

**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 at 20 days with a significant amount of work being undertaken to re-assess claims for the new financial year.

The call answer rate for Customer First declined to 43% in January due to staff vacancies, which are in the process of being filled and the impact of the renewal campaign for “green and go”, the call answer rate for quarter three had improved to 51%.

At the end of January Council Tax in-year collection performance was 84.4%, 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. Business Rate collection was 82.4%, a reduction of 0.7% compared to a like for like comparison with the previous year. This equates to £186,000 for the Blackpool element. A number of large business rates debts are being vigorously pursued and payments are anticipated before the end of the financial year.

Sundry debt collection was 93.3%, which was higher than the previous year when it was 87.7%. The additional notional amount collected compared to last year is £2.6m.

Over the last six financial years, the Council has collected a total £899m in respect of Council Tax, business rates and sundry debt. During the same period, a total of £17.1m has been written off (equivalent to 1.8%) with total arrears of £25.0m (equivalent to 2.7%) which is under 2%.

The amount of Council Tax collected during this period was £312m and a total of £6.7m written off. At the end of March 2016, we had arrears of £12.3m still to collect for all years and collection of these outstanding amounts continues.

In respect of business rates, £272m was collected and a total of £9.4m written off. At the end of March 2016, we had £4.6m still to collect for all years. For sundry debtors, £315m was collected in the last six financial years and £1m written off. Total arrears were £8.1m.

### **Firstline**

Firstline is a leadership development programme designed to develop good social work managers into high performing, considered and influential leaders. It is largely funded by the Department for Education (DfE's) Innovation Programme.

The curriculum provides Leaders with the tools, space and confidence to develop their leadership skills so they can better enable great social work practice. Those on the programme are strongly encouraged to stretch themselves beyond their comfort zones in areas such as reflexivity, decision making and influencing others.

We have had seven applicants from Children's Social Work managers currently being considered for the programme.

### **Strategic Issues**

#### **Financial Monitoring**

The latest financial performance monitoring report for 2016/ 2017 was reported to the Executive on 13 March 2017. As at month 10, in-year pressures prevail in Children's Services, Strategic Leisure Assets and Places with estimated working balances forecast to fall by £2,788,000 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 nearly half.

In the context of £35.0m of Earmarked Revenue Reserves and with two 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 million. As at 31 January 2017 (month 10) 86% 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 93% of the £25.1 million target.

The Final Settlement of Blackpool Council's 2017/ 2018 Settlement Funding Assessment was announced by the Department for Communities and Local Government on 20 February 2017. There was a £2,000 reduction to Blackpool Council's Core Spending Power of £123.5m in 2017/ 2018, which will be met from Reserves, as such the 2017/ 2018 General Fund Estimate of £120,248,000 was recommended to the Executive on 20 February 2017 and agreed by Council at its Budget meeting.

### **Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone**

Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone (EZ) became live on 1 April 2016 and continues to attract significant interest from private business and occupiers. The EZ offers a number of tax breaks to new business. To date, the EZ has secured a net job growth of approximately 140 full time employees (FTE), in addition to the safeguarding and relocation of approximately 300 FTE. The Council continues to work closely with Fylde Borough Council, key landowners and the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership on the next steps to enable development at the site. Local partners have recently secured funding from Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) (£50,000) to support production of a Masterplan for the site and we hope to have appointed appropriate consultants by the end of March. The Masterplan will play a crucial role in guiding investment and development of the site so that it can deliver on its full potential over the 25-year life of the EZ. Local partners are also in the process of developing and agreeing significant marketing activity for all of Lancashire's EZ's with the LEP and Marketing Lancashire. Local partners look forward to working collectively with other Lancashire EZ's and the LEP to maximise exposure to national and international investors in the years ahead.

### **Valuation Office Agency (VOA)**

Along with the success of the Enterprise Zone, I am also pleased to say that the VOA's recent revaluation of business rates is good news for the town. On average, the revaluation could see a retail business in Blackpool paying 13% less in business rates, compared to an average rise of 5% across the country, while office based businesses will benefit from an average reduction of 18%, compared to an average rise of 13% elsewhere in the UK. Some businesses will also be able to escape paying business rates whatsoever, as approximately 3,000 Blackpool companies with a rateable value of under £12,000 are exempt completely, with businesses valued between £12,000 and £15,000 also eligible for discounted rates.

This is more good news for investment in the town and follows on from recent investment announcements by private firms. The successful sale of The Imperial Hotel, the hotel opposite the new conference centre at the winter gardens, the five star expansion to the Sands Venue on the Promenade, a new hotel in the old post office on Abingdon Street and the two pieces of work currently taking place on South Promenade the Hampton by Hilton, which is progressing very well and the new apartment blocks.

### **Transforming Services**

#### **Council Tax**

For the first time, a number of annual Council Tax bills will be sent electronically rather than through the post. Promotion of this facility will take place during 2017/ 2018 and it is anticipated that the number will increase significantly over the years.

**Recruitment Portal and Agency provider**

The Council's new recruitment portal Greater Jobs is now live. This was developed and funded in collaboration with other North West Local Authorities and work is about to commence to consider opportunities for further collaborative working with Health.

The Council's new preferred Agency provider has recently changed from HAYS to Reed following a collaborative procurement process with a number of other North West Authorities.

**Corporate Delivery Unit (CDU) - Children's Social Care**

The CDU is now four weeks in to the mapping exercise with Children's Services and is working with staff and managers at all levels to understand how support is coordinated, how services are managing resources effectively to match demand and how systems and processes support or challenge practitioners to do the right thing for children and families in Blackpool. The mapping exercise will be used to support both the interim Director of Children's Services and the new Director of Children's Services to work with the Service as a whole to determine where attention needs to be focused to deliver practical, process and cultural change to deliver real measurable improvements in performance and outcomes for children.