

## LEADER OF THE COUNCIL – COUNCILLOR BLACKBURN

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### Financial Management

The latest financial performance report for 2014/ 2015 was reported to the Executive on 10 November 2014. As at month six, in-year pressures in Children's Services, Adult Services, Parking Services and Community and Environmental Services have been mitigated in part by the performance of Treasury Management, Area Forum and Ward Budgets. The 2013/ 2014 under spends have been redirected to bolster working balances, which are by now forecast at a level of £4.0m. Services are working to recover their deficits whilst at the same time financial planning for the 2015/ 2016 financial year.

### Asset Management

The lease has now been signed for the largest unit underneath the Talbot Road multi-storey car park to create a 300-seat 'World Buffet' restaurant which is due to commence fit out early next year.

### Legal Services

The service continues to defend public liability claims and to prosecute and secure convictions for a variety of offences including breaches of planning control, housing legislation and consumer protection legislation. It has successfully defended an appeal to the Court of Appeal concerning the proper construction of standard leases granted by the Council to its tenants and, in particular, whether it was entitled to charge certain management/ administration charges as part of the service charge recoverable under those leases.

Four Academy conversions were concluded in September and the service completed the purchase of a large property required in connection with the Tyldesley Road Housing Scheme.

### Electoral Services

At the Waterloo By Election on Thursday 9 October, Councillor Derek Robertson (Conservative) was elected to the position which became vacant following the very sad death of Councillor Tony Lee. The turnout was low at 22.5%. I welcome Councillor Robertson to his first Council meeting. The Returning Officer is now planning in earnest for next year's local and general elections and more information on key dates and publicity will be made available over the coming weeks/ months.

### Revenues, Benefits, Invoices and Payments

Council Tax collection at the end of September was 54.0%, which is 0.7% more than at the same time last year. The figure remains 1.3% lower than in years prior to the introduction of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, which continues to have an impact on collection. The Business Rate collection figure at the end of September was 51.0%, which is 3.0% less than the same period in the previous financial year. However, more customers are choosing to pay over 12 monthly instalments rather than 10 for both Council Tax and Business Rates and so a direct comparison with the previous year is not possible.

The average time to process new benefit claims and changes has remained static at 32 days over the last quarter. The Benefit phone line is still operating a reduced service, but it is anticipated that this situation will be reviewed in the near future. The phone line closure has allowed the service to concentrate on processing the backlog of claims and using the opportunity to promote online services to customers.

The service has been preparing for the introduction of Universal Credit and the processes we shall be carrying out on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions. These include delivering Personal Budgeting Support, dealing with Housing Cost enquiries and supporting customers to claim Universal Credit.

The Blackpool Council Advice team secured a total of £18,400 additional benefits for customers during the second quarter of 2014 whilst the Social Care Benefits team is promoting the Winter Warmth campaign when corresponding with customers.

The project to change banking provider will begin shortly, but accounts will be in place for the February main billing exercise for Council Tax and Business Rates.

### **Blackpool Fylde and Wyre Credit Union**

Over the summer the Credit Union successfully completed its refit and move to new branch premises on Birley Street with financial support to £60,000 committed in the Council's 2013/ 2014 Budget. The new premises opened its doors to the public on 11 October. The Credit Union is now open six days a week giving much greater visibility and easier access to all residents of Blackpool. This is reflected in early figures which indicate a large increase in take up of membership, savings and loans.

### **Risk Services**

The Civil Contingencies Team responded to the incidents of 21 October as caused by severe weather. There were a number of issues, which required dealing with, predominately related to the strength of the wind which crossed Blackpool. Staff from a wide range of Council services were on hand to help address these issues.

The Civil Contingencies Team will be completing the National Capability Survey on behalf of Blackpool Council in November. This is a central government survey where a submission is required every two years and assesses the Council's ability to respond to a major incident.

The Strategic Risk Register has been reviewed by the Corporate Risk Management Group. The revised document is now with the Corporate Leadership Team which is going to devote a session to undertake a full review of the document on 8 December 2014.

Data for the National Fraud Initiative 2014/ 2015 has now been submitted to the Audit Commission. Results of the data matching exercise are expected in January 2015.

### **Contracts and Purchasing**

Consultation documents have been released by the Cabinet Office in respect of the UK Transposition of new EU Procurement Directives into the Public Sector Contract Regulations and Lord Young's Proposals regarding Small and Medium Sized Enterprise (SME) access to public sector contracts. These legislative reforms will become statute early in 2015 and there will be a requirement to review Council Contract Procedure Rules prior to their introduction.

The outcome of the consultation is eagerly anticipated as whilst there is general support from National and Regional Procurement Bodies to implement the new directives early, there is a concern that the Lord Young Reforms, which are presented as a deregulatory measure to make procurements faster, more transparent and less bureaucratic will in fact have an opposite effect for SMEs and lead to increased administrative burden on local authorities who are already struggling with a diminished capacity base following public spending cuts. There is also a strong body of opinion that the proposal conflicts with the principles of localism as outlined in the Localism Act 2011 which provides freedom in how local authorities organise themselves and their ability to fund arrangements in a way that suits local circumstances.

