

CORPORATE PORTFOLIOS

The 'Corporate' portfolio consists of:

- Councillor Lynn Williams – 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

Exit from the European Union

As we approach the end of the Transition Period, the Council's EU Exit Task and Finish Group has reconvened from August 2020 and is meeting fortnightly. The Group is monitoring government communications via the daily Local Government Bulletin and is liaising closely with the Lancashire Resilience Forum to ensure that the Council is equipped to make the most of the relationship the UK will have with the EU from January 2021. The Group will advise on how we can react quickly to the potential impact it may have on the town, its businesses and its residents.

We are also addressing the impact of Brexit on some of our staff, encouraging employees to register for settled status. We have a small number of staff who we know to be impacted, who are receiving targeted support and we are ensuring that there is general communications to the wider workforce to ensure that everyone who needs assistance has access to it. Where it is known that employees require settled status both they and their managers have been written to and regular monitoring is being undertaken to ensure applications are made. Whilst the deadline to complete this work is June 2021, we have set an internal deadline of end of this year so that we can ensure there is no disruption to key roles or services.

Working in Partnership

Locally Supported Contact Tracing – controlling the virus

From 2 September, our Public Health Team has been leading on local contact tracing work, supporting the national service by contact-tracing those individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19, but which the National Team has been unable to reach. This work will be extended to cover COVID-positive household contacts once all Districts across Lancashire are undertaking this work.

The team operates seven days a week and consists of a range of staff from across departments, with individuals continuing to undertake their usual roles, again showing how our staff are going above and beyond to slow the spread of the virus. Additional staff are being recruited and trained to extend their work into the evenings from later this month.

The process involves sending an initial text message to the contact as soon as the data is received, advising that a contact tracer will be making contact with them and stating that they need to self-isolate. The contact tracer, supported by Vitaline, then tries to make contact for 48 hours. If this is unsuccessful, letters are delivered to the households to ask them to make contact, with checks made with the hospital and adult social care if there are concerns about the welfare of an individual. The team work with Benefits and Revenues, to double-check contact details and home addresses.

As at 8 November, the team has handled 704 cases, completing 71% (487) of the cases, which the national system has been unable to trace. The remaining 29% (217) are cases where the contact details are incorrect, no address can be located or where individuals are in hospital or are deceased.

Whilst significant challenges persist in delivering the work in a timely manner due to issues with the national system, this is a very positive outcome which clearly demonstrates the benefit of using local community knowledge in the track and trace system.

Enhanced COVID-19 testing capacity for Blackpool

The new Local Testing Site for Blackpool has now opened and offers appointment-based testing. Appointments are available seven days a week through the online booking system and through the phone booking system by calling 119. The capacity of the testing site is meeting the current demand and we work with the provider to monitor this closely. The Lancashire Resilience Forum oversee the capacity and demand across the county and has the resources to meet any local surges in demand with mobile testing facilities. For anyone who is not able to get to the testing site and requires a home test, there are no reports of delays in accessing these tests or receiving prompt results.

New lateral flow testing, currently being used for the mass testing in Liverpool, offers a really exciting development and we are working with the national team to support a roll out of this testing capacity in Blackpool.

Care and Nursing home testing continues to support our most vulnerable residents, with staff testing weekly and residents every 28 days across the town. We have seen some outbreaks in care facilities, with many asymptomatic cases identified through the testing regime. Identifying these allows people to self-isolate until they are safely able to return to work and for residents to be well supported and monitored where required and ongoing transmission halted. The amount of work involved in organising the testing, carrying it out and managing the consequences should not be underestimated and our heartfelt thanks go to everyone involved in this work, which really is making an effective difference.

Supporting Winter Plan preparations

We have now submitted the winter plan after close collaboration with the local health commissioners and providers and have put in place key strategies to ensure that we are doing all we can as a system to manage the winter surge in the health system, alongside the current and anticipated additional pressures that COVID brings. The winter plan describes all of the interventions and additional investment, which we are putting in place and their anticipated outcomes and allows the whole system to work together to make best use of our collective resources. A comprehensive flu vaccination programme is underway, which we would encourage all eligible people to participate in and we are now working collaboratively across the Integrated Care System with the NHS to make preparations to roll out the COVID-19 vaccination to our frontline staff and most vulnerable residents.

