

## CORPORATE PORTFOLIOS

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The 'Corporate' portfolio consists of:

- Councillor Lynn Williams – Acting Leader of the Council
- 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>

## Strategic Issues

### COVID pandemic developments and local arrangements

As a country and a town, we have now been living with the devastating effects of Coronavirus for four months. All of our thoughts remain with those who have lost loved ones, are recovering from the virus and of course the tireless key workers across the town who continue to go above and beyond to keep us safe.

We are proud to say the Council was quick to respond, with preparatory work underway some weeks before the lockdown on 23 March. Very quickly when the impact on our most vulnerable members of the community was known we established Community Hubs to ensure that those needing to self-isolate or shield received the support they needed, including the coordination of food parcels, welfare checks, medication and many other practical tasks. There have been some extraordinary examples of creative, well led partnership working across the public, private and third sector, all focussed on supporting our communities at such a challenging time. We have seen social care and health working together to deliver strong support for our care providers who we are sure we all recognise have been on the frontline of a rapidly changing and challenging landscape. The tireless work that our schools and early years settings have undertaken to support the children of key workers and those children who are most in need of support from a wider network. We have seen unprecedented support for our homeless population, ensuring that they were able to safeguard themselves and others. We have seen an incredible effort to ensure that payments were made to local businesses promptly to help them cope with the impact and protect livelihoods. My thanks go to everyone who has been involved in these and the countless other examples of extraordinary work that has taken place.

As we move out of the very restrictive lockdown approach that we saw at the end of March, we are taking steps to ensure that we have strong governance in place to support our understanding of the current picture of the prevalence of the virus in the town. The Director of Public Health is legally responsible for managing outbreaks of communicable disease, which present a risk to the health of the public, including being assured that the arrangements to

protect communities are robust and are implemented. To support this responsibility we have established two local Boards:

- **The COVID-19 Health Protection Board:** This is responsible for the implementation of an Outbreak Management Plan, which includes how we would respond to outbreaks and incidents in particular settings like care homes, schools and workplaces; and aims to give reassurance that a timely and appropriate response is in place locally in order prevent, detect and manage further incidents and outbreaks of COVID-19. Staff have been appointed to each complex setting; with guidance, advice and training offered to all in preparation for outbreak control. Prevention work is ongoing with care settings to create the conditions for lockdown restrictions to be safely relaxed, preventing and avoiding transmission and providing reassurance to the public.
- **The COVID-19 Outbreak Engagement Board:** This is chaired by Councillor L Williams as Acting Leader of the Council with representation from the Director of Public Health and other Council Directors, Heads of Service, Communications Team, Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, Fylde Coast NHS CCG and Healthwatch. The Board is developing a communications plan to ensure that messaging to the public is positive, raises confidence and offers reassurance about what the council and partners are doing in response to COVID-19, and what the public can do keep themselves safe.

### **Supporting NHS Test and Trace**

The Public Health team, with support from wider council departments, are an integral part of this new service, which launched on 28 May 2020 across England. The aim is to help identify and control coronavirus, saving lives by tracing contact those with confirmed cases have had with other people, and prompting them to self-isolate. A single point of contact (SPOC) has been established to receive notifications of outbreaks. This is monitored by the Public Health admin team and calls and/or emails forwarded to appropriately qualified and informed staff to respond to and take any necessary action.

### **Loss of life from COVID-19 in Blackpool**

Using the standard method of assigning a cause of death based on the cause recorded on death certificates, **129** residents of Blackpool have sadly died due to COVID-19. Every death is a tragedy and we are sure all Members and the wider Council will join us in sending our heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of each victim of this indiscriminate disease.

The rate of loss of life from COVID-19 in Blackpool is very similar to other areas. The number of deaths peaked in the week ending 17 April, with 22 deaths recorded and has fallen to five in the week ending 12 June, the latest week where there is data available at the time of publication.

### **COVID-19 Cases in Blackpool**

As Members may be aware, we have only just received access to full data on COVID-19 testing in Blackpool, which has held back our understanding of the spread of the virus significantly. We are now due to get weekly updates which will greatly assist in our monitoring and surveillance

of the data, as we seek to understand whether the national downward trend evidenced in the national Infection Survey Pilot is also seen locally.

Until a few days ago, data available to us only covered those with a clinical need and health and care workers. Taken together, this shows that positive tests started to peak in mid-April, at 29 cases a day, which fell to 10 cases by 1 May. We are pleased to say that, with the exception of three consecutive days in mid-May where over 20 cases were recorded, the latest data from June shows a general decline in positive cases. This is particularly true since 10 June, after which only one day has seen more than five cases recorded.

