

## LEADER OF THE COUNCIL - COUNCILLOR SIMON BLACKBURN

---

All major strategic, corporate cross-cutting, financial reputational and commercially sensitive issues covers my portfolio and those of:

- Councillor Ivan Taylor (Cabinet Member for Projects and Partnerships)
- Councillor Lynn Williams (Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health)

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

#### **Elections 2019: Not One, but Two!**

Since our last full Council in January, the Returning Officer and his staff have facilitated two elections, one local and one European. The local election benefitted from six months planning; the European had to be planned and delivered in just six weeks! Successful delivery of these elections has necessitated some 450 different roles and countless hours organising, preparing and contingency planning. On behalf of all Councillors and candidates can I pass on well-earned thanks to the Returning Officer and his staff for two very well organised elections. Can I also thank the staff that went straight from organising elections into delivering an induction programme to help make our nine new councillors feel welcome and supported.

#### **Financial Monitoring: Draft 2018/ 2019 Accounts and the Year Ahead**

I can report to Members that the Council's 2018/ 2019 draft Accounts have now been completed in line with the format required by the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS). The draft accounts will next be examined by our newly-appointed external auditor, Deloitte and reported to the Audit Committee on 25 July 2019. The draft accounts show that the Council's working balances as at 31 March 2019 stood at approximately £7 million, above our target of £6 million due to a favourable in-year underspend of £1.02 million.

It is true that 2018/ 2019 witnessed substantial pressures within Children's Services due to the number and mix of Our Children. We succeeded in offsetting this overspend via a technical accounting adjustment regarding debt payments made to Lancashire County Council to finance the Council's waste disposal arrangements (formerly the Lancashire Waste PFI scheme), a favourable position in Treasury Management due to prudent cash flow management and non-deployed contingencies. I would like to congratulate all staff who have contributed to achieving a positive position by year-end.

Whilst I am pleased to acknowledge that working balances are at a record high, in part reflecting the financial risk environment, I am naturally concerned about the difficulty of maintaining such healthy levels in the context of the ongoing pressures we currently face. As such, I continue to be in close discussion with Chief Officers to ensure that the situation remains under continuous review. Nevertheless, the Council's financial standing remains sound. Our continued financial sustainability is no small achievement, not least when set in the context of the extreme financial difficulties now being faced publicly by a number of large local authorities in other parts of the country. One large council has already failed financially and the BBC has recently named ten others on a 'danger list' of most depleted reserves. If the Government does not offer some respite to its reductions of funding for essential public services, I fear it inevitable that other councils will follow.

As Members are well aware, we have to continue to make very difficult choices here in Blackpool to live within our increasingly smaller means. The Budget for 2019/ 2020 required total savings to be found of £9.0 million. This is on top of the £142.7 million we have been required to remove from our budget over the previous eight years. There is little doubt that the year ahead will again be a very tough one.

### **Financial Collections Review**

At the end of month 12, the amount collected for Council Tax (excluding Police and Fire precepts) was £50.4m and the collection rate was 92.0%. This compares to £46.4m and 91.3% at the same point in 2017/ 2018. The amount collected has actually risen by £4.0m, which is mainly due to increases in both the Council Tax rate and base. At the end of month 12, the amount collected for Business Rates was £47.7m and the collection rate was 96.2%. This compares to £47.6m and 95.6% at the same point in 2017/ 2018. The increase of 0.6% compared to the previous year equates to £0.4m, though the changes in both the Business Rate multiplier and base (due to the Revaluation in April 2017 and other movements) have made negative contributions of £0.3m, offset by a compensating increase to the Non-Domestic Rate (NDR) Top-up amount. The Council's share of Business Rate yield continued at 49%.

I am pleased that the last full financial year again showed an in-year collection improvement for both Council Tax and Business Rates. This was the second consecutive year of improved collection performance after a number of years of reduced collection following the introduction of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme in 2013. It is anticipated that 2019/ 2020 will be another challenging year for collection of monies owed to the Council.

### **Strategic Issues**

#### **Blackpool Museum Project**

I have previously advised Members of the success we had in securing millions of pounds of funding toward the Museum Project. Indeed, we have won £4m from the Northern Cultural Regeneration Fund; the Lancashire Growth Deal is contributing £1.5 million; and the Coastal Communities Fund a further £1.75 million. I can confirm that a Round 2 National Lottery Heritage Fund (formerly Heritage Lottery Fund) bid has been submitted for £4 million. The

result of this application will be known in June. If the application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund is successful, the Museum Project will then move into its delivery phase. This will be kicked off with a special event at which the name for the Museum will be formally announced. This is planned for the autumn and we are aiming to open the Museum for the 2021 season.

