully understood and embraced the guidance and all appeared to have worked hard to ensure their schools were COVID-19 Secure in line with Health and Safety law and current government guidance. The Health and Safety Team offered continued support to schools, as well as providing guidance and advice with any queries and concerns, which schools raised and monitoring Local Authority schools to ensure the risk assessments were reflected in the procedures in place and updated to account for changing guidance. Health and Safety Executive visits have confirmed that practice is acceptable and in line with national expectations.

National guidance called for the formation of "bubbles" of pupils. In the first phase, schools have been able to form bubbles of between 10 and 15 pupils, with a teacher and Teaching Assistant. In the second phase, schools have used larger bubbles, but have also dealt with positive cases through a track and trace approach, resulting in more children being able to stay in school. "Zones" have been used to keep these bubbles separate, with pupils entering and

leaving the buildings through different entrances and exits where possible. To support social distancing, extra transport services have been provided with a maximum capacity of 50%, whilst correspondence has been sent to schools to share with parents that emphasises the need to walk or cycle to school where possible rather than using public transport.

Maximising pupil attendance

All schools returned within 14 days of the official start of term. This was partly due to the change in term dates. Attendance has been around 85% or higher for most of the school year, even taking into account absences due to COVID-19. Many schools would have a percentage attendance rate in the mid to high 90% range without the impact of COVID-19.

Two schools have closed for short periods of time and the numbers of pupils who were isolating were initially high. Cases of illness other than COVID-19 are lower in most schools than at this time last year, which is probably an indicator of the measures being taken to reduce COVID-19 also reducing the incidences of other viral infections.

Whilst we have taken a comprehensive approach to ensuring pupils' safety as much as possible, some parents have not returned their children to school. We are using family-focused professionals from the Pupil Welfare Service, the charity School to Home Support and school pastoral staff to work with families, re-engaging them in education again and supporting them to resolve their underlying concerns and issues. We have also shared the pan-Lancashire agreed protocol for issuing Penalty Notices with Head teachers and Academy CEOs so that they are aware of how to use these and which specific circumstances apply, so that they can be used if absolutely necessary.

Pupils who have previously been poor attenders at school have been identified, as have those who have found it difficult to follow the rules set out by schools. Their families have additional support provided by the Pupil Welfare Service and, if they consent, through Targeted Intervention Services and the charity School to Home Support. Places have been made available at our Hospital School provision, with increased access to specialist mental health support and in the LA PRU and in independent alternative provision if schools require it. Bespoke timetables have been arranged which gradually encourage full attendance, which combine face to face learning with online learning.

Facilitating remote learning

Schools have been working hard to ensure that they have functioning systems that can easily pick up remote learning if required. Schools that were unable to facilitate online learning were able to access the free support from the DFE and establish a Google or Microsoft platform. We have shared information with school leaders about how to safely and effectively use Microsoft Teams and Google Classroom, as well as using available online resources such as Oak National Academy.

All our allocated DFE laptops have been distributed to families, with 4G "dongles" to enable internet access. The Council worked with the PRU and the social work teams to identify children

and young people who were in need of a laptop and/or internet access. Devices arrived in late June and the majority were delivered to school settings in early July. Around half of the devices were delivered via schools thereby enabling the schools to add the devices to their own systems and networks. Schools then made arrangements to handover the device directly to the child or young person. The remainder of the devices were delivered directly through social workers or an allocated worker.

We also distributed 26,882 Free School Meal packs, the equivalent of 134,410 meals.

Elective Home Education

We have seen a rise in the numbers of parents choosing to educate their children at home from 240 in November 2019 to 301 currently. 213 of these are secondary school age. Given this rise, we are putting in place a total of 2.0 full time equivalent (FTE) posts in place to ensure we discharge our responsibilities effectively in relation to ensuring that all children in Blackpool are in receipt of a full-time education and are safeguarded, with 0.6 FTE of this capacity currently in place.