Growing Full Fibre Internet Connectivity in Blackpool

As the main fibre infrastructure is almost complete, members of the Fibre Blackpool co-operative has been able to invest in connecting businesses in Blackpool to the network. One member has already connected over 30 businesses, whilst a second has announced the launch of a gigabit fibre product costing just £20 per month. According to figures from Ofcom, with the average UK internet speed being around 64 mbps (megabits per second), Fibre Blackpool's ability to deliver 1,000 mbps or "gigabit internet" potentially gives businesses within reach of the network a competitive advantage.

Corporate Issues

Remembrance Day arrangements

In line with guidance from the Government and the Lancashire Resilience Forum, the traditional Remembrance Day service in Blackpool was adapted so that it complied with pandemic restrictions. In view of the current legislation, the popularity, location and demographic of those who normally attend the service, the risk of possible COVID-19 infection spread was thought to be too great to allow the event to go ahead in its usual format.

To mitigate the risk of a crowd gathering at the War Memorial on Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day, we encouraged people who wished to lay wreaths to do so at any time during the Poppy Appeal period (22 October – 15 November). For those who could not lay a wreath, people were invited to follow the British Legion's virtual "Plant a Poppy" initiative online.

As a further tribute and to further discourage attendance at the War Memorial at 11am on 8 and 11 November, VisitBlackpool produced a virtual service that was shown during what would have been the normal service hours on both Remembrance and Armistice Days. Led by Reverend Steve Haskett, the short, socially-distanced service was recorded in the veterans' area of St John's Church. He was accompanied by representatives from the Royal British Legion, Royal Marines' Association, Fylde Ex-Service Liaison Committee and Friends of the Burma Star Association.

The service featured a moving tribute to the Armed Forces past and present, the Last Post/Reveille and a two-minute silence at 11am. A wreath was then shown to be laid at the Blackpool War Memorial by Councillor Paula Burdess, Deputy Mayor on behalf of Blackpool. The virtual service was repeated on the Council's social media channels at 10.54am on Armistice Day.

Financial Monitoring – Unprecedented Demands

The operational and consequential financial demands being placed upon the Council this year are entirely without precedent. From the very outset, the introduction of the Government's lockdown and restriction measures resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted in a variety of ways from increasing service demand and cost, to curtailing income sources. This is true not just for Council services, but also our private sector providers, our wholly-owned companies and our partners. We have employed every financial mechanism available to keep things afloat, including supplier reliefs and subsidies, cash flow loans, other support measures and budgetary overspends. In addition, we also prioritised delivery of a rapid response to Government policy initiatives such as business support grants, business rate reliefs and infection prevention and control grants. As covered in previous reports, our aim was to ensure that money quickly made its way to where it was most needed.

The full-year forecast position at the end of month 5 of 2020/2021 shows a marked deterioration in the Council's financial standing when compared with the draft unaudited position as at the close of 2019/2020. We expect working balances to fall by the current forecast overspend of £8,872,000. Taking into account that funding of £11,282,000 has so far been received from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for financial year 2020/2021, that a contribution of £2,810,000 is anticipated from Blackpool Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) for Enhanced Hospital Discharges and that an estimated £7,917,000 will be received from MHCLG in respect of the Sales, Fees and Charges compensation scheme, £5,163,000 of this overspend is COVID-related. We expect this figure to be reduced further by the Government's fourth tranche of financial support to local government. 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 Sales, Fees and Charges compensation scheme addresses non-commercial income lost based upon 75% recovery over and above a 5% excess. The scheme compensates eligible authorities for irrecoverable losses compared to budgets, with three separate application processes covering periods to 31 March 2021. We submitted our first bid to MHCLG for the sum of £3,486,000 covering the period 1 April 2020 – 31 July 2020 on 30 September 2020, with further bids planned in line with MHCLG deadlines accounting for the remainder of the estimated that the full-year effect of £7,917,000.

