

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL – COUNCILLOR BLACKBURN

Financial Management

The latest financial performance report for 2014/2015 was reported to the Executive on 9th February 2015. As at month 9 in-year pressures in Children's Services, Community and Environmental Services, Parking Services, Adult Services and Strategic Leisure Assets have been mitigated in part by some improvements in Treasury Management. The Council's forecast working balances are now at a forecast year-end level of £5.2m.

The Department for Communities and Local Government on 3 February 2015 announced Blackpool Council's Final Settlement Funding Assessment 2015 / 2016. The impact of this was an increase in Blackpool's funding allocation of £361,000 in 2015/ 2016 to address local welfare assistance. In order to maintain a freeze in Council Tax in 2015/ 2016, a revised General Fund Estimate of £128,073,000 was recommended to the Executive on 23 February 2015 with the £361,000 increase in funding being added to Contingencies to provide some further cushion against any non-delivery of/or slippage within the 2015/ 2016 Budget savings programme of £25.2m, as £400,000 growth funding had already been included in next year's Budget to support local welfare assistance.

Council Efficiency Programme

The Budget for 2014/ 2015 required total savings to be found of £15.8million. As at 31 December 2014 (month 9) 88% of the 2014/ 2015 savings target had already been delivered. The full –year forecast predicts the same will be achieved by the year-end, which takes into account new in-year pressures and savings, but work is ongoing to close this gap further with alternative savings plans.

Revenues, Benefits, Invoices and Payments

The cumulative average time to process new benefit claims and changes has increased by the end of the last quarter to 37 days. This increase is due to a combination of processing old changes in circumstances and a backlog of new claims. Work is well underway to automate the download of claims into the back office processing system, which should help to improve performance figures over time.

The Universal Credit housing pilot, where the local authority verifies tenancy information supplied to the Department for Work and Pensions, went live on 26 January 2015. The pilot is likely to continue into 2015/ 2016 and is already providing useful data by allowing the Council to identify customers who need to claim Local Council Tax support, without the pilot the Council would not have been aware of these cases. Rollout of Universal Credit will include families in Blackpool with effect from 2 March 2015.

The Blackpool Council Advice team secured a total of £47,500 additional benefits for customer during the third quarter of 2014 with 100% positive customer feedback for the period.

Council Tax collection at the end of January was 86.85%, which is 0.8% less than the same period last year. The Business Rates collection figure at the end of January was 84.31%, which is 6.26% less than the same period in the previous financial year. Larger payments are expected during February and March than in previous years as businesses have had the right to pay over 12 monthly instalments this financial year, rather than 10 monthly payments in previous years. This prevents a direct comparison with the previous year.

Customer First

Changes to the telephony system have recently been implemented giving options for directing calls straight to other services where appropriate. If the lines are busy, the system now provides an estimated waiting time for calls to be answered.

Officers in Customer First are liaising with the relevant service areas to prepare for the increased demands expected due to the annual billing and benefit notifications process, as well as preparing for any enquiries for the elections that are anticipated due to the new Individual Electoral Registration.

Asset Management

The demolition of the former Progress House building has been completed and site investigation works are currently underway on behalf of Lancashire Constabulary.

The new Council offices at Number One Bickerstaffe Square have recently won a national energy award as "Energy Efficient Building of the Year" and are also nominated for a Civic Trust Award to be announced at the end of the month.

Initial design works have commenced for the Central Business District phase two hotel development and a planning application is due to be submitted in late February.

Risk Services

The Civil Contingencies Team has been involved in co-ordinating the Council's response to a number of severe weather incidents over the winter months. On 15 January 2015 in particular, although there were no major single incidents, the combination of a significant amount of small ones did stretch responding officers and equipment available resulting in the Council coming close to declaring a major incident as a direct result of demand exceeding our response capability.

A Corporate Business Continuity Exercise was facilitated for members of the Corporate Leadership Team and Senior Leadership Team on 5 February 2015. The outcome of this was a number of lessons that will be fed into the revised Corporate Business Continuity Plan and will also inform the changes required to ensure that the Critical Activity List is up to date and fit for purpose.

The service has been closely involved in the investigation into a former employee of the Rideability Service who has recently been found guilty of stealing £46,000 from the Council and the Rideability charity. This case has now been referred to Crown Court for sentencing.

As of 1 March 2015, all new referrals for Benefit Fraud investigations will be sent to the Department for Work and Pensions who will lead on the investigations. Steps are being taken to ensure that this message is effectively communicated to staff and the public so that there is clarity in the reporting process.