Concerns were raised as to the potential increase in families opting for Elective Home Education (EHE) following the lockdown as a result of several months of compulsory home schooling. We are firmly of the opinion that a school learning environment is the best way for the overwhelming majority of young people to get the best quality education for their needs, whilst acknowledging the right of parents to educate their children at home. To this end we have decided not to provide additional support to families who opted to home school once the restrictions were lifted and all virtual learning ended in September, we have proactively contacted children identified as being considered 'at risk' of not returning to school to deter any applications for Elective Home Education (EHE) and have sent letters to all Blackpool-educated families informing them that no school places would be held, with no guarantee that a place would still be available in the same school in the future once an application for EHE had been completed.

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PLACE PORTFOLIOS

The 'Place' portfolio consists of:

- Councillor Gillian Campbell - Cabinet Member for Tourism and Culture
- Councillor Neal Brookes - Cabinet Member for Housing and Welfare Reform
- Councillor Jim Hobson - Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment
- Councillor Mark Smith - Cabinet Member for Business, Enterprise and Job Creation

The full details of the portfolio areas can be found on the Council's website at <https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/Your-councillors/Executive-members.aspx>

Strategic Issues

Ensuring the recovery of tourism businesses

In the early stages of the initial lockdown, we established a Tourism Recovery Group comprising key partners and stakeholders in the visitor economy to ensure we had a consistent approach to reopening the resort when conditions allowed. These meetings enabled businesses to discuss their recovery plans and, as different attractions and venues were allowed to open, provided an opportunity to share best practice and customer insights. It also ensured that as a resort we adopted the same key messages to visitors. The group, which includes attractions, theatres and representatives from the accommodation sector continues to meet on a weekly basis and provides an invaluable platform for feedback on the impact of ever-changing rules and restrictions.

As we move towards the end of the year, the group will focus its attention on preparing for the 2021 season. We are already working on a new destination marketing campaign, although the timing of the launch of that activity will be dependent on what restrictions are in place as we move into the New Year. We already have a strong product lined up with a number of high-profile shows booked at The Winter Gardens from March onwards, and the openings of the conference and exhibition centre and two new hotels (Sands Venue Resort and Premier Inn North Pier). In addition, Blackpool Pleasure Beach and the Empress Ballroom will both celebrate 125-year anniversaries in 2021.

Our own major events programme is also due to be reinstated, though along with other event organisers, we await guidance as to when large crowds will be able to gather. In the meantime, we will develop contingency plans should some restrictions still be in place.

Support for Businesses in Blackpool

It is crucial that we prioritise the local economy at this time of crisis and as noted in the Corporate portfolio report, the Council's finance and business support teams are working to deliver a package of measures that will provide financial aid to local businesses affected by pandemic restrictions. The measures are designed to support those required to close due to pandemic lockdown restrictions as well as those that remained open, but suffered serious losses as a result of a dramatic downturn in trade. We have also pledged to use our support services to help businesses access the national support measures announced by the Chancellor, including the extension of the Job Support and Self-Employment Income Support Schemes.

In mid-October, the business community, the local authority and the town's two MPs, sent an open letter to the Prime Minister urging him to intervene and provide bespoke financial support to tourism businesses that saw most of their trade wiped out when the town was moved into Tier 3 status on the eve of the crucial October half-term holiday period. We are at our strongest when we stand together and we are pleased that the spirit of co-operation remains strong across the town.

New developments on Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone

The development of the Enterprise Zone to date has been a positive story of growth and we are preparing a revised EZ masterplan and financial delivery plan to build on the developments that have occurred since 2016 and incorporate other changes to future work. This will be subject to public consultation, which we will undertake online due to the pandemic.

We are particularly happy to see the continuing physical transformation of the site. The new grass playing pitches have now been now constructed and seeded and will be maintained by the contractor until they come into operation in September 2021. Once these are brought into use, the existing sports pitches at Common Edge can be used for further development and the construction of the eastern gateway access road. A planning application has been submitted for the construction of new changing facilities and car parking to support the operation of the new pitches, which will also be delivered by September 2021.

Work has also commenced on a 3.5 acre site at Amy Johnson Way for the construction of a 40,000 sq. ft. unit for Swedish-owned medical technology company Multiply Components Ltd. This will be completed in October 2021 and provide for 67 jobs. £800,000 of Growth Deal funding was secured from Lancashire LEP to support the project and the Enterprise Zone has also been successful in securing an allocation of funding from the Towns Fund toward the cost of delivering the eastern gateway access road and remodeling of the Highway at Common Edge. Further work has been completed on a 14,000 sq. ft. facility for exhibition stand company Love Expo, whilst the refurbished Squires Gate Industrial Estate continues to attract new occupiers with a very limited supply of industrial and warehouse accommodation currently available.

