

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

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

Council Tax and Sundry Debt

At the end of March 2017, council tax in-year collection performance was 90.0%, 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 93.9%, a reduction of 1.2% compared with the previous year with disappointing collection yields from some central government departments and agencies. This equates to £318,000 for the Blackpool element. Collection and recovery of outstanding 2016/ 2017 debts are continuing and will be vigorously pursued, assisted by further staff investment from the Transformation Fund.

The four-year collection rates for Council Tax and Business Rates were 96.2% and 96.9% respectively and such debts, even beyond this term are still actively pursued. In cash terms, the amount of Council Tax collected is £46.5m and for Business Rates it is £23.8m in respect of the Blackpool element.

On a positive note, sundry debt collection was 94.2%, which was 3.5% higher than the previous year when it was 90.7%. The additional notional amount collected compared to last year equates to £2.4m.

Regarding creditor payments and the National Public Sector Payment Policy of paying supplier invoices within 30 days of receipt of invoice or service delivery (whichever comes later) the Council achieved a performance of 95.5% in 2016/17 with all local supplies being targeted at 10 days to bolster their cash flow. This compares to 94.4% in 2015/ 2016.

ICT – Cyber Threat

On Friday 12 May, a massive Cyber Attack in the form of ransomware hit the NHS IT systems across large parts of the country. NHS systems in Blackpool and across the Fylde Coast were seriously impacted and consequently a decision was made to disconnect temporarily the Council network from the Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust and the wider N3 network

(NHS national broadband network). This remained in place until Friday 19 May when a decision was made to reconnect after assurances had been provided that the Blackpool NHS network was safe. Whilst this affected upon some Council staff who work closely with the NHS, the wider Council network remained unaffected by the Cyber Attack. The Council's IT Service worked tirelessly through the weekend of 13 and 14 May and ensured all the Council's systems were fully secured against the vulnerability that the Ransomware was exploiting. The Council's IT Service also fielded several of its own staff to support the recovery effort within the NHS on the Fylde Coast.

The Council continues to treat the risk of cyber-attack as a high priority and this risk was recently scrutinised in detail at Audit Committee on 2 March 2017. The Council has made and continues to make investment in its IT security systems and wider IT estate to reduce risks in this area. All organisations are at risk and as the Council and wider society continues to increase its dependencies on digital systems it is important that we recognise ongoing investment in this area will need to continue to reduce the Council's exposure to this growing risk.

Blackpool Museum Project

The Planning Application has been withdrawn to enable us to hold further discussions with key consultees. We intend to resubmit again in due course. We have agreed with the Heritage Lottery Fund for the decision on our project to be deferred to September 2017 to enable this to happen. As I have said previously, if it is possible to proceed with the project from a financial point of view (i.e. without it requiring an ongoing annual subsidy) we will do so, if not, we will not.

Strategic Issues

Financial Management

The 2016/ 2017 Final Accounts have been completed. These will now be examined by the Council's external auditor, KPMG, and reported to Audit Committee on 14 September. At the end of a financially challenging year in which Children's Services overspent against budget by £5.4m the draft Accounts show that the Council's working balances as at 31 March 2017 are below the £6 million target at £3.2 million. A review of earmarked reserves has been undertaken and the Director of Resources has recommended a re-designation of £3m of specific reserves into working balances to compensate.

The Budget for 2017/ 2018 required total savings to be found of £18.7 million. Early indications from budget forecasts as at months zero and one are that 2017/ 2018 will prove to be the most financially challenging year yet, something which we have always known would be the case.

Benefit and Customer First and Revenues and Exchequer

It is pleasing to report that as the Lend A Hand Mortgage Scheme, of which Blackpool Council was a designer and first participant nationally, comes to a conclusion Blackpool Council was

able to assist 90 first-time mortgage borrowers (of which only one has gone into arrears) to achieve life-changing freehold ownership whilst making a cash surplus itself on its underwriting bank deposit. This Scheme was 'copied' by the Government with its Help to Buy Scheme, which proved 2.5% more expensive due to the unforeseen Mortgage Insurance Premium that was triggered by the lower level of underwriting offered.

The average number of days to process Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction Scheme new claims and changes in circumstances for April was 15 days. Despite significant amount of work being undertaken to re-assess claims for the new financial year we have managed to maintain performance levels compared to April last year.

Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone

Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone, one of the largest in the UK, was established in 2016 and over its 25-year life span will transform the Blackpool and the Fylde Coast's economic base with over £300 million of private investment and the creation of 3,000 jobs supported by new infrastructure. This 141-hectare site has already grown with over 35 companies and 450 (circa 150 brand-new) jobs since 2016 (including the newly constructed Lancashire Energy Headquarters) established by Blackpool and the Fylde College. Whilst this site targeted at the energy, aerospace, food and drink manufacture and digital and creative sectors, has the capacity to host a wide range of manufacturing and service businesses within the existing Blackpool Business Park and Squires Gate Industrial Estates. The specific incentives for business include business rates reduction and enhanced capital allowances as well as design and build opportunities.

Following a competition run by the Department for Communities and Local Government, an award of £50,000 commercial support was secured in January 2017 to support the provision of detailed master planning for the Enterprise Zone. In March 2017, following completion of a competitive tendering process a consultant team led by Mott McDonald and including How Planning, BE Group and IBI architects, were appointed to undertake the Masterplan preparation for the Enterprise Zone. Work is now well underway with significant stakeholder engagement a key part of the process with the target of producing a draft Masterplan by July 2017.

The Masterplan will, in addition to producing the overall development phasing and plan framework, look at land for future development, additionally considering future market opportunities for development of aviation services. It will undertake a full audit of existing highways and utility capacities and make recommendations as to required upgrades and significant phased infrastructure investment to deliver the Masterplan.

Work is also progressing on the Implementation Plan and the Masterplan will be key to formulation of the site marketing strategy and provide primary marketing collateral for Marketing Lancashire in progressing International marketing of Lancashire's four Enterprise Zones.

Investment Marketing

In view of the range of development opportunities either being developed or in the pipeline (including Talbot Gateway Phase 2 , Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone, Central Leisure Quarter, the new Conference Centre, Business Loans Fund and Railway Electrification the Tramway Extension etc.) work is being undertaken to promote Blackpool in a more concerted way as an investment location. This work includes developing appropriate marketing materials and began by supporting an event organised by "The Built Environment on 14 June at the Winter Gardens, focusing on Blackpool's key development plans and projects. In addition, work is being undertaken in collaboration with Marketing Lancashire to understand more of perceptions of Blackpool by developers and investors, so that we can focus our marketing efforts most effectively in the coming months and years.

Manchester Arena Tragedy

Following the tragic events in Manchester late last month we worked with partners across Lancashire to ensure that the people of our town received the support and reassurance that was needed. We continue to provide this support as people try to come to terms with what happened both in Manchester and London. We also had to consider an appropriate response to how we make Blackpool as safe as we can for visitors. We will continue to carry on providing a great place to live and visit, but our thoughts and prayers are with Jane Tweddle and all of those touched by this atrocity and subsequent events. We must ensure that we continue to be one community in the face of this tiny, but violent and twisted minority.

Working with Partners

Parliamentary Election

As members are aware we had a General election called quickly since the last meeting and this was a mammoth task to arrange. I would like to place on record my thanks to the (Acting) Returning Officer and his staff in organising the election for the two constituencies, which cover Blackpool. Some 450 people worked on the election and Polling day and the count was very well supported and efficiently delivered.