

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

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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**

### **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 circumstances has increased from 16 to 20 days since the last report, this is due to the clearing of older items of work related to changes in circumstance.

The call answer rate for Customer First has been impacted by the “Green and Go” campaign recently when nearly 5,000 additional telephone calls were received compared to the same period last year.

At the end of quarter one, Council tax in-year collection performance was 26.8%, a reduction of 0.9% compared to the previous year, this equates to £435,000 based upon the Council Tax Net Requirement excluding Police and Fire. Recovery activity is well underway in respect of outstanding current year debts. Business Rate collection was 25.5%, exactly the same position as the previous year.

Sundry debt collection was 82.1%, which was significantly higher than the previous year when it was 55.6%.

An “unofficial” timetable for the 2016 rollout of the lower Benefits cap has been received from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

There are 336 affected claimants in Blackpool at the present time.

- From 5 September, claimants who are likely to be affected will be sent a letter from the DWP that sets out the likely loss of Housing Benefit in ‘band-widths’
- From 5 October, claimants who are carers who are currently ‘capped’ will get a letter from the DWP giving them exemption from capping from 7 November.
- From 7 November, claimants who are already capped (known as current stock cases) will be re-capped at the new lower level. The DWP will be notifying housing benefit sections of the relevant cases as close as possible to 7 November (and subsequent roll out dates) in order to make sure information about family size, disability benefits, rent levels etc. is current.

- From 14 November and for the following 12 weeks, newly capped claimants will be brought into scope. The DWP will start with smaller councils with smaller caseloads first, to ensure that if technology “goes wrong” it affects smaller numbers. The full schedule has not been agreed, except it will be within that 12-week framework.

## **Strategic Issues**

### **Lancashire Combined Authority**

Of the 15 Local Authorities in Lancashire, 14 have now come together as the shadow Lancashire Combined Authority (LCA). The shadow Lancashire Combined Authority met formally for the first time in July 2016 and will commence monthly meetings from September. I am delighted to have been elected as Chairman of the shadow Lancashire Combined Authority at the first meeting, with Councillor Alistair Bradley (Chorley) successful in his application to become Vice Chairman. As part of my new role, I have been meeting with other Leaders across the County to begin to determine the early operation and work programme for the Lancashire Combined Authority.

Officers are working closely with the Department for Communities and Local Government’s Governance Team to progress the Order that must be laid before Parliament to enable the full formation of the Lancashire Combined Authority. We remain hopeful that the Order can be presented to Parliament in autumn. This will enable the Lancashire Combined Authority to come into formal legal existence and we are targeting a date of 1 April 2017.

We continue to await Government’s signal to open formal negotiation on a first devolution deal for the County. For obvious reasons, there has been a period of flux at Whitehall over the summer, but we know that Lancashire is firmly embedded in the devolution deal ‘queue’. I am currently working with Chief Officers across the County on a work programme for the shadow Lancashire Combined Authority, to include Local Authority Leaders’ roles. Proposals to this effect will be presented at the September meeting of the shadow LCA. I am also pleased to confirm that the October meeting of the shadow Lancashire Combined Authority will happen here in Blackpool, with meetings rotating around the County thereafter.

### **Growth Deal 3**

The Lancashire Enterprise Partnership (LEP) was recently invited to submit funding proposals for Growth Deal 3 to Government. The LEP led a competitive process after inviting project submissions from partners across the County. Over 20 project proposals were submitted for consideration. The process of project prioritisation was overseen by both the LEP Board and the shadow Lancashire Combined Authority. I am pleased to report that Blackpool’s submission, a request for £15m of funding toward a new conference offer at the Winter Gardens, was eventually ranked as priority scheme number 3 for Growth Deal funding. The process was very competitive and we know that this round of Growth Deal funding will be heavily over-subscribed. However, Blackpool’s showing is strong and encouraging and I am hopeful our proposal will attract support in Government now that it is placed toward the top of Lancashire’s

priority scheme list. As a part of emerging governance arrangements, I jointly signed off Lancashire's Growth Deal 3 submission in my role of Chairman of the shadow Lancashire Combined Authority, alongside Edwin Booth, Chairman of the LEP.

### **Blackpool Museum**

An agreement with the V&A for partnership working is in the process of being finalised. The museum will be holding a community consultation event with Variety performers at St John's Church on 29 September 2016 and a Heritage Lottery Fund gateway development review meeting will take place on 30 September 2016.

### **Financial Monitoring**

Financial performance monitoring in the early part of 2016/ 2017 highlighted financial pressures emerging in Children's Services, Strategic Leisure Assets, Concessionary Fares and the Investment Portfolio with estimated working balances forecast to fall by £2,592,000 against the budgeted position over the year. This fall is in the context of unaudited working balances at the start of the year of £5,636,000.

In the context of £35.0m of Earmarked Revenue Reserves and with nine months of the financial year, remaining there should still be sufficient time to redress the position and revised service and financial plans are underway to do so.

The latest month 3 financial performance report for 2016/ 2017 was reported to the Executive on 12 September 2016.

The Budget for 2016/ 2017 required total savings to be found of £25.1m. As at 30 June 2016, (month 3) 79% of the 2016/ 2017 savings target had already been delivered and the full-year effect of the 2016/ 2017 savings in 2017/ 2018 amounted to 90% of the £25.1m target.

## **Policy Issues**

### **Council Tax Reduction Scheme**

The 2017/ 2018 Council Tax Reduction Scheme consultation began on 22 August 2016 and will run to 16 October 2016.

## **Transforming Services**

### **Online facility for council tax and business ratepayers**

A new online facility has recently gone live on the Council's website for council tax and business ratepayers. Customers can now easily set up direct debits online and inform the Council of changes of address and other changes in circumstances.

By registering for the full service customers can view their bill instead of receiving it through the post and view other documents they have been sent. They can also view payments they have made, see the balance on their account and make payment arrangements.

## **Working with Partners**

### **Shared Service for emergency planning**

A shared service, to be held by the Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, is in the process of being developed for emergency planning. The main benefit of this approach will be increased resilience across both organisations as well as retaining the expertise and knowledge of the Council's former Emergency Planning Officer who joined the Trust in August 2016. The shared service is in the early stages of development and will be piloted for a 12-month period at which stage an evaluation will be undertaken to determine whether this is the appropriate model going forward.

### **Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust Governor Elections**

Following on from supporting the Referendum on 23 June, the Council's Elections Team, working with governance staff from the Trust, ran the elections for the 13 vacant governor positions (eight public and five staff), which took place during August with the Count taking place on Wednesday 17 August 2016.