There remains a good level of interest from business seeking new build accommodation at the EZ with four potential development schemes at the feasibility assessment stage. To date the Enterprise Zone has enabled 1,492 jobs, against a 25-year target of 5,000.

We intend to step up our efforts on marketing the EZ to the data management sector and cloud-based tech companies, following the landing of the Aqua Comms fibre optic subsea transatlantic cable at Starr Gate on 11th October. The capacity and speeds offered by this cable to North America and Scandinavia led to Blackpool being dubbed “Silicon Sands” in some very positive media coverage and makes the Enterprise Zone a prime site for data centre and digital business development.

Corporate Issues

Future High Street Fund

The Future High Street Fund aims to provide infrastructure investment to help renew and reshape town centres and high streets to improve experience, drive growth and ensure future sustainability. Members will recall that we made a submission requesting £25m across 11 schemes to support existing public co-funding of £18.3m and £16.1m of private investment.

On 21 September 2020 we were notified that the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) had completed their initial review of applications. They asked applicants to remove projects, which had already been brought forward and awarded Getting Building Fund money, to remove money to be spent on monitoring and evaluation and to review scheme eligibility in light of the criteria. They also highlighted authorities, which had not followed the business template and guidance, although Blackpool’s submission was completed correctly.

In our case, as the Houndshell extension (£5 million) and Abingdon Street Market purchase (£3.63 million) schemes will receive such Getting Building Fund money these were removed, along with the £296,000 evaluation proposal and the Fylde Coast Rail Study (£800,000) as feasibility studies were considered ineligible. Alternative routes are now being explored to fund the Rail Study. The new request for £15.27m was submitted in time for the October deadline, with a decision on the funding now anticipated in late November.

Getting Building Fund

The Getting Building Fund was established in response to the economic crisis caused by COVID-19. On 10 June 2020, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government invited the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to put forward ideas for accelerating existing Government funded capital projects within local growth programmes, to generate new development activity within 18 months, help create jobs, and raise overall demand in the economy.

As the Houndshell Extension and Abingdon Street Market schemes were sufficiently advanced, they were allocated funding – another tribute to the fantastic work which the Growth and Prosperity Team is doing to speed up the regeneration of Blackpool. The Houndshell scheme includes a nine screen Imax-style cinema, two new restaurants and a relocated Wilko store, whilst the Abingdon Street Market scheme will support the creation of a range of independent

retail and food retail services and office uses, together with performance space. Both schemes should see work start this year.

Town Deal

The Towns Fund invited towns to bid for up to £25 million of funding - £50 million in exceptional circumstances - which could help “unleash the full economic potential of 101 places and level up communities throughout the country”. The development of the bid was overseen by Blackpool’s Town Deal Board, which incorporates public, private and community membership and an independent private sector chair, in its capacity as an advisory board to the Council. The bid process included the development of a wider Town Investment Plan from which a suite of projects were suggested for funding.

Blackpool’s Town Investment Plan was submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) with a request for £49.3m across nine projects on 31 July 2020, as covered in our report to September Council. MHCLG held a challenge session with the Council and the Chair of the Town Deal Board on 29 September, the outcome of which was that the Plan was deemed sufficiently strong to offer the Council a Heads of Terms for £39.5 million across seven projects, with the Innovation Partnership and Grundy Art Gallery feasibility study being deemed out of scope. An additional £1m of “accelerated funding” was made available to support capital elements of Town Deal schemes and discussions are underway to determine how this would best be used.

The Town Deal Board considered these Heads of Terms at a meeting on the 13 November and made recommendations to the Council’s Executive at an extraordinary meeting on 16 November, in order to meet the 17 November deadline. The Executive approved the recommendations.

