

## LEADER OF THE COUNCIL – COUNCILLOR BLACKBURN

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### Financial Management

The 2013/ 2014 Accounts prepared under the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) format have been completed. These will now be examined by our external auditors and reported to the Finance and Audit Committee on 18th September. The draft Accounts show that the Council's working balances at 31st March have almost reached their £6 million target at £5.8 million.

### Asset Management

Phase one of the Central Business District development is almost complete with the refurbished multi-storey car park and petrol filling station now open and in use. The new Council offices have been handed over and services have started moving in and are programmed to be completed by autumn 2014. The new Sainsbury's supermarket will conclude Phase One and open to the public in the summer following completion of the internal fit out which is currently underway.

### Electoral Services

On 22<sup>nd</sup> May the elections for the European Parliament were held, together with 3 local by elections. The new councillors elected were as follows; Councillor Mrs P Jackson (Labour), Hawes Side ward, turnout 30.3%, Councillor K Benson (Labour), Layton ward, turnout 33.7% and Councillor I Coleman (Labour), Talbot ward with a 28.5% turnout.

The turnout in the Blackpool area of the North West Region for the European Parliament was 30.2%. For the North West region the seats were allocated as follows: 3 Labour, 3 UKIP and 2 Conservative. Can I take this opportunity to thank all the staff who worked on these elections, over 250 people were involved from across the Council in various roles and without their help on top of their normal jobs, elections would not be able to be supported in the way currently are.

On 10<sup>th</sup> June, Individual Electoral Registration (IER), went live. Under the new system, instead of receiving a household registration form, everyone will have to take responsibility to register individually, including providing identification information such as a National Insurance number and date of birth. For the first time people will also be able to register online. Initially this will not affect the vast majority already registered who have been transferred across from the previous register but any new rolling registrations will have to register on the new format.

### Revenues, Benefits, Invoices and Payments

Council Tax collection at the end of year was 93.1%, which is 2.4% less than the same period last year. The introduction of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme has had a significant impact on collection, as we anticipated it would. At the end of April collection was 1.5% down on the previous year, 9.5% compared to 11.0%. The Business Rates collection figure shows improvement at year-end at 94.9%, compared with 94.3% for the same period in the previous financial year. At the end of April a small reduction is shown, 8.2% compared to 9.1% the previous year. Strenuous efforts will continue to collect all Council Tax owed, as in the current financial circumstances, we owe it to our staff and our residents to ensure that our income is maximised.

The average time to process new benefit claims and changes is currently 26 days.

At the end of April there were 556 cases affected by under-occupancy and there are now 122 households affected by the Benefit Cap.

At the end of March 2014 all Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) received for 2013/ 2014 had been allocated. During April 2014 we have already spent 21% of the 2014/ 2015 funding, which has been reduced this year by around £100,000. DHP expenditure will be carefully monitored over the coming months.

The Discretionary Support Scheme had a total of 457 crisis applications (66% approved) and 111 community care grant applications (42% approved) during April 2014.

The Council's centralised Advice Team will be located within Treasurer Services from June 2014 and will consist of two debt advisors, two welfare benefit outreach workers and an administrative support officer.

The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) has announced the rollout of Universal Credit in the North West region during 2014 and discussions are ongoing with the DWP implementation team. Whilst we do not expect a large number of Housing Benefit customers to be affected initially, further briefings will be arranged as soon as more information is known.

### **Blackpool Fylde and Wyre Credit Union**

The Credit Union's growth continues with total savings topping £2.5m this month. Preston City Council has selected the Credit Union as its preferred supplier of Credit Union Services and services will be opened to Preston City Council staff and their families in June as part of a managed growth strategy.

### **Risk Services**

The Benefit Fraud Team identified overpayments of £1.8 million in 2013/ 2014, which is an excellent achievement by the team, but also a strong indication that benefit fraud continues to be a problem in Blackpool. We have now received confirmation that the Council's Benefit Fraud Team will transfer to the Department of Work and Pensions to join the Single Fraud Investigation Service in April 2015.