CONTRACT	PROVIDER
Tax Advisor	Ernst and Young
Adult Drug and Alcohol Recovery Service (including Criminal Justice) Lot 1	Addiction Dependency Services
Drug and Alcohol Clinical Intervention Service for Adults and Young People - Lot 2	Delphi Medical
Drug and Alcohol Adult Harm Reduction, Assertive Outreach together with Non Clinical Sexual Health Harm Reduction Services - Lot 3	Renaissance at Drugline Lancashire Ltd (LOCAL)
Minor Works Framework	Warden Construction(LOCAL) Blackpool Services (LOCAL) F. Parkinson Ltd (LOCAL) Harry Fairclough SPIE (Garside and Laycock)
Business Travel	Click Travel
External Mail	TNT
Accommodation Based Services framework	The Ashley Foundation (Lots 1, 3 and 5) – (LOCAL) Bay Housing (Lots 4 and 5) – (LOCAL) Caritas Care (Lots 2 and 3) Great Places Housing Association (Lot 3) Home Group (Lot 6) Places for People (Lot 7)
Pest control chemical supply	Killgerm
Ad Hoc Waste	Smart Environmental Services Ltd (LOCAL) Fylde Coast Metals Waste Recycling (LOCAL)
Demolition of Progress House	Walter Forshaw
Passenger Transport Contracts - BTS	BTS (LOCAL)
Homeless Applications IT module	Abritas
Educational Diversity	Furniture Matters (LOCAL) Volunteer Centre (LOCAL) MENCAP (LOCAL)
Yeadon Way Refurbishment	Galliford Try

### Health and Wellbeing Board

The Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) received confirmation recently that the revised Better Care Fund plan had been 'approved with support'. We will shortly be allocated a relationship manager from the local area team and are awaiting the publication of the 2015/ 2016 mandate.

The Health and Wellbeing Board met in October and endorsed the Tobacco Free Lancashire Strategy, considered the Pan-Lancashire Smoking in Pregnancy Action Plan and supported the adoption of a Blackpool Tobacco Control Strategy and Action Plan 2014/ 2016 as a local tool for taking forward work to reduce the harms of tobacco use.

An update on the Social Isolation Task and Finish Group was discussed and it was agreed that Neil Jack would take the work forward with the Fairness Commission.

The Public Health Annual Report was endorsed, the report focuses on lifestyles and considers the role of smoking, drinking alcohol, lack of exercise and unhealthy diets on the health and looks at what can be done to promote and enable people in the town to make healthier lifestyle choices.

The Director of Public Health delivered a presentation on the recently published Due North report on health inequalities and actions have been developed to address the reports' recommendations.

### **Staff and Public Communications**

The next issue of 'Your Blackpool' will be distributed before Christmas. This issue will contain information on Christmas opening times and bin collections as well as information on how to keep warm and well this winter.

A communications plan has been implemented for the closure of Yeadon Way including a double page feature in 'Your Blackpool', dedicated webpage and social media. Throughout the five month closure there will be regular updates on progress.

Positive coverage has continued in the tourism sector with stories generated on the Illuminations, proposed Promenade beach huts, half term visitor figures and the most recent bathing water results.

### **"Customer First"**

As a result of a health and safety review, a number of changes have now been implemented in the Customer First area. The Customer Reception point has been extended to provide an additional reception desk for Benefit enquiries. Customer First and Benefits are working together to encourage and support Channel Shift to online services and improve the face-to-face services for those making enquiries at the centre.

Improved CCTV coverage has now been installed in the Customer First Centre and Town Hall reception area to help prevent inappropriate behaviour and to provide additional protection to staff and customers working in and using the enquiry and payment areas.

All customer facing staff are in the process of receiving refresher training on dealing with difficult customers.

### **Council Efficiency Programme**

The Budget for 2014/ 2015 required total savings to be found of £15.8 million. As at the half-year 66% of this savings target had been delivered. The current full-year forecast predicts that 84% will be achieved by the year-end, taking into account new in-year pressures and savings and work is underway to close this gap further with alternative savings plans.

### **Fairness Commission**

The Fairness Commission has been very busy during the last quarter, with a number of activities taking place as detailed below.

#### Fairtrade

A Fairtrade event took place at St John's Conference Centre during September hosting an international expert on Fairtrade who inspired attendees to work together to make Blackpool a Fairtrade Town. A working group has been formed and will meet at the end of November. Work has already been completed to identify establishments already committed to Fairtrade.

### Dementia Alliance

An event was held at the end of September jointly hosted by Blackpool Fairness Commission and the Alzheimer's Society to bring together Dementia Friends to create a Dementia Alliance for Blackpool. This group will be driven forward by Reverend Steve Haskett, Curate at All Saints Anchorsholme who is a member of the Fairness Commission Steering Group and has a particular interest in creating Dementia Friendly Communities.