The National Fraud Initiative (NFI) data matches for 2015 have now been received with 4,324 matches in total and 1,064 of these flagged as "high risk" to be prioritised for investigation. Risk Services are co-ordinating the Council's response to dealing with the matches, which cover a wide range of services and data sets.

Contracts and Purchasing

Contracts awarded since the last meeting are listed below:

CONTRACT	PROVIDER (Location)	ESTIMATED CONTRACT VALUE
Marton Mere Ground Investigation	Mott MacDonald (Croydon)	£12,000

CONTRACT	PROVIDER (Location)	ESTIMATED CONTRACT VALUE
Maraton Mere Spillway	Bethell Construction (Kearsley, Gtr Manchester)	£128,000
Maraton Mere Pumping Station	Wm Pye Ltd (Longridge)	£200,000
Provision of Bread and Morning Goods	Partnership between Morris Quality Bakers and Food Service Options (Chorley / Bolton)	£872,000
Blackpool Museum – Project Manager	Prince’s Regeneration Trust (London)	Development Phase - £88,559 Delivery Phase – (Subject to funding bid) £166,250
Blackpool Museum – Architect Design Team	Buttress Fuller Alsop (Manchester)	Development Phase - £378,570 Delivery Phase (Subject to funding bid) - £607,719
Computer Consumables	Supplies Team (Sheffield)	£65,000
Fresh Meat	Clifton Quality Meats (Blackpool)	£176,000
Oral Health	Blackpool Teaching Hospital (Blackpool)	£55,000
Fitness Equipment – Palatine School	Matrix (Stoke on Trent)	£91,000
NHS Health Checks - Data Processor	Health Intelligence (Sandbach, Cheshire)	£51,600

A record 44% of Council overall third party spends is now with local providers/ suppliers as at quarter three in 2014/ 2015. This has increased from 38% as at 2013/ 2014 year end.

The Public Contracts Regulations Act 2015 has now been published and came into effect on 26 February 2015. The Regulations aim to make the current rules quicker, simpler and more flexible and will help councils to contribute to economic growth by improving the access of suppliers to the EU market.

A host of reforms are identified in the new Regulations, including a new Light Touch Regime, reduced timescales, new types of procedure, payment of supply chains and they will also implement two of the ‘Lord Young’ reforms, namely no Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) under the EU threshold and advertising on Contracts Finder for local authority procurements over £25,000 or each council’s standing order limit whichever is the higher. The requirement to publish on Contracts Finder will become effective for local authorities on 1 April 2015.

The Council’s Procurement procedures and standard control documents will be updated to reflect the changes.

Legal Services

The service has completed various land transactions, including the lease of Unit 1, Talbot Road Multi-Storey Car Park and the lease of the Marton Mere Holiday Park Visitor Centre (and an associated refurbishment contract). The land transactions associated with the conversion to an academy of the former Christ the King Catholic Primary School have also been completed, as has a licence agreement to facilitate the recent 2015 North West Stages (Motor) Rally on the promenade.

The inquiry into the Rigby Road/ Tyldesley Road Compulsory Purchase Order resumed on 5 and 6 February 2015 and was formally closed by the Inspector on 13 February 2015. A decision is not expected for some weeks.

Recent prosecutions for toy safety, trademark, truancy and street trading offences have resulted in convictions and other varied prosecutions continue to be ongoing. The Core Strategy Examination (Planning) is to take place in May 2015 and the service is assisting with this matter.

Lexcel is the Law Society's legal practice quality mark for excellence in legal practice management and excellence in legal client care. The Legal Service has been accredited with Lexcel since 2004 and was inspected again on 21 and 22 January 2015. The service has retained the accreditation and the Lexcel Inspector found no non-compliances and no areas for improvement.

Blackpool Museum Project

The new in-house project team is now complete with four of the eight staff recruited locally. Led by Project Director Belinda Betts, the team has been working on community mapping and engagement, developing skills and learning contacts and researching collections and stories, as well as writing the functional brief for the design team and procurement of the professional services.

In the New Year, Buttress from Manchester was appointed as Architects on the project leading the design team that includes Buro Happold as structural engineers and Troup Bywaters and Anders as services engineer. The team is currently in the process of tendering for interpretative design, quantity surveying, governance and fundraising. They will be releasing the business planning tender shortly. The plan is to reach Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) stage two in July 2015 and to seek further approvals at the Executive meeting in July.