Work has been undertaken by Adult Social Care and the Civil Contingencies Team to identify volunteers to take part in the Emergency Response Group. Numbers continue to remain low however work is ongoing to recruit to this important role. A Rest Centre Exercise including the Emergency Response Group and the Voluntary Agencies was held in April.

The Council's new insurance policies have now been implemented and took effect from 1st April. Performance against these new policies will be monitored throughout their life to ensure that they are providing the relevant cover aligned to the Council's risk appetite.

### **Contracts and Purchasing**

The 2014/ 2015 work programme for the Corporate Procurement team has been signed off by all Departmental Management Teams. Tenders completed and contracts awarded since the last report include the following. Members will note how effective our new procurement processes are in ensuring local firms are able to compete for Council business.

- Milk - Lot 1 School – Town Head Farm, Lot 2 Kitchen – Fresh Pastures
- Fruit and Veg – Ralph Livesey
- High Ropes Course, Stanley Park – JMA
- Common Edge Catering – Whites (local)
- Health Works Award & Healthier Catering - ABL
- Feminine Hygiene Bins (nappy bins etc) - Initial (local)
- Child Safety Services - Barnardos (local)
- Applied Suicide Intervention training - Nicki De Costa (local)
- Support services for Adult Carers - Blackpool Carers (local)

- Fitness Equipment for Bickerstaffe House - Matrix Fitness
- Annual Council Tax Billing Printing - Outsource Documents
- Intruder Alarms - Automatic Alarms
- Reg 33 (Safeguarding) - NYAS
- Staff Uniforms - MWUK t/a Alexandra
- Hot drinks vending machines for leisure centres - Simply Coffee
- Alley Gates - Fylde Coast Gate Company (local)
- Ad Hoc marketing for FYCreative - Happy Creative (local)
- Central Business District Office Moves - Commercial Transfer
- Delivery of Members Mail - C Cabs (local)
- Framework Agreement for Day-to-Day Reactive Repair and Maintenance
- Lot 1 Electrical £0 - £500 – J and J Electrical (local)
- Lot 2 Electrical £500 - £50,000 – J and J Electrical (local)/ Jack Cunliffe (local)/ Technical and Electrical (local)
- Lot 3 Mechanical £0 - £500 – T. Jolly Services
- Lot 5 Asbestos Removal £0 - £50,000 – Aspect Contracts /Rhodar/LAR Ltd
- Provision of Gas – Corona Energy
- Winter Gardens Operator – brought back in-house.

### **Health and Wellbeing Board**

The Board is currently overseeing refresh of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), which is a document that describes in detail how the Borough population is made up. Three of the five core chapters are now updated. An event to engage and raise awareness of the JSNA with Voluntary and Community Sector partners is planned for the summer.

At the end of March the Board took part in the Local Government Associations (LGA) health and wellbeing peer challenge. The purpose of the challenge is to support Council's to implement their new statutory responsibilities in health and well-being and support Health and Wellbeing boards to become more confident in their system wide strategic leadership role. The challenge involved a four day on-site visit by a team of national peers across health and social care who met with senior and operational staff across the Council, NHS, Police, Fire and Ambulance Service, schools, local Healthwatch and the Voluntary and Community Sector. A feedback report has been produced by the peer team which sets out a number of development areas and key recommendations to enable both the Council and the Board take forward the health and wellbeing agenda.

Blackpool's Better Care Fund (final) plan was submitted to NHS England in early April. Initial feedback on the submission has been positive, however all local areas at this current time are awaiting formal responses from NHS England on their final plans.

The Board held its second away day in May, the purpose of the event was to consider the outcome of the health and wellbeing peer challenge, identify next steps in order to implement the recommendations outlined in the feedback report and agree future priorities. The Board will hold a thematic debate on Dementia in July

### **Staff and Public Communications**

In May, the Heritage Lottery Fund announced funding of £1.2 million towards the development of the Blackpool museum. This generated extensive coverage across the region including on BBC North West Tonight.