As there is a funding gap of £7.7 million across the seven remaining projects compared to our original request, the projects will be received over the next two months to assess the impact of the funding reduction. Following this, the next stage of the process involves the development of business cases for each of the seven projects in line with HM Treasury Green Book Business Case guidance. Senior officers in the Growth and Prosperity and Delivery teams will liaise directly with public, private and community stakeholders in developing the business case in accordance with the Stakeholder Engagement Plan, supported by the Town Deal Board Community Engagement Team.

To ensure there is sufficient oversight and scrutiny of the business case proposals brought forward, we will establish a Town Deal Investment Panel (TDIP), drawing from partner agencies across the public, private and community and voluntary sectors) and government. The panel will be chaired by a private sector Towns Fund Board member and will report to the Town Deal Board regarding the allocation of funding and best use of public sector funding. The TDIP will be supported by the Growth and Prosperity Team of Blackpool Council in line with its existing secretariat role to the Town Deal Board and will appoint an independent appraiser to assess Business Cases. If approved by the Board and, if appropriate, the Council’s Executive, the

Council will draw up a funding agreement in its capacity as the accountable body, and put in place appropriate monitoring and evaluation arrangements.

Transforming Services

Highways – protecting and upgrading our roads

We reported at last Council that project amber, the £4.5m investment into our highway network, was at stage 2 of the procurement process. We are now pleased to report that the process is now complete and we will start to see significant protecting and upgrading of our roads from January 2021. We would like to pass on our thanks to the Highways team for their success in attracting this funding from the Department for Transport Challenge Fund.

£700,000 for our Supported Housing pilot

On 20 October 2020, government announced the National Statement of Expectations (NSE) for supported housing. This document sets out the government's vision for ways of working in the sector and recommendations for standards in accommodation. It is intended to ensure that quality support is provided and is part of the government's work to improve oversight and ensure value for money.

The new framework will be tested out in Blackpool, along with four other areas. The Council has been awarded almost £700,000 to support the use of the framework alongside existing local tools and powers, with a view to driving up the quality of supported housing in Blackpool. Throughout the pilot, we will be working closely with central government to create an evidence base of what works and what does not, reporting back on the progress made.

The pilot will involve staff from a wide range of services including enforcement, planning, housing, social care, commissioning and legal. A full supply and demand analysis will also be undertaken as part of the pilot to inform future need.

Progress on Council Homes

As reported to Council previously, we have two major schemes underway. The Troutbeck scheme will deliver 75 new Council Homes by April 2022. Although there was some delay in March due to lockdown, good progress is now being made on site and there have been no additional setbacks. Meanwhile, a design team has now been appointed to work up a full plan for the scheme at Grange Park which will deliver approximately 100 additional homes in this area.

Homeless Update

We have been successful in obtaining a small amount of funding through the Next Steps Accommodation Programme to extend some accommodation and facilitate further move on.

Working with Partners

A new Registered Provider for Blackpool

On 1 October 2020, we successfully registered Lumen Housing Limited as a provider of social housing. The Council has supported the creation of the community benefit society as a subsidiary of Blackpool Housing Company to form a key part of our wider strategic ambition and effort to increase the supply of good quality affordable homes and to help tackle the issue of poor quality housing and management standards that exist in some segments of the market. The new organisation will work in tandem with the Housing Company, allowing us to bring forward the right solutions to deliver a balanced housing market that offers customers affordability and quality homes in some of the most deprived parts of the Town.

COUNCIL APPOINTED COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY REPRESENTATIVE - REPORT TO THE COUNCIL – COUNCILLORS BLACKBURN, HUGO AND T WILLIAMS

This report updates the Council on the work of the Combined Fire Authority. The Fire Authority is made up of 25 Councillors (19 representatives from Lancashire County Council three from Blackburn and Darwen Council and three from Blackpool Council).

Since the last report to Council, the Combined Fire Authority has met on one occasion, 14 September 2020. The Combined Fire Authority has produced a summary of that meeting and the appointed representatives will update the Council on any issues.

REPORT OF THE LANCASHIRE COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY 14 SEPTEMBER 2020

1. CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

This was the first virtual meeting of the full Authority.