The team is planning to make the Round Two submission to the Heritage Lottery Fund in December 2015.

Electoral Services

The Electoral Services Team in the Governance and Regulatory Services Directorate is busy preparing for the forthcoming Local and Parliamentary Elections. The last time both were held on the same day in Blackpool was 1997 and it is anticipated that over 600 people will support the Returning Officer in delivering these Elections. The Notice of Election for the Local Election will be posted on Monday 16 March 2015 and this will begin the pre-Election period.

Managing the budget process

The Employee Relations Team is currently working with managers and employees to ensure the Budget proposals for 2015/ 2016 are being managed consistently across the Council.

A series of briefings took place across the authority on the 8 and 9 January to advise staff of the implications of the budget reductions.

Those employees placed at risk of redundancy have access to a comprehensive package of support to ensure that they receive all the help they need during this difficult time. The package includes

dedicated support from an Employment Advisor, group information sessions, training, careers and money advice and access to the Employee Assistance Programme.

In order to reduce the number of compulsory redundancies, a voluntary redundancy scheme was offered and on closing date of 2 February, almost 90 applications had been received. For those services which are under review there will be further opportunities for employees to request voluntary redundancy once the review outcome is known and therefore this figure is expected to rise.

Health and Wellbeing Board

The Health and Wellbeing Board met on 28 January 2015. It received the annual report of the Child Death Overview Panel, which has a responsibility to review the deaths of children and young people resident within the three local authority areas of Blackpool, Lancashire and Blackburn with Darwen, with the aim of identify themes, trends and recommendations in an attempt to prevent future child deaths. The report makes a number of recommendations for the Board to take forward, which will be done through the Blackpool Safeguarding Children Board.

An update on the Winterbourne View Concordat gave assurance to the Board that the needs of individuals falling under the Winterbourne criteria are being met. The Concordat is a programme of action designed to transform services for people with learning disabilities or autism and mental health conditions or behaviours described as challenging. It should be recognised that a significant amount of work is underway and good progress has been made locally to achieve the objectives set out in the Concordat.

The Board received a report on the NHS England paper 'Primary Care Co-commissioning' and its implications. The paper offers Clinical Commissioning Groups the opportunity to assume greater power and influence over the commissioning of primary medical care from April 2015, with the option of choosing one of three co-commissioning models as follows:

- Greater involvement in primary care decision-making by greater involvement in discussions, but no decision-making role
- Joint commissioning arrangements with NHS England area teams
- Delegated commissioning arrangements – full responsibility for commissioning general practice services delegated to Clinical Commissioning Group.

The Board was advised that Blackpool Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) has submitted an application to NHS England to take on full delegated arrangements from April 2015. The CCG has discussed the principles of co-commissioning primary care services with practices and has received overwhelming support and confidence of the ability of the CCG to deliver this.

The Board also received an update on the current delivery of Affordable Warmth initiatives across Lancashire and an overview of the planned changes that are currently in development, which aim to maximise the opportunities available to Blackpool and the other Lancashire authorities by packaging together work, which is less attractive to the private companies running the scheme. Blackpool has one of the highest levels of fuel poverty in England and a greater percentage of hard to treat houses than other areas, which are those without a cavity wall or with a roof lift into the attic and therefore require expensive solid wall insulation.

The next Board meeting is on 4 March and will consider items including the Blackpool Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report 2013/ 2014, the Lancashire Crisis Care Concordat and Action Plan to sign up to, consultation on the Fylde Coast Highways and Transport Master plan, which includes a significant health component, approval of the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment, which informs decisions on the provision of Chemists and services available through them locally and an update on

the Project Search, the Council's programme for supporting young people with learning disabilities into employment.

Marketing and Promotion

The Channel Shift Project, which aims to streamline how enquiries to the Council are handled and will encourage more people to carry out transactions online rather than face to face or over the telephone where possible is progressing well. The first project will focus on taking the "Bulky Matters" service online and is expected to be ready for testing in spring.

Increased enquiries to The Wedding Chapel at Festival House on the Promenade have been experienced as a result of a New Year marketing campaign, which has used social media, digital marketing, radio advertising and new signage.

Public Health's focus this last month has been on sugar swaps, to be clear on cancer (stomach cancer) and also alcohol and substance misuse through promotion and development of Blackpool Council's Horizon Service. The Horizon Service has radio ads airing on Rock FM this month