Other topics generating media interest have been seaside awards, bathing water testing, demolition of Queen's Park, Dancing with Dementia event at the Tower Ballroom and the proposed closure of Yeadon Way.

Over the last year the Council's social media accounts have grown significantly in popularity. The number of people liking the Facebook page has increased from 2500 to 4600. Twitter followers have increased from 5500 to 9500.

The next issue of 'Your Blackpool' will be delivered ahead of the school summer holiday with a "what's on" guide for the summer and update on the Talbot Gateway.

## **Strategy Development and Research**

### Welfare Board

The Welfare Board has agreed a training package to alert frontline staff to the welfare reform changes and how their clients may be affected. This will be rolled out during the summer months prior to the introduction of Universal Credit in November 2014.

Financial advice services have been reviewed and a single access point has been developed for residents seeking welfare and debt information and support. This will be operational in July 2014.

A digital inclusion pilot, held at the Council for Voluntary Services, has now been in place since January 2014. The pilot opens up computer access for Jobseekers one afternoon a week, providing additional computer's for those seeking work and relieving the pressure on Library computers. Volunteers and people taking part in the Job Centre work placement scheme offer advice and support to people.

Further capacity has been provided via Blackpool Coastal Housing, funded by a bid made to the Tenant's Project Fund. The hub adds another five computers to the town centre for use by Blackpool Coastal Housing Limited clients.

### **"Customer First"**

In the period 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014, the Customer First team has answered over 100,000 telephone calls on the Customer First line and over 50,000 calls on the Council Tax line with an answered rate of 38% on both lines. Responses have also been sent to over 5,000 emails received from customers.

From 2nd June, Customer First staff have been covering the reception point at Number One, Bickerstaffe Square. They will meet and greet customers and visitors to the new offices and ensure that all visitors are signed in, provided with a visitor lanyard and collected for their meeting.

In line with staff moving to the new building a new meeting room system is being created. This will mean a new, more efficient way of viewing and booking meeting rooms.

Post Team corporate post standards have been devised and will be distributed in a Welcome Guide to all staff moving to Number One, Bickerstaffe Square.

### **Council Efficiency Programme**

The Budget for 2014/ 2015 required total savings to be found of £15.8 million. As at 30th April 2014 (month 1) 59% of the 2014/ 2015 savings target has already been delivered.

## **Human Resources**

### Occupational Health and Employee Well Being

The Council is running an employee exercise challenge "1Blackpool World Cup Challenge". The aim of the challenge is:

- Collectively travel the same distance in air miles as Blackpool to Rio and back (11,600 miles)

- Any form of physical activity counts, both inside and outside work
- The challenge runs from 21 May until the day after the World Cup Final (14<sup>th</sup> July)
- Two organised walks are planned to launch the challenge and there is the possibility of an organised fun run and 7 a-side football tournament

#### Unpaid Leave

Thanks to the support of the Trades Unions and employees the Council has been able to achieve the required £1 million per annum savings through voluntary unpaid leave requests for this year and next. This is a fantastic achievement and we are very grateful for the continuing support of the workforce.

#### Redundancies

Work is now almost complete in relation to Redundancies required to achieve the 2014/ 2015 savings.

The voluntary redundancy scheme was very successful this year with over 100 voluntary redundancy requests being agreed which enabled the council to reduce the number of compulsory redundancies required to achieve the savings quickly and efficiently. Where employees have been made redundant they have been offered 1:1 support with job search skills such as CV writing, job applications and interview techniques.

#### LGPS changes

With effect from 1st April 2014 changes were made to the Local Government Pension scheme. Key changes include a move from a final salary scheme to a career average salary scheme and ability for employees to pay 50% contributions for 50% benefits if they cannot afford to pay the full contribution rate required.