The Chairman welcomed new Members Councillor Jane Hugo from Blackpool Council and County Councillor Margaret Pattinson from Lancashire County Council who had replaced Councillor Fred Jackson and County Councillor Miles Parkinson on the Authority. The Authority recognised their long service and dedication to the work of the Authority.

The Authority congratulated former Deputy Chief Fire Officer David Russel on his promotion to Chief Fire Officer of Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service and wished him well in his new post.

The Authority recognised the sad loss of so many people who had lost their lives to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Authority recorded the excellent work the Service had done, and continued to do during this difficult time, not only to maintain a response to emergencies, but to work in partnership especially supporting the Lancashire Resilience Forum for the benefit of the people of Lancashire.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

The Authority appointed County Councillor Nikki Hennessy as its Vice-Chairman for the remainder of the term 2020/2021.

3. EXECUTIVE BOARD SUCCESSION ARRANGEMENTS

The recruitment process for the Deputy Chief Fire Officer post was due to conclude later that week with a Member and Chief Fire Officer interview panel.

4. HMICFRS COVID-19 INSPECTION

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services had confirmed it was undertaking an interim review of Fire and Rescue Services in England of the sector's response to the COVID-19 pandemic to draw out any common learning. The Service's inspection would take place virtually over the end of September/beginning of October and included interviews with the Chairman and Chief Fire Officer. The Service had conducted its own review of its response to the pandemic, which included a staff survey. There had been a great contribution from all staff who were dealing effectively with the largest incident ever faced, alongside a lot of operational activity (such as wildland fires at Longridge Fell, Darwen Moor and Winter Hill, all at the same time and dealing with recent flooding in the north of the county). The Service had supported the people of Lancashire through the provision of support to the Lancashire Resilience Forum (for example, through the establishment of temporary field hospitals, undertaking processes for potential body recovery, face fit testing for the NHS and the distribution of PPE).

5. ANNUAL SAFETY, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT REPORT

The Authority considered the Annual Safety, Health and Environment Report. The Service had again seen a very positive year in terms of performance. External audit visits were carried out in February 2020 against international standards for health and safety and the environment. The scope for both standards was the provision of fire, rescue and supporting services across Lancashire. The audits included all operational activity with visits to fire stations operating different duty systems and support departments. Certification to the standards was granted without any non-conformance or opportunities for improvement identified.

6. FIRE PROTECTION REPORTS

The Authority discussed the building risk review of all high-rise buildings in Lancashire, which was a programme to assess the safety of all high-rise buildings in England with an upper floor more than 18m from access level. The focus was the external wall system. Since the initial attention on aluminium clad material brought about by the Grenfell Fire tragedy, the programme now considered all external wall systems, their cladding material, insulation, cavity barriers and balconies etc. The Authority was pleased that the audit of the 73 buildings that fell within the programme in Lancashire would be completed in March 2021; in advance of the deadline of December 2021 in recognition that it would take time for responsible persons to undertake necessary surveys and reports to confirm the full construction details of their external wall systems.

It was noted that this was a significant issue for the fire sector. Following the Grenfell Fire tragedy, resulting enquiries had highlighted inadequacies in the way the build environment had been constructed and regulated over the past two decades. There were changes to

legislation currently going through parliament and it was clear that Government intended Fire and Rescue Services to play a significant part in the sector-wide improvements, which were now necessary. Planning Committee had recently approved changes to the Service management structure to support the Fire Safety Inspection transformation.

7. RE-APPOINTMENT OF CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY

The Authority approved the re-appointment of Mr Mark Nolan as Clerk and Monitoring Officer to the **Lancashire** Combined Fire Authority for a period of twelve months, to the September meeting of the Authority in 2021.

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CHAIR OF THE SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP BOARD'S REPORT TO COUNCIL - COUNCILLOR MRS MAXINE CALLOW

Culture

In July 2019, I highlighted to you that the culture of our organisation was key in making improvements in the way we carry out scrutiny at the authority. Since that time the scrutiny function has gone from strength to strength thanks to the continued efforts of scrutiny members, Executive Members and council officers. Officers are seeking earlier involvement in policy development and are actively engaging with scrutiny members as appropriate; and in return scrutiny members are proactively identifying relevant topics and strategies for review. All this combined has led to improved working relationships and a more valuable contribution made by those involved.