## **Working in Partnership**

### **An outpouring of Corona Kindness**

At the end of March, the Council set up a free phone helpline and email address, staffed by the Contact Centre team and those redeployed from other areas, for people impacted by the crisis in Blackpool. Over 10,000 calls and emails have been received to these dedicated lines since they were put in place, with a peak of over 1,600 in one week in early April. The team was able to deal with many of the enquiries straightaway, helping people access the right support and advice to meet their needs.

Where people needed further support, they were contacted by our “Kindness Coordinators”, a group working together to build a support network drawn from many Council services including HR, Public Health, Planning, Audit, Leisure Services, and Social Care. The team rapidly recruited nearly 200 volunteers from the over 500 local residents and businesses who offered their support and worked in ward areas across Blackpool to coordinate and support people so that they could stay safe and secure in their homes, particularly where they had additional vulnerabilities.

It is truly heart-warming to see how many of our partners pulled together with us at this time of need, which meant we could quickly develop community hubs right across Blackpool so that support and welfare visits could happen quickly. We want to extend our gratitude to every individual and business who got in touch to offer assistance to their community and in particular the staff and volunteers who have been instrumental in the delivery of support from Warren Manor Day and Support Services, Blackpool Football Community Trust, Talbot and Brunswick Family Hub, The Magic Club, Blackpool Coastal Housing, The Boys and Girls Club, Revoelution and HIS Provision, Groundwork, The Carers Centre, Empowerment, Blackpool Volunteer Service and Blackpool Promotions.

We should also applaud our local business community. At a time when they had every right to be more concerned about their own futures, many of them across the town stepped in to the space left by the overstretched national supermarket delivery network and made doorstep deliveries of a wide variety of goods available to residents, especially those most at risk.

As many organisations are now providing services in new and innovative ways, we have been able to reduce the number of hubs operating to two and as we move in to August, will phase our support down. The partnerships forged in this time and the lessons we have learned, will stand us in good stead should support need to be provided again in the future.

### **Continued progress towards Blackpool Central**

Despite the impact of the pandemic, work has continued to deliver our priority regeneration and economic development projects. The Blackpool Central developers have remained positive and active during this period. Nikal have brought on board Manchester-based architects Spawforths to assist with developing the overall masterplan for the site and the design for the buildings, whilst their partners Media Invest Entertainment are refining their proposition for the types of visitor experiences that will be incorporated into the development, with some very exciting and innovative elements being considered. They intend to make a planning submission by January 2021, with development on site starting later that year.

The wider development needs the existing Courts need to be relocated and to enable this the Council has acquired the former Devonshire Road hospital site, ensuring the deliverability of both future court services in Blackpool and the wider delivery of the Blackpool Central scheme.

### **Talbot Gateway – work underway**

Site work on phase 2 of the project is now underway. The Wilko building has been handed over to Robertson Construction Group, who are currently undertaking testing for asbestos and ground carcinogens. Demolition of the building is currently expected in early August, after which part of the site will be handed over to the tram contractor (Sisk) to complete the tramway extension. Construction of the new Holiday Inn Hotel, due to open in April/May 2023, will follow afterwards.

Phase 3 of Talbot Gateway is at the feasibility stage, with plans for a new office development that will accommodate over 2,000 employees under discussion with the potential occupier's commercial advisors. This involves looking at the length of the lease needed to make the project viable, with a 25-year rental position under consideration, along with shorter and longer terms for financial comparison. To enable this, we are continuing to acquire properties that will facilitate this development, and it is hoped that all the remaining properties can be purchased by agreement.

### **Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone**

Nearly 1,500 jobs are now located at Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone across 80 businesses, representing significant progress towards delivering the anticipated 5,000 jobs and 180 companies over its 25 year life. Inevitably, the impact the COVID-19 pandemic will make some short term reverses and job losses likely, but the support given will help increase business resilience and allow those on the Enterprise Zone to play a key role in the economic recovery ahead.

Good levels of occupier interest have been maintained from a wide spectrum of business, whilst eight new developments have been completed and planning consent has been secured for a new 4,000m<sup>2</sup> factory unit on Amy Johnson Way with construction work expected to commence in August. Work has also continued to roll out the super-fast fibre optic broadband across the Enterprise Zone (EZ) and town in preparation for the landing of the Aquacomms Transatlantic cable which with connectivity of less than seven milliseconds to the United States is already drawing interest from the ever growing data sector.

Blackpool Airport is an integral part of the EZ and has remained operational throughout the pandemic providing vital support to the offshore gas platforms. An architectural feasibility study is underway, which will identify options for the provision of new aircraft hangars and will examine the potential for a new fire station and control tower.