#### New mandatory E Learning modules

The Council has launched two new modules for completion by all employees. One relates to Fire Safety Awareness to reduce the risk of fire and to ensure the Council meets its Health and Safety obligations and the other is the Customer Care programme, which will ensure that every employee understands what is expected of them in terms of dealing with customers.

#### Culture Change Workshops

This year is a big year for change amongst Council Employees as we see the new offices at Bickerstaffe Square open. The move has prompted a need for the whole Council to embrace a culture change and to make changes to the ways in which we have traditionally operated, even if you are not moving to new offices. All managers, supervisors and team leaders were invited to attend a Making Change Happen session during May at Bickerstaffe Square. 296 Managers attended and evaluations were very good and included comments such as 'Absolutely the best session about change I have experienced in 20 years of working for the Council.'

#### **Fairness Commission**

The Fairness Commission continues to work hard in relation to addressing quality of life issues for the citizens of Blackpool:

#### Easter Buddies Campaign

The Easter Buddies Campaign started with coffee mornings in libraries across the town. Fairness Commissioners interacted with over 200 people who defined themselves as lonely or socially isolated. Staff from a range of partner organisations was on hand to provide support and a number of other issues were highlighted and dealt with. Additionally at least two thirds of those in attendance were signposted to activities, groups and clubs to help them make greater connections in their communities. The scheme will now continue as the Blackpool Buddies Campaign and the coffee mornings will continue, at the request of those who attended.

### Dementia Friends

Blackpool Fairness Commission continues to support attempts to make Blackpool Dementia Friendly. Courses continue to be delivered and a Dementia Alliance Event will be delivered in July.

### Children's Summit

The Fairness Commission has invited 100 children and young people to join them for a Children's Summit at Blackpool Tower Circus on 1<sup>st</sup> July. The event will see children from all of the School Council's given the opportunity to pose questions to a panel of senior officers including Blackpool Council, Lancashire Police, Blackpool Hospitals Trust, Lancashire Fire and Rescue and North West Ambulance Service. They will also get to participate in an hour-long circus performance to thank them for taking part. After the event, members of the panel will visit children who are unable to attend including those at Brian House, they will engage in appropriate activities to ensure they can be involved in the process.

### Fairtrade

Blackpool Fairness Commission is driving forward activity to achieve Fairtrade Town status for Blackpool. Auditing work is reaching a conclusion and a Fairtrade Picnic will be held in July/ August to raise awareness of both Fairtrade products and why it is important.

### Engagement with the Public

An open public event took place on 19<sup>th</sup> June at St John's Conference Centre, when members of the public were invited to attend and hear about the work of the Fairness Commission. There was a market place stall at the event, where 20 start-up businesses will get to showcase their work. A further newsletter was circulated at the end of May and the new Fairness Commission website, being developed by a private sector business as an Act of Kindness, is well underway and should soon be ready for use.

### **Blackpool Museum Project**

Blackpool Council has been awarded £1.24 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the development of the Blackpool Museum project.

The Blackpool Museum, planned for the Winter Gardens building, will tell the extraordinary story of the world's first working-class seaside resort, celebrating its contribution to British and Western popular culture. As well as displaying the council's own nationally significant collections in an imaginative, immersive way, there will be quality space for temporary exhibitions, co-created with communities, the V and A and others. It will be in the Pavilion Theatre space, saving it from dereliction and finding a use for other underutilised spaces in the Winter Gardens.

The museum will be a high quality, professional, self-sustaining business with the capacity to reinvest resources to support heritage-based learning and community programmes.

During the 18-month development stage, 10 jobs will be created to carry out three main objectives:

- Building a solid foundation – consisting of the development of the business case and strategic plan for the museum.
- Creating the museum – preparing for capital works by carrying out in depth surveys, public engagement and consultation, collecting stories and developing concepts.
- Raising the project's profile – talking to partners and the local community to develop communication plans.

Following the development stage, the Council will apply for £20m for the implementation of the museum and has up to two years to submit the fully developed proposals to secure a firm award.