Workplanning

It is my view that workplanning is a key determinant in carrying out effective scrutiny and that the right topics being identified for consideration at the right time will allow for the greatest opportunity for worthwhile scrutiny. To ensure our workplans are robust we review them regularly and engage with the Executive, Senior Officers and partners to allow them to feed in suggestions and involve scrutiny at the right time in the development and review of policy. Unfortunately the pandemic has, understandably, had a significant impact on some of the work of scrutiny in 2020 and as a result workplans have had to be reactive and flexible to balance the new demands placed on officers with the need to continue effective scrutiny.

From March 2020, the meetings of the three Scrutiny Committees were cancelled in response to the pandemic and two special meetings of the Scrutiny Leadership Board were held in July 2020 to consolidate the work of scrutiny. The two meetings considered the key topics identified by Members such as homelessness, the response to the pandemic by Children's Social Care and Adults Social Care, tourism recovery and the health system's response to the pandemic. Scrutiny review work was also put on hold. The Scrutiny Committees therefore revised their workplans in July 2020 with a view to recommencing work in September 2020 when the normal meeting timetable was resumed. The pandemic is still however having an impact and it has not yet been possible to resume the work of the Channel Shift Scrutiny Review or fully undertake the Supported Housing Scrutiny Review as planned. These pieces of work will recommence in the New Year. There also remains an impact on the work of the Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee in particular, with the workplan being revised in order to minimise impact on key services.

I am pleased to say that despite the pandemic some excellent scrutiny work has still been able to be carried out and concluded including the Inclusion in Education Scrutiny Review, which was

recently approved by the Executive subject to the Cabinet Member comments. The review of the school's response to the pandemic has been recently concluded and will report to the Executive shortly and the Housing and Homelessness Scrutiny Review is considering the recommendations it wishes to include in its final report before its planned submission to the Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee in February 2021.

The Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee has held the postponed special meeting on mental health services provision and received the results of a brief analysis carried out on the impact of the Whole System Transfers of Care Scrutiny Review.

There has also been scrutiny involvement in the development of a number of new strategies and plans including the Ten-Year Education Strategy, Tree Strategy and the Active Lives Strategy and the Scrutiny Leadership Board has also fed into the development of the Council's new key performance indicators.

Looking forward, further policy development and strategy input has been identified to be carried out on the Drug Strategy, Lancashire Waste Strategy, the Air Quality Strategy, the Sponsorship Strategy and the Sustainability Strategy. Review work will also be carried out on the Community Safety Partnership. The work of the three committees continues to be regularly reviewed with topics for review identified to ensure a balance during these continued difficult times.

Relationship between Scrutiny and the Executive

The new Executive/Scrutiny Protocol was approved by Council earlier this year and can be used as a tool to continue to build upon the relationship between scrutiny and the Executive. I, as Chair of the Scrutiny Leadership Board, regularly speak to the Leader of the Council and the Chairs and Vice Chairs of our scrutiny committees continue to have a regular and ongoing dialogue with the relevant Cabinet Members to their Committee. This relationship is proving even more important during the pandemic, with more work being carried out outside of Committee meetings and the sharing of information more important than ever.

Budget Scrutiny

A pleasing result of the pandemic has been the improved attendance of members at training. A fantastic number of members attended the financial scrutiny training provided by Steve Thompson and Phil Redmond which resulted in the revision of the way in which budget and financial scrutiny will be carried out. At its meeting on 15 October 2020, the Scrutiny Leadership Board following consultation with the Director of Resources approved the following proposals:

- Scrutiny of the Council's budget and financial performance should be an ongoing consideration. It was considered that in order to effectively review the Council's budget and provide a valuable contribution in terms of new ideas, that additional input should take place earlier in the process and on a regular basis.

- The Scrutiny Leadership Board should take an active role in scrutiny of the Council’s overall financial performance and budget whilst the three Committees should be asked to focus more on the financial performance and medium term financial plans (for Children’s and Adults Services)/financial planning of individual services within their remit.

