

**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**

**Financial Monitoring 2017/ 2018 and Budget 2018/ 2019**

The Medium-Term Financial Sustainability Strategy 2016/ 2017 - 2021/ 2022 clearly identified 2017/ 2018 as the critical year to navigate, being the last of the very high budget gap years to bridge and following six years of significant erosion of Government funding. I would like to draw Members attention to the fact that over the period 2011/ 2012 – 2017/ 2018, the cumulative Budget savings amount to £137m, a figure which is now greater than the Council’s annual Net Requirement Budget. The compound effect of this reduction over the seven-year period exceeds £1/2 billion of resource that has been removed from the Blackpool economy, a truly eye-watering statistic that will have profound and long-lasting implications for our town.

As at month five, the Council was forecasting an overspend by year-end for 2017/ 2018 of £3.4m with the main financial pressures presenting in Children’s Social Care, Strategic Leisure Assets, Business Loans Fund and Parking Services. However, in the context of £33m of Earmarked Revenue Reserves and with seven months of the financial year remaining in which to improve performance, the Director of Resources remains confident that a more acceptable and manageable position will be reached by year-end.

I can confirm that work on the Council’s Revenue and Capital Budgets for 2018/ 2019 is well underway. This work will be further informed by this afternoon’s announcement of the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s Budget. The Council made strong representations to the Chancellor’s Budget, for example, through the 2018/ 2019 Local Government Finance Settlement – Technical Consultation Paper, the Fair Funding Review and other Local Government Association (LGA), Special Interest Group on Municipal Authorities (SIGOMA), Key Cities Group and Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS).

## **Strategic Issues**

### **Museum**

As Members will recall, we had to make a difficult, but necessary decision earlier this year to withdraw the Museum project from its proposed location in the Winter Gardens. A key factor in this decision related to rising costs associated with using a listed building. Since then the team has worked hard on identifying a number of potential alternative locations and attracting new sources of funding. We have recently narrowed our focus to one preferred location. The new preferred location on the promenade will have better footfall and the scheme will continue to deliver all the same aims and objectives at a significantly lower cost than the previous location. The project has already been selected as Lancashire's top priority for The Northern Cultural Regeneration Fund, with submissions due at the end of November. At the same time, the team is also preparing bids to the Heritage Lottery Fund and Coastal Communities Fund, with the results known by March/ April next year. We have had strong positive feedback to date on the detail of this scheme and subject to positive outcomes in these funding rounds, the museum project would be fully funded.

### **Blackpool Airport and Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone**

Last month I was delighted to attend the UK's largest commercial property conference known as MIPIM in London. Lancashire had a strong presence at MIPIM UK, led by Marketing Lancashire on behalf of Lancashire Enterprise Partnership. Blackpool Council joined forces with our sub-regional partners in this effort and together we were able to deliver a credible presence facing the investor market, alongside the likes of the Manchester and Liverpool city regions, who have many more years of experience (and success) in such settings. It was great to see Lancashire working together in this context.

At the event, Marketing Lancashire unveiled the initial marketing material for Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone, part of the wider family of Lancashire Enterprise Zones. Our officers have had a firm input into this material and it looks very impressive. The full range of marketing material for Lancashire's Enterprise Zones will be launched at MIPIM Cannes early next year, targeting international investors.

I am pleased to say that the MIPIM UK event has led to a number of enquiries from investors and developers in the UK context. We now have scores of active enquiries and over 450 jobs have moved or been created at our Enterprise Zone, making it one of the best performing in the country. As I mentioned at the last Council meeting, the acquisition of the airport strengthens our hand further on the Enterprise Zone. We have begun work on a new Business Plan for the Airport, which should be available in the New Year. I am delighted to confirm that the major airside contracts have recently been renewed, including those for servicing the rigs. As a result, the Airport remains in a good trading position on which to build our new business plan.

## **Working with Partners**

### **The Future of Joint Local Authority Working in Lancashire, and the Establishment of an Economic Prosperity Board for the Fylde Coast**

In September, I updated Members on a meeting I had held with Jake Berry MP, Northern Powerhouse Minister, concerning the future of governance in Lancashire. As Members are aware, we have been operating in shadow form as a Combined Authority since the summer of last year, but have made little real progress with Government since the EU referendum on our application to become a fully-fledged Combined Authority, or on a devolution settlement for Lancashire. Jake Berry MP followed up on our meeting in writing, confirming his commitment to working with Lancashire to find a solution and confirming that it was entirely possible to have a Combined Authority without an elected mayor, as per the Conservative Party manifesto. The letter also confirmed the reality that only a Combined Authority can act as a vehicle for the devolution of power and resource to Lancashire.

Subsequent to this, at the following Lancashire Leaders' meeting we agreed that I would write to the Secretary of State, Sajid Javid MP, to attempt to seek further clarity and instruction on how Lancashire is to move forward. The Secretary of State replied in mid-October, confirming that the Government is open to non-mayoral Combined Authorities and that it was for Lancashire to come forward now with proposals that carry the maximum support of local partners. The Secretary of State also offered to meet.

I have since written to Lancashire Leaders, asking them to work with their local groups to arrive at a final position on their willingness to pursue Combined Authority arrangements for Lancashire and to bring their position to a key meeting between us all in later November. It is essential that we have clarity on each Local Authority position before attempting to take things any further with Government and certainly before any meeting with the Secretary of State. It is my sincere hope that all Lancashire authorities will see the importance in pursuing this agenda. Our neighbouring sub-regions are now motoring ahead with their Combined Authority arrangements, attracting new resource and powers through the devolution process and Lancashire is already getting further behind. I believe we all have a duty to do what we can to arrest this position, for the good of the whole County.

In contrast to the difficulties at County level, I am pleased that we are making real progress on arrangements for closer working on the Fylde coast. As Members are no doubt aware, the Fylde coast is a coherent economic and social space. We have cooperated closely in various ways with our neighbours in Fylde and Wyre for many years, recognising the close relationships we all share. We all share the desire to cooperate further, in particular on economic development. For this reason the Leaders of Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre Councils have collectively agreed to establish a Fylde Coast Economic Prosperity Board (EPB). EPB's have been established in other 'real world' economic areas of the country and I am pleased to say that all three Councils are taking reports through their respective channels in the coming weeks. The EPB will be a formally constituted committee of each respective Council, chaired by a Leader, but will also include private sector representation. The EPB will enable us to oversee jointly the delivery of our two Fylde coast Enterprise Zones at the Airport and Hillhouse

advocate and develop other projects drawing upon our collective resource. The EPB will not be a fund-holding authority and it cannot draw down powers and resource like a Combined Authority. Nevertheless, I believe this is a positive step forward for the Fylde Coast and its economic prospects.