To capitalise on changing external factors, we are revising the Enterprise Zone masterplan and delivery plan. For example, the new owners of Squires Gate Industrial Estate want to focus on refurbishment rather than redevelopment, providing smaller industrial facilities, whilst Sport England requirements and specific highway advice will require modifications to the proposed provision of new sporting facilities at Common Edge. It will also take into account future airport operational infrastructure and opportunities, which may arise from the new transatlantic telecommunications link. A new delivery plan outlining projected costs income and outputs in terms of jobs and Gross Value Added (GVA) will be presented to the Executive at its September meeting.

## **Corporate Issues**

### **Counting the cost of the pandemic**

The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown restrictions has made this an unprecedented year in terms of the operational and consequential financial demands being placed upon the Council. The impact has been felt in a variety of ways from increasing service demand and cost, to curtailing income sources for both Council services and our private sector providers, wholly-owned companies and partners. This has meant budgetary overspends, supplier reliefs and subsidies, cash flow loans and other support measures, in addition to implementing at short notice Government policy initiatives such as business support grants, business rate reliefs and infection prevention and control grants.

We have now begun to forecast our revenue outturn for 2020/2021. This forecast incorporates the impact of COVID-19 upon the Council's wholly-owned companies for which the Council is parent company and underwriter. A financial modelling exercise has been undertaken in order to identify the Council's exposure to potential wholly-owned subsidiary company losses and their need for cash injections during the 2020/2021 financial year, modelling "best" and "worst" case scenarios and considering the impact of potential "trigger" events, which move companies from one scenario to another – for example, by changing government guidelines. This also allows the Council to consider when cash flow subsidy in compliance with State Aid rules may be required,

and plan our own finances effectively. As at month 2, the Council faces forecast aggregated Company losses in 2020/2021 in the range of £9m to £18m.

This work now allows us to finalise plans to enable all our companies to continue to operate viably into the longer term, with a view to returning to a cumulative surplus for each company within five years unless a previously agreed longer term recovery plan was already in place. This approach also takes advantage of the positive strength of the Council's balance sheet, which currently exceeds £0.25 billion in value.

Overall the Council's full-year forecast position at the end of the second month of 2020/2021 shows a marked deterioration in its financial standing when compared with the draft unaudited position as at the close of 2019/2020. Working balances are expected to fall by the forecast overspend of £24.1m to a deficit of £21.8m by the end of 2020/2021. However, £12.8m of this overspend is COVID-19-related and is part of the current lobby for a further £16.7m (including other non-General Fund pressures) of Government financial support. The bulk of the remaining overspend is due to continuing pressures in Children's Social Care, which have been planned for within a refreshed medium-term financial strategy.

The Council's Revenue Budget for 2020/2021 set a target level of General Fund working balances of around £6m. Despite the circumstances it is still deemed appropriate to maintain this target level of £6m for working balances for the medium term and every endeavour is being made to deliver this.

Earmarked revenue reserves at the start of the financial year stood at a record high of £46.8m, though with known in-year commitments against this the balance will fall to an estimated £34.5m by the end of the year. This should still be sufficient to underwrite the current year's financial risks with a separate financial plan in place for the Council's wholly-owned companies. It is hoped that by the end of the calendar year there will be sufficient clarity regarding COVID-19 and future funding policies for local government to enable a refresh of the medium-term financial sustainability strategy, together with an updated medium-term financial plan of at least five years' horizon.

Specific COVID-19-related funding support announcements made so far by the Government to the Council include two tranches of support funding (£6,084,606 and £3,810,835), Infection Prevention and Control (£2,193,612) and Test and Trace (£1,693,874), plus £11,250 for a Homeless Top-up, £122,772 to re-open High Streets safely, and £26,000 in tranche 1 of the Emergency Active Travel fund. An allocation to support people struggling for food and essentials has yet to be confirmed.

This initial funding from Government is of course welcome. However, it falls a long way short of covering the full extent of expenditure and loss of income that the Council has endured as a consequence of the pandemic. Early in this crisis the Secretary of State promised that local government would be fully compensated for the impacts of COVID-19. We now urge all parties to continue to lobby the government to come good on this promise.

## **Council Tax Reduction Scheme Hardship Grant**

In contrast to the austerity measures which introduced the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, hitting the most vulnerable in society directly in their pockets, the Council Tax COVID-19 hardship fund has provided local authorities in England with funding to support economically vulnerable people and households directly. Blackpool's allocation was £2.8m, with the guidance stating that a grant of up to £150 should be given to all working age Council Tax Reduction recipients throughout 2020/2021, numbers of which are expected to increase throughout the year. Any residual monies will be used to support existing schemes the Council operates, such as Discretionary Support and Council Tax Discretionary Support, as well as to fund a trainee debt advisor to assist residents in financial difficulty. Awards will be made automatically to all eligible accounts as soon as software becomes available and there is no need to apply for the grant.