### **Blackpool Central Progress**

Further to the update I provided in January regarding the proposals for 'Blackpool Central', the Council have been in continuing discussions with the Developer Nikal Limited, to bring the scheme forward to delivery commencing 2020. Negotiations are at an advanced stage, with Council Officers and its advisors engaged in detailed discussions with regards to the land sale agreement and the overall development appraisals for the project. These discussions are taking time, owing to the complexities and scale of the project and the requirement to ensure the scheme delivers on the aspirations for the site, whilst securing and protecting the interest of the Council. The Council remains committed and hopeful of agreeing the terms of the sale very soon.

A key issue for the delivery of Blackpool Central is the future location of Blackpool Magistrates and County Courts. I can confirm that the Council has commissioned a number of studies and reports over recent months, the content of which will be used to support further dialogue with HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) over its plans for the future with a view to securing the relocation of the courts to an alternative site within the town.

### **Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone (EZ)**

A great deal of work continues in progressing Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone in accordance with the approved Masterplan and delivery plan. An outline planning application has been submitted, jointly to Fylde and Blackpool Councils for Phase One. Decisions in principle are anticipated in July/ August 2019 and the application will then be referred to the Secretary of State for a decision, as some of the land is within the current Fylde and Blackpool greenbelt. The final decision is anticipated being received in late autumn. Work on site is due to commence by early 2020, subject to approvals.

Members may already be aware of one very exciting development concerned our Enterprise Zone, a new transatlantic fibre optic communications cable linking Blackpool to New York. Aquacomms are constructing it and agreement has been reached to route this via the Enterprise Zone for onward connectivity to Newcastle and the Nordic countries. A local fibre network is being developed in association with this to serve the Airport Enterprise Zone and link Hillhouse EZ in Wyre via the Blackpool Tramway.

Presence of the new optic fibre link will provide fast communication links with timings of less than 64 milliseconds to transmit data from Blackpool Airport to New York, some 11 milliseconds faster than the best connections to London and thus providing a competitive advantage. The new connection will open up the possibility of securing investment in the provision of data centre facilities at the EZ and of securing investment from data driven industries. A study to

confirm the feasibility of undertaking such specialist development will be completed by the end of July.

I would like to advise Members that the approved Enterprise Zone Masterplan envisaged the demolition and redevelopment of the former Wellington Bomber factory fronting Squires Gate Lane as part of the second phase of the Enterprise Zone delivery. The property has now been purchased by a North West based property investor and developer who is looking to bring forward plans for early refurbishment and re-modelling of the approximately 800,000 sq. ft. estate. It is now our intention to work in partnership with the new owners to facilitate early investment in the property to maximise employment opportunities and provide improved accessibility.

There continues to be a steady stream of enquiries for the EZ, many enquiries are for smaller accommodation in the 1 – 15000 sq. ft. category, with several live enquiries up to 10,000 sq. ft., three in the 30 - 40,000 sq. ft. range and one tentative enquiry for up to 200,000 sq. ft. A total of 255 enquiries have been received since commencement of the EZ, some 57 businesses have located to the Enterprise Zone since April 2016 and a total of 1350 jobs have located to the Enterprise Zone of which a considerable number are considered completely new jobs to the area.

#### **Ministerial Visit by Lord Henley 17 May 2019**

I was delighted to welcome Lord Henley, Business Energy Industry and Skills Minister for local industrial strategies and the Northern Powerhouse, on a visit to Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone in May. Lord Henley undertook a tour of the Lancashire Energy HQ and participated in a round table discussion with leaders of Blackpool Council and representatives from subsea cabling company Aquacomms. Lord Henley acknowledged the potential of our EZ and the wider efforts to diversify our economic base. Lord Henley confirmed continuing Government support for Blackpool, both in terms of the development of the EZ, but also the continued socioeconomic regeneration of our town.

#### **Blackpool Airport Investments**

I can update Members with the positive news that a new instrument landing system (ILS) has been installed and is due to be commissioned with full CAA approval in June. Other navigational aids are in the process of delivery to maintain the Airport's operational capability. This is of particular importance to support the core offshore helicopter operations where the prime contractor, Spirit Energy, has indicated their willingness to renew its contract for a further five years. This commitment is great news for Blackpool Airport.

#### **Transforming Services**

##### **Domestic Waste**

I wish to remind members that the collection of domestic waste will be carried out by the newly formed arm's length company of the Council Blackpool Waste Services Limited trading as ENVECO North West Environmental Services from 1 July 2019. The company will not only carry

out Blackpool's household waste kerbside collections, but also explore innovative ways to reduce waste and improve recycling rates a part of the national agenda on waste reduction. As Members are aware, the service was previously operated by Veolia Environmental Services. However, bringing it under the umbrella of the Council provided opportunities for greater flexibility operationally and savings. I am also pleased to raise awareness of the fact that John Hawkin, who was previously Chief Operations Officer within Community and Environmental Services, has been appointed as Managing Director. Good luck to John and the new service!