### Review of the Fairness Commission

A review of the structure of the Fairness Commission has taken place supported by Edge Hill University, who are specialists in the field. The results will be presented to the Fairness Commission Steering Group at the end of November. Overall the Fairness Commission was recognised as an efficient delivery vehicle for a wide range of innovative projects which directly impact on the quality of life and opportunities for people in our communities.

### Teenagers Summit

This event will take place on 9 December building on the success of the Children's Summit held in the summer. A total of 80 teenagers will have the opportunity to share their views with members of the Steering Group including Blackpool Council, Lancashire Police, Blackpool Teaching Hospitals and Lancashire Fire and Rescue.

### **Community Engagement**

The Council Couch has been out on a tour of the town for the last eight weeks and has covered 18 locations and engaged with over 500 members of the public. The programme was extremely successful with many people attending to share their ideas.

The 'Give a Little' Campaign has been launched with donation points as per last year. It is hoped the campaign will help to brighten up Christmas for a large number of children and young people. Over 1000 children and young people benefitted from the campaign last year.

An Armed Forces Event took place recently to develop an action plan that will underpin the community covenant for Blackpool. Over 50 attendees from the Armed Forces, Council, Police, Health and Voluntary and Community groups came together to identify actions which can help to support veterans in Blackpool.

### **Blackpool Museum Project**

Progress continues to be made on the Museum for Blackpool Project. As part of the development phase of the project, eight new posts have been created to support the scheme including a project director. The new jobs have caused significant interest with in excess 400 applications being received from across the UK and internationally. It is anticipated that the full team will be in place by the New Year.

There are three major contracts to award in the development phase, Project management, Architect Design Team and Interpretive Design Team. It is anticipated that the project managers and the architect design team will be procured by Christmas with the interpretive design team being appointed early in the New Year. Smaller commissions to award include business plan support and fundraising advice which will be issued in the next few weeks.

£1.5 million has been earmarked for the Museum for Blackpool project from the Growth Deal, which was announced in July. Blackpool is one of a handful of projects nationally to secure funding for this kind of project. We are also working with Lancashire County Council colleagues to clarify those areas of the Museum for Blackpool project, which may be eligible for European funding and assess the realistic success rate. A number of trusts and foundations are being targeted and the project will be engaging a fundraising and income generation experts to provide advice and support.

## **Corporate Development**

Our Welfare Board has spent the last year ensuring that the Council's response considering how it can make it easier for residents to access services on line. In order to support this work I have appointed Councillor Fred Jackson as Digital Champion to drive our commitment to implementing the pledges of the Go On Digital Inclusion Charter, which will see us improve online service delivery, get more of our residents online and confident in using digital services and assist more of our staff in making better use of technology, both at work and in their home lives.

We have adopted revised arrangements for the Business Planning process undertaken by our Departments next year, strengthening the link between our actions and priorities.

## **Employee Development and Training**

### Recruitment and Training in Social Care

#### Campaign

A successful recruitment campaign has concluded which involved:

- Benchmarking salaries and job profiles.
- Creation of a bespoke recruitment brochure which highlights the Council's comprehensive benefits package, supervision, training and Continued Professional Development (CPD) programmes.
- Use of alternative advertising media, for example through Google Ads and Facebook which has widened the field of applicants.

We have now recruited 10 permanent Social Workers and three temporary Social Workers and therefore have no Qualified Social Workers vacancies at this time. All Advanced Practitioner vacancies are also filled.

There is ongoing work with regard to recruiting and/ or developing Team Managers to reduce existing Agency placements and prepare for new vacancies

### Step up to Social Work

Blackpool in partnership with Blackburn with Darwen and Lancashire were successful in a bid to deliver the Step Up to Social Work programme from January 2014.

This is a 14-month training programme designed to enable high-achieving graduates or career changers with experience of working with children and young people to become qualified social workers at the same time as gaining intensive hands-on experience.

We have 3 Step up to Social Work students all of whom have undergone a rigorous selection process and all of whom are progressing well. We are looking forward to seeing them Graduate in the summer of 2015.

### Training matrix

The Children's social care workforce development group has created a training matrix, for use by all staff within Children's services. For every role within children's services, at every level, courses have been identified as mandatory and a suggested timescale for completion given. This will ensure that all staff are working to a base line of knowledge. In addition to this there is a course menu, which identifies courses which may be of interest to staff within children's services, but which are not mandatory. The matrix has been launched and all staff are working to map their training records to it. It remains the responsibility of the workforce development group to ensure the matrix is kept up to date and reviewed regularly.

### Flu vaccines

The Occupational Health team has carried out flu vaccination sessions throughout the month of October and November for all employees. We have encouraged those employees who work with vulnerable clients in particular to participate in the campaign to protect them and our service users.