

Council

25 November 2015

**LEADER OF THE COUNCIL –‘CORPORATE’ PORTFOLIO AREA
COUNCILLOR SIMON BLACKBURN**

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>

Corporate Issues

Financial Monitoring

Financial performance monitoring in the early part of 2015/ 2016 has highlighted financial pressures emerging in Children’s Services, Adult Services, Property Services, Concessionary Fares, Parking Services, Community and Environmental Services and Places with estimated working balances forecast to fall by £3,167,000 against the budgeted position over the year. This fall is in the context of working balances at the start of the year of £6,188,000.

The latest month 5 financial performance report for 2015/ 2016 was reported to the Executive on 2 November 2015.

The Budget for 2015/ 2016 required total savings to be found of £25.2 million. As at 31 August 2015, (month 5) 68% of the 2015/ 2016 savings target had already been delivered. The current full-year forecast predicts that 87% will be achieved by the year-end, which takes into account new in-year pressures and savings and work is underway to close this gap further with alternative savings plan.

The full-year effect of the 2015/ 2016 savings in 2016/ 2017 amount to 77% of the £25.2 million target. This is an encouraging position after five months.

Insurance Renewals

The insurance renewals process has commenced to ensure that the Council has appropriate cover in place from April 2016. This will be the last year of the current three-year long-term agreement, however there exists the option to extend a further two years if value for money is deemed sufficient.

Benefit Claims, Council Tax and Sundry Debt Collections

The average time to process new benefit claims and changes in circumstance for September was 38 days. This increase is due to the continued clearance of a backlog of older work.

Council tax collection at the end of September was 53.1% (54.0% as at September 2014).
Business rates collection at the end of September was 52.11% (51.03% as at September 2014).

Sundry debt collection also remains high on the radar and although the sum written off in 2014/ 2015 of £115,000 is high in absolute terms it represented just 0.19% of the total £59m of sundry debt raised.

Customer First received 13,844 telephone calls during September 2015, with a call answer rate of 43%.

Employee Conference

On Monday the 19 October, we held Our Big Employee Conference and Awards at the Opera House. The conference was hosted by the Deputy Chief Executive and included presentations from both the Chief Executive and myself.

The purpose of the Conference was to ensure employees understood the vision for Blackpool and how we can work together to achieve it. Our guest speaker was Paul McGee, who is one of the UK's leading speakers and a well renowned author and he spoke about change and performing under pressure, he talked about inspiring success and thriving in challenging times.

We have some extremely committed and dedicated individuals and teams who regularly go above and beyond in their everyday duties, with customer care at the heart of everything they do. To acknowledge this our annual employee awards were interspersed throughout the conference. This year, the awards had been categorised by the Council's values. Councillors Graham Cain and Gillian Campbell presented the awards to our worthy winners.

Support for Employees at Risk of Redundancy or on notice

As in previous years, we are committed to ensuring that all staff at risk of redundancy receives a comprehensive package of support during this difficult time. A variety of support is on offer and all the information is contained in the Employee Support Booklet - Dedicated Employment Adviser Support.

Individualised support is available from Laura Baines, an Employment Adviser within Blackpool Council's Positive Steps into Work Team. Those staff at risk/ on notice of redundancy often have many questions about their future and want the opportunity to discuss their plans with someone.

Flu vaccination programme

Flu is very easy to catch and can lead to serious complications for those with existing medical conditions. Each year the Occupational Health (OH) team for the Council encourages employees to participate in the flu vaccination programme not only to protect themselves, but to protect vulnerable service users and public that they may come into contact with. As part of the Council's contingency planning for winter the vaccination is offered to all employees. Uptake for the vaccination has increased year on year. Vaccination sessions have been held in

the OH Department and at various venues during October, so far 450 vaccines have been given with more sessions planned.

The Fairness Commission

The Fairness Commission held the second of its Older People's Summits on 9 October 2015 at St John's Conference Centre. The event was well attended and participants had the opportunity to ask questions, important to them, of the Public Sector Partners including the Council, Health, Police, Fire and Ambulance. The event was hosted by Dr Arif Rajpura, Director of Public Health and Chair of the Fairness Commission.

Working with other Lancashire Councils.

Further meetings of Lancashire's Leaders and Chief Executives have taken place over the last few months. A piece of work has been commissioned by a small team of people, including support from Blackpool Council, that will result in a proposal that can be considered as part of the Council's decision making process. Areas being looked at for part of this greater co-operation proposal include Transport (Connected), Housing (Better Homes), Economic Growth (Prosperous), Skills and Health and Social Care (Public Service Reform). It is hoped there will be something for us to consider before Christmas and if agreed, action would be taken in the New Year.

Strategic Issues

Emergency Control Centre.

A project has commenced to consider the feasibility of setting up an Emergency Control Centre at Bickerstaffe House, which could be used by multi-agencies should a major incident occur. Steps are being taken to explore property business continuity arrangements should any of the core Council buildings become unavailable.

Council Survey

We want to make sure that we have a good understanding of residents' opinions as we face another series of tough decisions on the budget, so we have engaged with local residents and staff to understand how they would cut services. Our survey was open to all residents to take part in online or face to face and we received over 250 responses from residents and around a further 350 from staff (including staff that live in Blackpool). This gave us rich information on how people would make budget reductions, reshaping the Council to deliver the services they felt was most important.

Blackpool Museum

The Council has set out to create a brand new museum for Blackpool and for the nation. It will bring together the objects, stories and memories, which together tell the local, national and international Blackpool Story. The team is working towards Project Board approval for the early designs and the development of a sustainable business plan, based on the findings of our market research and consultation. Two public consultation days in August attracted 4,000 people who endorsed the plans to date. The event attracted positive national coverage from

the BBC as well as local media interest. The next milestone is the 'Gateway Review' meeting on 30 November with Heritage Lottery Fund, the major funder of the project.

Policy Issues

Corporate Fraud

HMRC have indicated that they will be willing to share some data with Local Authorities in the future, which will help with corporate fraud investigations.

Welfare Reform and Council Tax Reduction

A welfare reform briefing note has been issued to all Members summarising the changes to welfare announced by Central Government. Further updates will be provided when more information is known. Consultation is underway for minor changes to the 2016/ 2017 Council Tax Reduction Scheme, no changes are proposed to the current 27.11% reduction in support.

Council Plan

The Council plan is on the Council agenda today and is the most important Council policy that sets the councils visions and priorities for the next five years. It has been the subject of extensive consultation with residents and employees and will shape the way that the Council undertakes its business in these difficult and challenging times.

Transforming Services

Risk Issues

Risk Services will be meeting with each of the Council's Risk Champions to assess how best to support each Risk Management Group to strike an appropriate balance between reduced resources and ensuring effective risk management and challenge.

On-line Services

The Transactional Services Team is working with Property Services and the supplier of their Asset Management System to create a new interface to the Council's Accounts Payable System to streamline the payment of invoices. This will allow suppliers to upload their own invoices. Auto-matching of invoices with purchase orders will generate a payment file that loads into the Accounts Payable System, reducing duplication of work and speeding up payment of invoices to suppliers.

The Benefits Service has recently gone live with the automated download of the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction online form directly into the back office processing system, which will assist in improving processing times.

The Bulky Matters online removal service has proved successful with 35% of customers booking their own collection online during September.