### **Early Years Health Visiting Model Update**

I am sure Members will share my commitment to do everything we can to support children in their earliest years of life. It is the most crucial time. I would therefore like to set out some detail on progress we have made in enhancing our service for very young children, specifically the implementation and delivery of the new model for health visiting services in Blackpool. For the benefit of new Members, Blackpool Council commissions health visiting services for Blackpool from Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

The new service model includes an increase in the number of universal contacts to eight visits, which include an additional visit in the early weeks of life, a desktop review of progress at 12-15 months and a multiagency contact at three and a half years to assess school readiness. The methods, content and process of all the visits and professional practice have been reviewed and revised to improve consistence, quality and effectiveness. Better Start appointed the Renew team of consultants to support the service design and the Renew team has recently published a progress update report 'The Blackpool Health Visiting Service: Year One' assessing the progress of implementation (February 2019).

The report attests to the good progress that has been made in implementing the new model and commends the positive energy and commitment from everybody involved at all levels in the implementation of the transformation. It makes specific reference to the real and apparent commitment to the families of Blackpool amongst the staff and a continued willingness to engage with the challenges of changes to structures, processes and approach. An action plan has been developed arising from the recommendations and this will be carried forward immediately into the continued development of the service.

### **Adult Services: Technology Enabled Care (TEC) Inspection**

I am delighted to report that the Council's Technology Enabled Care Service, Vitaline, was inspected against the TEC Services Quality Standards Framework in May 2019 and has successfully been awarded the Quality Standard Accreditation. Vitaline is a 24-hour service that supports some of the town's most vulnerable people through the provision of Technology Enabled Care, including a falls pick up service, alarm call and response services as well as being the Out of Hours contact for Blackpool Council.

The inspection measured the services performance against the TEC Quality Standards, which include user safety, response, user and carer experience, continuous improvement and innovation. Discussion with members of the Service User Focus Group demonstrated that the

service is engaging effectively with Service Users to support service improvement. The group feel involved and expressed that they feel 'listened to'. Some members of the group have been involved in testing some of the new equipment. Discussion with the Service Users also verified that Vitaline is highly regarded and many examples were discussed evidencing how the service had gone the extra mile to support both users and carers. I would like to congratulate the team on their work and in securing the TEC accreditation.

### **Adult Services: Personal Health Budgets**

It is with pleasure that I can update Members on an area of practice within adult social care in which Blackpool is recognised as a trailblazing local authority. The Personal Health Budget (PHB) initiative was initially trailed in 2009 and was intended to improve outcomes, increase choice and control and encourage health and social care integration. PHB's can be notional (funds managed by Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)), Third Party (similar to a broker) or a Direct Payment. There are currently 34 people in Blackpool managing their own funds via a Direct Payment and all other Continuing Health Care (CHC) funded patients have a notional PHB.

Patient ages range from early 20's to late 90's, many of whom have complex health and care needs such as Motor Neurone disease, kidney failure, Muscular Dystrophy and serious physical conditions. A high proportion of patients had previously managed their own care via a Direct Payment prior to the decline in their health that resulted in eligibility for Continuing Health Care (CHC) funding. Moving to a PHB means they can continue employing the same assistants or agencies if they wish to and the benefit of our administration practices means we are able to transfer funding in a process that appears seamless to the patient and their families.

The majority of patients have personal assistants providing care. Part of the role of our officers is to ensure they are adequately trained to perform the tasks necessary to follow the care and support plan devised by the patient with their nurse advisor. This includes sourcing training from external providers and liaising with insurance companies to verify cover. The types of tasks undertaken are wide-ranging for personal care to overseeing and cleaning specialist equipment such as cough-assists and dialysis machines.

End of life care works particularly well with PHB direct payments, especially when family and/or friends are involved in caring for their loved one. Career breaks or reduced hours can be arranged in the knowledge that payments can be made for care that may help compensate for a reduction or loss of earnings. This reduces reliance on hospital and hospice services and gives comfort to the patient to be surrounded by people they know.

Access to services via a PHB is estimated to reduce costs to the NHS by around 17% per annum. This does not include the savings made from the reduction in visits to hospitals and calls on other NHS services, or the benefit of less time spent investigating and responding to complaints.

I am very pleased that Blackpool is leading the way in the positive use of PHB's. The Council is committed to continue to develop and promote the use of PHB's as the benefits to patients, loved ones and the NHS are increasingly clear.