

**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**

#### **Council Plan – 2019/ 2024**

I am both excited and proud to be presenting an updated Council Plan 2019/ 2024, to this meeting of Council. This updated Plan sets out how we intend to build upon the substantial progress we have made since the previous Council Plan was published in 2015. Indeed, our achievements over the last four years are considerable and this updated Plan rightly draws attention to some of the great things we have delivered in the most difficult of financial contexts. A few highlights of achievements since 2015 include:

- Winning tens of millions of pounds of funding in highly competitive processes to build a new conference centre, tram extension and renew our bridges and arterial highway routes for the next generation;
- Securing the future of Blackpool Airport and Enterprise Zone status that has already delivered 700 new and safeguarded jobs;
- Establishing a £100m business loan fund, facilitating growth and job creation for local people in the town’s private businesses and enabling construction of some of the quality new hotels our town needs;
- Investing in our pioneering wholly owned companies, to include the creation of over 250 new quality, affordable homes out of failed buildings in central Blackpool and a bus and tram fleet that are the envy of our region; and
- Winning tens of millions of pounds of funding for schemes that are investing directly in the future of our young people: BetterStart, HeadStart and our Opportunity Area programme.

This is only a sample of the things we have delivered for the benefit of Blackpool and its residents. At the same time, we have now lost over £800m of funding since 2011. It is entirely accurate to say that since 2015 we have succeeded in delivering more with a great deal less.

Our updated Plan sets out the key things we will deliver over the next five years to build on what we have achieved so far. We are clear that our two core priorities are the right ones: the economy and our communities. Highlights of our agenda for 2019/ 2024 include:

- Delivery of thousands of new jobs and hundreds of millions of pounds of investment in our economy, to include the first phase of £300m Blackpool Central and continued Enterprise Zone growth;
- Driving positive change and investment in the town centre, to include the expansion of Talbot Gateway, opening our new conference centre, hotels, shopping centre extension, museum and transport interchange;
- Creation of up to 1,000 new affordable homes for rent via our wholly owned companies and strengthening our ability to improve standards in the private rented sector; and
- Continuing to improve life chances of our young people through investment in the likes of our BetterStart programme, leading improvement in educational attainment and the development of family hubs.

It is no exaggeration to say that we are living in an era of unprecedented uncertainty about the future funding of Local Government and the essential services it provides for local people. Regardless of this, our updated Council Plan demonstrates that we have the vision our town needs. It attests to our formidable track record of delivery and that we have the right ideas for the future. Furthermore, this updated Plan underlines our determination and will to ensure that Blackpool Council remains at the heart of driving positive change in our town for the benefit of its people.

### **Budget and General Finance Update**

Following a delay caused by the first aborted Brexit deal debate and vote, the Government eventually announced the Council's Provisional Settlement for 2019/ 2020 on 13 December 2018. The specific details and implications of this announcement will be contained within the Council's Revenue Budget 2019/ 2020 report. It is pleasing that there was some new money announced for social care, albeit a fraction of that urged by the Local Government Association.

However, as I reported to Members last time, reductions in funding and new cost pressures continue to mean that the Council faces a budget gap of approximately £9m for 2019/ 2020. As at month 8 the Council was forecasting an overspend by year-end of £3.8m with the main financial pressures presenting in Children's Services, Strategic Leisure Assets and Parking Services. This is an improvement on the position I reported to Members in November and whilst we face a very significant in-year pressure, the Council's wider financial position is secure. The Council holds a stable balance of approximately £32m of Earmarked Revenue Reserves and with four months of the financial year remaining, we are confident that the in-year position will improve further so that working balances of at least £3.0m are reached.

I am pleased to report to Members that at the end of month 8 of the financial year the amount collected for Council Tax (excluding Police and Fire precepts) was £38.0m and the collection rate was 69.4%. This compares to £34.7m and 68.3% at the same point in 2017/ 2018. The

amount collected has actually risen by £3.3m, which is due to increases in the Council Tax collection rate, level and tax base. In relation to claimants of Council Tax Reduction Scheme, the collection rate for their element of Council Tax has increased year-on-year by a staggering 4.7%, from 45.5% to 50.2%.

Business Rate collection for the same period stood at £33.6m with a collection rate of 67.1%. This compares to £34.5m and 68.0% at the same point in 2017/ 2018. Changes in both the Business Rate multiplier and base (due to the Revaluation in April 2017 and other movements) have made negative contributions of £0.9m, offset by a compensating increase to the Non-Domestic Rate (NDR) Top-up amount. The Council's share of business rate yield continues at 49%. From April 2014, Business Ratepayers have been entitled to elect to pay by 12 monthly instalments instead of over ten months. This has allowed businesses more time to pay. However, 592 business rate summonses have been issued this year up to month 8.

I reported to Members in November that we had joined forces with other Lancashire authorities to bid for Business Rate pilot status during 2019/ 2020. I am pleased to report that following a competitive process the Lancashire submission was successful in its application to pilot 75% Business Rates Retention in 2019/ 2020. Early estimates suggest that this is likely to benefit Lancashire by up to £10m, subject to collection rates. Discussions are ongoing amongst Lancashire Leaders on how best to use this new resource, but it is likely that Lancashire authorities, to support investment in infrastructure, will use a significant portion of this money collectively and economic development projects of pan-Lancashire significance.