## **Grant Payments**

After an initial rush of applications, numbers of businesses seeking Business Support Grants have tailed off. As at 29 June the Council has paid over £43m of the £59m allocated to 3,813 businesses, with all eligible businesses who have provided the correct information have now been paid a grant of either £10,000 or £25,000, with those who have multiple properties receiving several grants. A further 600 applications have been received for our discretionary grants, and a further £220,000 already paid.

## **Transforming Services**

### **A Digital Revolution**

One of the positives to come out of lockdown has been the transformation of the Council's use of digital systems, unleashing the previously untapped potential of the Council's digital platforms. Teams are harnessing the power of Skype for Business, Microsoft Teams and other apps and tools not just to replace face to face meetings but to collaborate together in a new way. Over 1,400 staff are now active users of Microsoft Teams, compared to 200 in February, thanks to a superb effort by our ICT department to roll out a new Virtual Private Network with more capacity. This has proven to be absolutely vital and will set us in good stead for the future.

Examples of new tools developed include a Workflow system for outbreak tracking in residential care homes, a COVID-19 children services risk assessment process, a free school meals ordering form, homeless support demand management and a system to register and record receipt of laptops for vulnerable children amongst many others. All of which were vital in ensuring a quick, reliable, and auditable response when people needed it most.

## Awarded Contracts

Contracts awarded since the last meeting are as follows:

<b>CONTRACT</b>	<b>PROVIDER (Locations)</b>	<b>TERM (including extensions)</b>	<b>CONTRACT VALUE</b>	<b>NO. OF INITIAL BIDS</b>	<b>BIDDERS WITH FY POSTCODE</b>
Legal Advisors - Houndshill	DAC Beachcroft <b>(London)</b>	24 months	£199,999	Direct award	0
Cashless Parking	PaybyPhone <b>(Hertfordshire)</b>	2 years	Dependent upon usage	Direct award	0
Drugs & Alcohol Adult Harm Reduction, Outreach and Non Clinical Sexual Adult Health Harm Reduction Services	Renaissance <b>(Blackpool)</b>	3 years (1 + 1 year extension)	£2,675,000	1	1
Strategic Housing - Claremont Urban Planning Review	Lambert Smith Hampton <b>(London)</b>	4 months	£54,970	1	0
Strategic Housing - Claremont & Revoe Urban Planning Review	G L Hearn <b>(London)</b>	4 months	£58,375	1	0
HIV self-sampling service (Including Syphilis)	SH:24 CIC <b>(London)</b>	2 years (18 months extension)	£10,000	Direct award	0
Museum - Marketing Consultant	Brazen <b>(Manchester)</b>	18 months	£50,000	14	0
Auditor for WOCs (include for company valuations)	Smith Craven <b>(Doncaster)</b>	1 year (1+1+1 year extension)	£300,000	2	0
Janitorial	Arrow County Supplies <b>(Shrewsbury)</b>	2 year (1 + 1 year extension)	£350,000	4	0
Cleaning of Pupil Referral Units	MINT Commercial & Healthcare Limited <b>(Northwich)</b>	2 year (1 year extension)	£200,000	5	1
Electrical Works (£0 - £1,500)	Jack Cunliffe <b>(Blackpool)</b>	2 year (1 + 1 year extension)	£300,000	6	4

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Electrical Works (£1,500 - £50,000)	Jack Cunliffe Ltd / J&J Electrical Services / Tech & Elec Services Ltd <b>(Blackpool)</b>	2 year (1 + 1 year extension)	£50,000	6	4
Blue Badge Digital Services and associated services	Valtech Ltd <b>(London)</b>	3 years	£14,205.43	Direct award	0
Enforcement Agents	Phoenix Commercial Collections <b>(London)</b>	2 year (1 + 1 year extension)	£354,920	4	0
Finance System	Advanced Business Solutions <b>(Berkshire)</b>	4 years and 2 months (50 months)	£500,000	Direct award	0
Robotic Arm - Illuminations	CNC Robotics Ltd <b>(Liverpool)</b>	3 months (2 months extension)	£129,270.0 0	1	0
Highfield Day Care Centre	Independent Living Northwest <b>(Blackpool)</b>	14 months (1 + 1 year extension)	£500,000	2	0