General Fund Working Balances and Earmarked Revenue Reserves

The Council's Revenue Budget for 2020/2021 set a target level of General Fund working balances of around £6m. As part of good financial management practice, we aim to maintain at least this level for the medium term. Earmarked revenue reserves at the start of the financial

year stood at a record high of £46,772,000, though with known in-year commitments against this the balance will fall to an estimated £29,490,000 by the end of the year. This should still be sufficient to underwrite the current year's financial risks and we have put in place a separate financial plan in place for the Council's wholly-owned companies. In light of recent positive announcements about the potential of one of the candidate vaccines, we hope that by the end of the calendar year there will be sufficient clarity regarding COVID 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 another six years' horizon. We are also expecting the announcement of a one-year Spending Review and Settlement around 25 November, a key piece of information in developing our financial assumptions for 2021/2022.

Further financial support for residents

Our benefits team has been assessing self-isolation payments since 28 September, following their introduction for people who have tested positive or been asked to self-isolate by NHS test and trace. Based on certain eligibility criteria, there are two elements to the scheme, the main one having set national criteria and the discretionary scheme with limited funding where we have set local criteria. To date we have processed 162 applications, making payments of £500 to 74 people. Separately and as a result of receiving a grant of £261,000 from DEFRA for essential supplies, we have been able to help 2,531 Blackpool families financially impacted by COVID restrictions by providing money towards uniform costs for 4,465 children.

Benefit Processing Times

Despite resources being moved to support other COVID related activity and an increase in the number of claims for Council Tax Reduction over recent months, the Benefits Service has maintained remarkably good performance. The cumulative number of days to pay new claims for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction was 11 days and five days for changes in circumstances, ensuring payments are made quickly to those who need them. In addition to this, in line with government guidelines, we are continuing to apply Council Tax Reduction Hardship Grants to all Working Age customers in receipt of Council Tax Reduction. To date around £2.376m has been awarded and awards will continue to be made for the rest of the financial year.

Transforming Services

Agile System developments during the pandemic

One of the positives which has come out of the pandemic has been the flexibility and innovation which our teams have shown in many areas, including digital working. The ICT service has rapidly developed a number of systems including case management systems in record time in order to support the Council's COVID response. We are keen to maintain this progress into the future, not just for the current lockdown, but in anticipation of working differently and even more efficiently in the future. In total, thousands of cases have been processed through the Corona Kindness Hub Case Management system, the Discretionary Grant for Businesses application system, the local lockdown support grant system and the

homelessness support referral system. In addition, we have tracked and allocated over 900 devices to vulnerable children.

Staff have also been quick to take advantage of existing tools to aid productivity, with peak times seeing over 1,300 simultaneous remote connections from employees homes. Since the start of the pandemic nearly 36,000 meetings have been held via Microsoft Teams, covering everything from one-to-one supervision meetings through to team meetings and conference-style workshops involving large numbers of external parties. Virtual working is also benefiting the transparency agenda, with over 40 virtual committee and council meetings having been streamed on YouTube since the start of the pandemic generating a total of 5,196 viewings.

Awarded Contracts

The following contracts have been awarded:

| CONTRACT | PROVIDER (Locations) | TERM (including extensions) | CONTRACT VALUE | NO. OF INITIAL BIDS | NO. OF BIDDERS WITH FY POSTCODE |
|--|---------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Revenues and Benefit OnDemand Support | Civica UK Ltd (London) | 42 months (12 months) | £175,000 | Call off contract | 0 |
| Grange Park Development | Cassidy & Ashton (Preston) | 24 months + novation | £140,000 approx. | 16 | 0 |
| Tramway Maintenance – Lot 1 (Sub-Arc Welding): Awaiting Award £172,410 | Lot 1 – Keltbray (Surrey) | 2 months | Lot 1 - Sub-Arc Welding £172,410 | 3 | 0 |
| Tramway Maintenance - Permanent way track tamping | Lot 2 - ESL (Manchester) | 2 months | Lot 2 - Tamping £180,098 | 3 | 0 |
| Tramway Maintenance - Rail Replacement | Lot 3 - Keltbray (Surrey) | 2 months | Lot 3 - Rail Replacement £144,431 | 3 | 0 |

| CONTRACT | PROVIDER (Locations) | TERM (including extensions) | CONTRACT VALUE | NO. OF INITIAL BIDS | NO. OF BIDDERS WITH FY POSTCODE |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|---------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Analysis & Research of Visitors | Visitor Insights Ellandi (Kent) | 12 months | £20,000 | 2 | 0 |