## **Strategic Issues**

### **Blackpool Central**

On Friday 7 December 2018, I was delighted to make a public announcement regarding developer proposals for the 'Blackpool Central' area - formally known as Blackpool Central Leisure Quarter. The proposals to agree to the adoption of the proposed Masterplan and the draft Heads of Terms were subsequently approved by the Executive on 10 December. The Masterplan forms the basis for progressing a major leisure development on the site in line with the adopted planning framework.

The Executive report and announcement gave further information regarding discussions that have been undertaken between the developer (Nikal Limited and Media Invest Entertainment) over the past 18 months, since the Council entered into an exclusivity agreement for the site in March 2017. The press event was attended by both national and regional press and received television coverage on both Granada News and BBC Northwest. Feedback from the launch has been extremely positive to date.

The scheme presented by the developer involves the comprehensive redevelopment of the site with a mixed-use leisure development, which includes a number of new world-class attractions, food and beverage venues together with new hotels, car parking and residential apartments, with an investment value of circa £300m. The scheme will be themed upon the novel 'Chariots

of the Gods' written by Eric Von Däniken in the 1960's and 1970's, based upon unsolved mysteries of the past such as the pyramids of Egypt and Mexico, ancient cave drawings, the monuments of Easter Island and hypothesis of extra-terrestrial visitors.

There will be six key leisure components to the scheme, these are:

- i. The Flying Theatre
- ii. Adventure Land
- iii. Thrill and Gaming Zone
- iv. Virtual Reality Experience
- v. Multi-Media Exhibition
- vi. Alien Diner

The proposals are to be undertaken in four phases over a period of eight years. Enabling works are planned to commence on site 2020 with the construction of 1,000 space multi-storey car park, followed by Phase one, which will consist of the main attractions. Phase one is planned for completion and opening to the public before 2024, with subsequent phases being constructed up to 2029.

The agreement between the Council and the developer will be that of land sale, with developable plots being sold under the terms of a long lease. Draft Heads of Terms have been agreed with the detailed negotiations continuing to agree the final legal and financial matters. It is anticipated that these discussions will have concluded towards the end February 2019. Thereafter, consultation regarding the proposals will continue into 2019, with the developers looking to submit a planning application at the end 2019.

It is estimated that upon completion the proposal will see an additional 600,000 visitors in to Blackpool annually, with £75m additional spend and approximately 1,000 jobs being created. I am sure Members will join me in welcoming progress on this transformative scheme and the signal of confidence it demonstrates in the future of our town.

### **Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone**

Important work continues in progressing the early stages of development of Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone (EZ). As Members are aware, the Council's Executive and the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership (LEP) have now been approved the EZ master plan and EZ implementation plan and they have been submitted to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHCLG).

The present focus of activity is around securing outline planning consents for development the Common Edge Playing fields with various highway, environmental and ecological studies underway. Phase one development proposals were subject to an initial public consultation on 6 December with the application area extending beyond our borough boundary into Fylde. In parallel, the development of detailed proposals for the relocation of existing sports field facilities into a new purpose built sports village within the EZ and the design for the intended

new eastern gateway access road are both underway. The new eastern gateway access road will open up a number of new development plots, tackling an increasing shortage of available serviced development land within the EZ and will end constraints to development resulting from a single point of access to Blackpool Business Park via Amy Johnson Way.

There continues to be a steady stream of business and investor interest in the EZ, with one proposed new development now entering detailed design phase prior to a planning application being submitted in the second quarter, with three other developments currently under construction.

It is highly encouraging that the total number of jobs attracted to the EZ (new and safeguarded) since its inception in 2016 has now exceeded 700 against the 25-year target of just under 5000.

## **Policy Issues**

### **Universal Credit**

As has been widely reported in the press since Christmas, the Government's rollout of Universal Credit (UC) is now in a state of disarray. Finally, a serving Minister has recognised the appalling damage that UC has wreaked upon so many individuals and families and the new Secretary of State has halted the planned migration of over three million claimants to the new system. The Government should now admit that UC has been a disaster and completely abandon this unfair, flawed system.

Regardless of the mess at national level, full service rollout of Universal Credit by the Department for Work and Pensions began on 5 December 2018 in Blackpool. With effect from this date, the Benefits Service could no longer accept any new claim for Housing Benefit, with the exception of a limited number of categories. When a resident has a relevant change in circumstance a claim for Universal Credit may be triggered and they are no longer able to claim Housing Benefit either; these changes do not include a change of address within the borough. Whilst the numbers of residents who have ceased to claim Housing Benefit in Blackpool is minimal to date, the impact of Universal Credit is being closely monitored. We are doing this to ensure residents claim Council Tax Reduction where appropriate and that they are directed to the most appropriate assistance if they come to the Council for help. We have all heard stories of the unforgivable suffering caused by the rollout of Universal Credit elsewhere and I am determined we do all we can to minimise negative impacts here in Blackpool.

## **Transforming Services**

### **PSN Code of Connection**

I am pleased to report to Members that following a sustained effort by our ICT services that Council received a new Public Services Network (PSN) Compliance certificate in December 2018 after an assessment of its security infrastructure by an external PSN assessor. This provides assurance that the Council's infrastructure is sufficiently secure to interconnect with other

Government networks and public sector infrastructures. We understand that since the WannaCry cyber-attack on the NHS, PSN assessments have become more stringent and a significant number of local authorities including some of the bigger authorities are struggling to achieve compliance. Well done to our ICT team.