

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

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The Corporate area covers my portfolio and those of:

- 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>

### **Corporate Issues**

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

The average number of days to process Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction Scheme new claims and changes in circumstances remains static at 20 days whilst work is ongoing to clear old items of changes in circumstance work.

The call answer rate for Customer First for November was 49%, a slight improvement on the same time last year.

At the end of November 2016 Council Tax in-year collection performance was 68.1%, a reduction of 0.7% compared to the previous year, this equates to £338,000 based upon the Council Tax Net Requirement excluding Police and Fire. Business Rate collection was 66.2%, a reduction of 1.9% compared to a like for like comparison with the previous year. This equates to £508,000 for the Blackpool element. Payment of a large Business Rates debt is anticipated soon following a recent sale of the property. Sundry debt collection was 87.1%, which was higher than the previous year when it was 82.0%. The additional notional amount collected compared to last year is £2.1m.

#### **Budget**

Council wide briefings were held on the 6 and 7 December 2016 to advise employees of the budget position for 2017/ 2018 and how it may impact upon them.

To ensure consistency of message Managers delivered an agreed briefing note to employees and managed any immediate queries and concerns.

Those employees placed ‘at risk of redundancy’ from their service due to a cessation of service or a diminution of the number of employees required, will continue to be supported through provision of a wide range of information being available e.g. career and money advice,

Employee Assistance Programme and one to one support from an in house Employment Advisor. Formal consultation on the proposals is now underway.

### **Director of Children's Services**

As members will be aware Delyth Curtis has been successful in being appointed as Deputy Chief Executive (People) at Cheshire West and Chester Council and consequently, a recruitment process has been underway to appoint a Director of Children's Services. The meeting of the Chief Officers Employment Committee was held earlier today (25th January) and I will provide an update at the meeting.

### **Apprenticeship Levy**

On 6 April 2017 the way the Government funds apprenticeships in England will change resulting in the introduction of an Apprenticeship levy for employers who have an annual pay bill of over £3 million.

The levy equates to 0.5% of the pay bill and the funds will be available to the employer to invest in apprenticeships training. The funds cannot be used for apprenticeship salaries or any administrative costs of implementing and running an apprenticeship programme. Work is in progress to consider how the Council implements this levy and ensures maximum benefit from it.

### **Corporate Delivery Unit (CDU)**

The CDU continue to work on priority areas aligned to the Council Plan. Stocktake reports are being compiled with action plans for delivery with a particular focus on Children Social Care. There is a corporate review of performance management arrangements underway currently, which will see a new and refreshed basket of indicators reported through Scrutiny on the progress towards the Council Plan priorities. The next Board meetings will be held in late February. The Business Planning Framework has been refreshed in order to strengthen links between the Council's Workforce Strategy 2016/ 2020, the Medium Term Financial Sustainability Strategy 2016/ 2017 – 2021/ 2022 and the Council Plan 2015/ 2020. The Transformation Board met for the first time in December 2016 and will work closely alongside the Resources Team to deliver the transformational actions required to deliver savings against targets set in the budget over the next three years.

### **Electoral Services**

The Electoral Registration Officer undertook the annual publication of the Electoral Register on 1 December 2016. The relevant statistics are as follows:

Electorate	101,899	(99,265 in December 2015)
Household Enquiry Response Rate	83%	(76% in December 2015)
Postal Voters	25,727	(26,029 in December 2015)

Actions undertaken during the 2016 electoral canvass include:

- Each property and potential new elector has received a maximum of three forms and at least two personal visits by the Council's electoral canvassers.
- The Electoral Services team has data matched with Council Tax data on a regular basis.
- The Outreach Worker has been the designated point of contact for all care home and nursing home responses. He has also visited relevant hard to reach groups, charities and community groups to reinforce the importance of registering to vote and the benefits.

Future plans to improve registration include holding a week long campaign for Voting Registration Drive.

## **Strategic Issues**

### **Lancashire Combined Authority and Devolution**

In November 2016, I along with Mr Edwin Booth, Chairman of the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership, met with the Northern Powerhouse Minister, Mr Andrew Percy, in Westminster. This meeting focused on the progress partners had made in Lancashire over the previous year, our formation as a shadow Combined Authority and our collective ambitions for the future. The Minister welcomed the progress we had made and urged us to continue to enhance joint working, both between the various Local Authorities and between Local Authorities and the LEP. The Minister committed to doing what he could to ensure that the Parliamentary Order, necessary for the formal creation of the Lancashire Combined Authority, was put to Parliament as soon as possible in the New Year.

### **Health and Wellbeing Board**

The Executive at its meeting on 15 December 2016 agreed the shadow arrangements for a PAN Lancashire Health and Wellbeing Board. A further report, to confirm the terms of reference and the formal creation of the joint Health and Wellbeing Board, will be provided at the Annual Council meeting.

### **Financial Monitoring**

The latest financial performance monitoring report for 2016/ 2017 was reported to the Executive on 23 January 2017. As at month 8 in-year pressures prevail in Children's Services and Strategic Leisure Assets, with estimated working balances forecast to fall by £3,135,000 against the budgeted position over the year. This fall is in the context of audited working balances at the start of the year of £5,636,000 an erosion of 55.6%.

In the context of £35m of Earmarked Revenue Reserves and with four months of the financial year remaining, there should still be sufficient time to improve the position such that Working Balances of at least £3.0m are reached. Revised service and financial plans are underway to do so, including the freezing of non-essential spend and delays to filling non-front line vacancies.

The Budget for 2016/ 2017 required total savings to be found of £25.1 m. As at 30 November 2016 (month 8) 83% 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 92% of the £25.1 m target. The Chancellor of the Exchequer published the Government's Autumn Statement on 23 November 2016, setting out public expenditure plans for 2017/ 2018 to 2019/ 2020. The Chancellor stated that the Government is committed to the overall plans for departmental resource spending until 2019/ 2020, which was set out at Spending Review 2015. Departmental resource spending will grow with inflation in 2020/ 2021 and 2021/ 2022.

The Council's Provisional Settlement for 2017/ 2018 was published on 15 December 2016. The specific details and implications of these announcements will be contained within the Council's Revenue Budget 2017/ 2018 report and subsequent refresh of the Medium-Term Financial Sustainability Strategy.

## **Policy Issues**

### **Benefit Cap**

The numbers of households affected by the lower Benefit Cap was significantly less than originally expected. In total, 197 new cases were affected whilst 49 existing capped cases were reassessed.

The new maximum amount of benefit allowable is:

- couples or lone parents of working age will no longer be entitled to receive more than £384.62 per week (previously £500).
- single adults of working age with no children will no longer be entitled to receive more than £257.69 per week (previously £350).

The Benefits Service is now giving appropriate support and considering application for Discretionary Housing Payments where appropriate.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has released details of the planned roll-out of the Universal Credit Full Service to more jobcentres and for Blackpool this is scheduled to take place in September 2018. From this date a much wider variety of people will be affected by Universal Credit than the mostly young, single jobseekers affected so far.