

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>

Statement on Orlando Terror Attack

I attended the Pride Festival in Blackpool earlier this month, which was a fantastic occasion to celebrate equality and show our support for the LGBT community, and it was devastating to hear that at the same time on the other side of the world a tragedy was unfolding.

We ensured that the rainbow flag that was flying over the Town Hall for Blackpool Pride was flown at half-mast, and the rainbow flag is now also flying from the Blackpool Tower, which was also illuminated in rainbow colours.

As I had a pre-planned meeting in London with Lord Ahmad, the Home Office Minister for tackling extremism, I attended the vigil in London on Old Compton Street in Soho, the location of the 1999 nail bombing of the Admiral Nelson pub by a far-right activist, which was also targeted at the LGBT community. Cllr Graham Cain, Cllr Maria Kirkland and other councillors attended a local vigil on Queen Street, which was very well attended.

We need to continue to stand together as a town, a country and a world to prevent terrorists driving a wedge between different faiths, races and nationalities.

Corporate Issues

Government Cuts

Blackpool residents have this year experienced the largest Local Government cuts in the country with a 4.9% reduction of core spending power, the Government’s preferred measure.

We also received no assistance from the £300m ‘transitional funding’ arrangements, which the Government claimed were to help authorities whilst they make changes in response to cuts. Surrey was the biggest beneficiary of this funding, receiving £24.1m.

Benefit Claims, Council Tax, Business Rates and Sundry Debt Collections

The average number of days to process new Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction Scheme claims and changes in circumstance improved further since the last report and now stands at 16 days as at the month of April 2016.

The number of telephone calls received by Customer First reduced by almost 5,000 in April 2016 compared to April 2015. There was also an improvement in the call answer rate with 55% of calls answered compared to 40% in April 2015. This is the result of the ongoing channel shift work we are doing that promotes and makes it easier to access many council services online. For example, we have introduced start to finish online bookings for Bulky Matters and now nearly half of all booking are made this way. Similarly, the online bin tracker and our use of in-cab technology have led to a dramatic reduction in the numbers of reported missed bin collections. All of this not only saves the council a huge amount of money, it also allows us to give a better service to residents.

At year-end council tax in-year, collection performance was 90.7%, down 1.7% compared to the previous year. Collection from households in receipt of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme is having a significantly adverse impact on collection performance. Business Rate collection was 95.1%, which was exactly the same as the previous year and above target.

Strategic Issues

Financial Monitoring

The draft 2015/ 2016 Accounts have been completed. These will now be examined by our external auditors and reported to the Audit Committee on 22 September 2016. The draft Accounts show that the Council's working balances as at 31 March are slightly below the £6 million target at £5.6 million.

The Budget for 2016/ 2017 required total savings to be found of £25.1 million. The first Corporate Budget Savings report for 2016/ 2017 was reported to the Corporate Leadership Team on 24 May. As at 30 April 2016 (month 1), 79% of the 2016/ 2017 savings target had already been delivered and the full-year effect of the 2016/ 2017 savings in 2017/ 2018 amounts to nearly 85% of the £25.1 million target.

Lancashire Combined Authority

A total of 14 of 15 Local Authorities in Lancashire are continuing to work in support of forming a Combined Authority (CA) for Lancashire. Each Council made a positive decision before Christmas 2015 in favour of public consultation. Formal public consultation took place across January and February 2016, with over 70% of respondents supporting the formation of a Combined Authority for Lancashire. Following this, all 14 local authorities took a further report in March and April 2016 to their Councils recommending the formation of a shadow Lancashire Combined Authority. All 14 Councils made positive decisions in favour.

The shadow Lancashire Combined Authority will hold its first formal meeting in early July 2016, although regular meetings are already taking place between all 14 Leaders. Leaders have now given senior officers approval to pen negotiation with Government on the formation of a Combined Authority for Lancashire and to start to negotiate on a first devolution deal. Officers met with the Department for Communities and Local Government's Governance Team in mid-

May to begin work on a draft Parliamentary Order that must be laid before Parliament to enable the formation of the Combined Authority. This is a complicated process, but sound progress has already been made as Lancashire is advanced in its governance proposals. Civil servants hope that the Order can be presented to Parliament in autumn, with passage through Parliament in the months following. This will enable the Lancashire Combined Authority to come into formal legal existence in either late 2016 or early 2017.

Officers hope to commence direct negotiation with civil servants on a first devolution deal for the County over the summer. At the same time, officers are currently preparing a work programme for the shadow CA. This work programme will include production of a Lancashire Plan setting out a vision for the County and will address the key strategic themes already identified e.g. economic growth, housing, transport, skills and health.

Policy Issues

Welfare Reforms

The Department for Work and Pensions has confirmed that an additional 365 Blackpool households will be affected by the changes to the Benefit Cap, which are due to be introduced later this year. The maximum amount of out-of-work benefits that a working-age family can receive each year will reduce to £20,000 from £26,000 whilst the amount for single adults with no children will reduce to £13,400 from £18,200. Based on current numbers the cap will equate to a loss of £1.47m per annum in total benefits across Blackpool with the reduction being applied to Housing Benefit or Universal Credit Housing Costs.

Additional funding to support those affected by the Benefit Cap has been made available to local authorities in the form of Discretionary Housing Payment.

Local Government Transparency Code

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has circulated a consultation paper on changes to the Local Government Transparency Code 2015. Local Authorities and interested parties are requested to respond by 8 July 2016. The proposed changes would require Local Authorities to record the publication of some existing provisions on Central Government sites instead of Local Authority websites. It also seeks to extend current provisions in some areas including a proposal, which requires Local Authorities with 'in-house' services to provide a one-off set of information to local residents, which justifies that the service is being delivered cost effectively. Local Authorities would also have to undertake a re-assessment of costs and benefits of in-house provision against private firms after an appropriate time period.

Transforming Services

People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA)

The Benefits Service has recently implemented a new process to exchange data with the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA). Previously customers used to have to visit Customer First to obtain verification that they were in receipt of Housing Benefit or Council Tax Reduction in order to obtain free treatment.

The process is now much more streamlined with a secure data sharing process in place that allows the Council to email the PDSA with the relevant information. It has saved clients making multiple trips to the PDSA, as previously they could have been given emergency medication, have to complete the registration process and then return to the PDSA for the rest of the medication course.

Working with Partners

Blackpool Teaching Hospital Trust

Shared working is continuing to be developed with the Trust with arrangements for Property Services already in place and support being provided for governance and legal. The Electoral Services Team is also assisting with the 'Governor' elections for the Trust due to be held this summer.

Blackpool Victoria Hospital

In order to support recruitment difficulties in relation to professional roles across Blackpool (Social Workers, Nurses, Doctors, Consultants, Teachers) joint working has taken place with Blackpool Victoria Hospital to develop a recruitment microsite.

The microsite is targeted at encouraging relocation of professionals into Blackpool by promoting "what Blackpool, the Fylde Coast and the North West have to offer in terms of lifestyle careers in Blackpool, employee benefits and professional development support available".

The Social work element of this site is now live and Health and Education will follow shortly.