Due to the fact that the budget process for 2020/2021 was already ongoing the following schedule of meetings was agreed:

10 December 2020 (informal meeting)	Informal scrutiny review of 2021/2022 capital and revenue budgets. Input into the new Medium Term Financial Plan.
11 March 2021 (formal committee)	Council Financial Performance Monitoring Overview
20 May 2021 (informal meeting)	Finance/Budget 2022/2023 development scrutiny review, identification of priorities
Tbc October 2021 (formal committee)	Council Financial Performance Monitoring Overview

The three Committees will be working to establish appropriate timescales for their specific service budget reviews in due course.

Conclusion

I have been very pleased with the development of scrutiny since I submitted my first report to Council 18 months ago. The feeling around scrutiny is now one of positivity and appreciation of the value that can be added by effective and enthusiastic scrutiny members. Our focus is on ensuring appropriate and early input into new policy and strategy, supporting the Council in its ongoing response to the pandemic and demonstrating the impact and value added by scrutiny.

I look forward to presenting the Scrutiny Annual Report to you in June 2021.

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Report to:	COUNCIL
Relevant Officer:	Mark Towers, Director of Governance and Partnerships
Date of Meeting:	25 November 2020

AUDIT COMMITTEE INDEPENDENT MEMBER

1.0 Purpose of the report:

1.1 To consider the appointment of an Independent Member/s to the Audit Committee.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

2.1 To make an appointment to two positions of Independent Member on the Audit Committee for a three year term of office, starting from 1 December 2020. The names of the recommended candidates will be put forward at the meeting by the Chair of the Audit Committee.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

3.1 To fill a vacancy on the committee and fulfil a previous action from the Annual Governance Statement. A second position is recommended to provide greater assurance to the committee and the governance framework and would provide complementary skills and expertise to the committee.

3.2a Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.2b Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

3.3 Other alternative options to be considered:

To not make an appointment. However, this would be contrary to previous decisions of the Council to have an independent co-opted member of the Audit Committee. To make just one appointment. This is an option and one Council could make although the interview process did highlight two appointable candidates with differing skills sets and experience and both can be accommodated on the committee.

4.0 Council Priority:

4.1 The recommendation in this report meet all of the Council's priorities.

5.0 Background Information

- 5.1 Council in 2017 agreed the appointment of an appropriately qualified independent co-opted member, who would serve on the committee with non-voting rights. This position was recommended as part of the Council's Annual Governance Statement at the time and is intended to strengthen the assurance and challenge role for that committee. It has become an even greater integral part of local governance especially with the current financial position of local authorities and the need for greater assurance. The vacancy has arisen as the former Independent Member stood down earlier this year. The successful applicant/s would ideally possess expertise and knowledge in audit/ finance and have an understanding of how local government operated.
- 5.2 Council at its meeting on 20 July 2020 authorised the recruitment process to commence and interviews were recently held conducted by the Chair of Audit, the Monitoring Officer and the Head of Audit and Risk.
- 5.3 In line with the decision of the July Council meeting, the four Group Leaders have been consulted on the nominated candidates and a recommendation will be reported to the meeting by the Chair of Audit Committee.

Does the information submitted include any exempt information?

No

List of Appendices:

None.

6.0 Legal considerations:

- 6.1 There is no legal requirement to appoint an independent (co-opted) member to the Audit Committee. However, the CIPFA Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police – Audit Committees 2018 Edition endorses the approach of mandating the inclusion of a lay or independent member and recommends that those authorities, for whom it is not a requirement, actively explore the appointment of an independent member to the committee.

7.0 Human Resources considerations:

- 7.1 There are no Human Resource considerations.

8.0 Equalities considerations:

- 8.1 There are no equalities considerations to this report.

9.0 Financial considerations:

9.1 The Members Allowances Scheme provides for a special responsibility allowance for an Independent Member of the Audit Committee, in the sum of £750 per year.

10.0 Risk management considerations:

10.1 Having an independent co-optee on the Audit Committee is considered good practice and helps to strengthen the assurance and challenge to the committee.

11.0 Ethical considerations:

11.1 There are no ethical considerations.

12.0 Internal/ External Consultation undertaken:

12.1 Consultation will take with the four Group Leaders on the preferred candidate before a recommendation on the appointments is made to Council.

13.0 Background papers:

13.1 None.

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Notice of Motions

To consider the following motions, which have been submitted in accordance with Procedure Rule 12.1:

a) **Fireworks.** Councillor Hobson to propose.

Fireworks are used by people throughout the year to mark different events. While they can bring much enjoyment to some people, they can cause significant problems and fear for other people and animals. They can be a source of fear and distress for many animals (including pet animals, farm livestock and wildlife). Animals affected not only suffer psychological distress but can also cause themselves injuries – sometimes very serious ones – as they attempt to run away or hide from the noise.

The unpredictable, loud and high intensity noises that many fireworks make can cause fear. For example, studies have found fireworks to be the most common cause for fear responses in dogs, and it is estimated that 45 percent of dogs show signs of fear when they hear fireworks. A New Zealand survey recorded 79 percent of horses as either anxious or very anxious around fireworks or over the Guy Fawkes Day period.

Although there is limited direct evidence, it is also likely that fireworks and their debris will cause disturbance to wildlife and are likely to cause suffering or distress, depending on the distance from the explosive and the noise level.

The RSPCA believes that a licensing system would help with better enforcement of the law by allowing enforcement bodies to know where licensed events are being held so they can focus on locations and incidents elsewhere.

The RSPCA also believes that there is a real need to raise awareness amongst owners of animals about fireworks phobia. This phobia can be treated (in dogs at least) in the long term but owners need to prepare themselves and their pets sooner, rather than just before the fireworks are let off. There is a need to raise awareness about the impact of fireworks on animals to the wider public to encourage them to be more considerate of those with pets, horses and livestock as well as local wildlife.

The RSPCA believes the law is failing as it does not prevent or sufficiently reduce the risk of fireworks causing distress, injury or anxiety to people, as well as death, injury or distress to animals.

The RSPCA also believe that further research is needed to properly understand the impact of noise on animals and a number of things can be done to improve the situation for animals and people by:

- introducing a limit on the public use of fireworks on or close to specific dates and times
- tightening restrictions on the sale of fireworks in the run up to Bonfire night

- reducing the maximum noise level of fireworks sold to the public, ensuring they are labelled accurately
- licensing all public firework displays – and ensuring displays are better advertised to the public

Therefore, this Council resolves:

1. That the Chief Executive be requested to write to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy urging him to introduce legislation to limit the maximum noise level of fireworks to 90dB for those sold to the public for private displays.
2. That the Director of Community and Environmental Services be requested to:
 - look at ways to encourage and promote all public firework displays within the local authority boundary to be advertised in advance of the event, allowing residents to take precautions for their animals and vulnerable people;
 - to develop and promote a public awareness campaign about the impact of fireworks on animal welfare and vulnerable people – including the precautions that can be taken to mitigate risks; and
 - to look at ways to encourage local suppliers of fireworks to stock ‘quieter’ fireworks for public display.

b) Supporting a healthier meal option for our older communities through Meals on Wheels. Councillor T Williams to propose.

Even before the pandemic, more than an estimated 1.3 million people over the age of 65 were thought to be malnourished. Malnutrition makes people more susceptible to physical and mental ill-health, extends hospital stays and makes re-admission more likely – malnutrition accounts for nearly £20bn of health and social care spending in England.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it difficult for many people to access good food daily, not least, older people and disabled people, who were already at high risk of malnutrition. During the crisis, many older people and disabled people struggled to access good food every day and indeed this issue predated the crisis.

Whilst there are a number of ways to support people – like investing in lunch clubs or good care-home and hospital food – having a robust Meals on Wheels service locally is a cornerstone to tackling the issue. Meals on Wheels services provide a lifeline to people struggling to feed themselves in their own homes, ensure that older and disabled people at risk of malnutrition or social isolation can access regular social contact every day and at least one nutritious meal every day, and are cost-saving in the long-term to local authorities and NHS trusts.

Now more than ever the Council must support older and disabled people to be able to stay healthy, safe and nourished in their own homes.

This Council resolves:

To request the Executive to adopt and budget for, a subsidised Meals on Wheels service with an accredited local supplier similar to the scheme currently being delivered by Chorley Council, where the most disadvantaged in Blackpool's older communities can receive financial support to have access to wholesome food every day.

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