

DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR URBAN REGENERATION – COUNCILLOR JACKSON

Getting People into Work

Positive Steps in to Work (the Council's adult employment services team) is continuing to perform to a high standard in terms of assisting residents to find work. To the end of January 2015, some 316 people have secured employment with the help of its skilled advisors. To achieve this, the team delivers a number of commercial and public-funded projects including the Government's Work Programme, Healthy Futures (funded by Public Health), the Chance to Shine work placement scheme and redundancy support to public and private sectors. The Chance to Shine project recently received the Fair Train Gold Standard for the quality of the work placements provided to over 120 long-term unemployed.

Positive Steps and NHS Blackpool are also co-delivering a £2m integrated mental health and employment pilot set to commence in the summer. It is one of only four impact pilots funded by Government. The Blackpool pilot aims to assist 1,000 people prepare for work whilst simultaneously accessing treatment. Currently, the link between employment support and mental health treatment is poor with long waiting times. Nationally, 75% of people in receipt of the Employment Support Allowance and 25% on Jobseekers Allowance are stated as having moderate mental health disorders. The pilot will be independently evaluated.

Youth Employment

The percentage of 16 – 18 year olds who were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) at the end of December 2014 was 7% the same as the previous year equating to 358 young people. The numbers have traditionally increased in January following the end of seasonal work. The percentage of young people who were "Not Known" to Connexions at the end of December 2014 was 3.8% the lowest it has been at this time of year (5% in 2013). This is due to developments in data sharing with Jobcentre Plus and the large training providers.

A bid to the Skills Funding Agency for a "Pathway to Traineeships" programme was successful. This will be delivered jointly by Connexions, Adult Learning and Positive Steps providing 8-week skills and work experience courses for unemployed 19 – 24 year olds. The value of the contract is £128,000.

Economic Development

Blackpool businesses have been successful in accessing over £450,000 of financial assistance, thanks to the focused help of the Council's Business Support team (part of Economic Development). The Business Partnerships Co-ordinator in particular has brokered a series of quality referrals to key support initiatives including the North West Access to Finance service (an impartial financial appraisal and brokerage service) and the Fuse Fund (new firms capital grants fund). In the six months between July and December 2014, 48 clients were referred to the Fuse Fund and 31 to the Access to Finance service. Some 13 clients have received approval of Fuse grants totalling £238,000, contributing to £955,000 total capital investment, set to create 37 new jobs. The Access to Finance service helped five clients raise a further £220,000 in other funding including loans.

Blackpool Tourism Academy is making excellent progress in rolling out the WorldHost international customer service standard across key attractions and smaller businesses in the resort. The Academy is pioneering improved customer service standards and four founding members have already secured Worldhost Business Recognition status (meaning they have trained at least 50% of front-line staff)

including Sandcastle Waterpark, Blackpool Zoo, Blackpool Transport and the Winter Gardens. More than 1,100 people are expected to have been trained in the standard by the end of March, on track to achieve the resort-wide destination status target of 2,500 people trained by the end of 2015.

Planning and Land Use

The Blackpool Local Plan Part 1: Core Strategy

The Core Strategy Proposed Submission document (June 2014) with the Sustainability Appraisal and Habitat Regulations Assessment and other supporting evidence base documents was submitted to the Secretary of State for Examination on 19 December 2014.

Malcolm Rivett has been appointed as the Planning Inspector for the examination, which is due to be held week commencing 11 May 2015 at the Solaris Centre. It was hoped the examination could have taken place in March but due to the Inspector's availability and the pre-election period, the earliest convenient date was in May.

It is expected that the examination will last no longer than one week. The Inspector has issued the Matters and Questions, which will be discussed at the examination, along with a draft programme. All information regarding the examination is on the Council's website. Officers are required to respond to the Inspector's Matters and Questions and our responses have to be with the Programme Officer by 22 April.

Gypsy and Travellers and Travelling Show-People Accommodation Assessment (GTAA)

As previously reported, an updated GTAA 2014 has been produced identifying the accommodation needs of gypsies, travellers and travelling show-people across the Fylde Coast. The outcome of the assessment identifies a need for additional sites for the period up to 2031. For Blackpool, a need for an additional 38 pitches for gypsies and travellers is identified (26 for Fylde and 17 for Wyre) along with two additional yards for travelling show-people (none for Fylde and 12 for Wyre).

The next stage of the process is to identify suitable and appropriate sites to accommodate this need where possible. Therefore a 'Call for Sites' was due to be undertaken towards the end of February this year, where the Council will invite residents, landowners, and other interested parties to let us know of any sites which are suitable for such a use by filling in the appropriate form with details of the site and submit it to the Council.

The suggested sites will be assessed by officers to determine their suitability. Sites assessed as suitable will be put forward for public consultation as part of the Local Plan process in preparing the Site Allocations and Development Management Development Plan Document, (Part 2 of the new Blackpool Local Plan).

Coastal Defence Scheme

Work continues on the Anchorsholme sea defence project, with a great deal of public interest and support for the project.

The contractor, Balfour Beatty, who has a proven track record in relation to sea defence schemes, building Blackpool and Cleveleys new defences and promenade, are working closely with the Council and the public to ensure Anchorsholme is to the same high standard.

Consultation with the public is ongoing and recently a number of people have expressed concern in relation to early works, which unfortunately were damaged by the sea. In relation to these people, we have worked with Balfour Beatty to involve them as much as possible in the process now and in the future and react to their concerns and queries.

The project is design and build and therefore Balfour Beatty carry all the risk in respect of the schemes design and construction.

Sea Water Quality

This year will see the introduction of the revised Bathing Water Directive with much more stringent standards. Predicted results have now been produced by the Environment Agency and unfortunately, two of the four Blackpool bathing waters are likely to be poor at the end of the 2015 bathing season, these are Blackpool North and Blackpool Central. However, Blackpool South and Bispham are predicted to be sufficient if not good.

This will result in signage advising against bathing at the start of the 2016 bathing season. The Parliamentary under Secretary of State for Water, Forestry, Rural Affairs and Resource Management invited representatives from Blackpool, Hastings and Cornwall to a meeting with him in January to discuss the work being carried out to improve bathing waters and implications, particularly on the potential effect on tourism.

The meeting concluded that all three authorities are working hard with their partners particularly United Utilities and the Environment Agency and a number of actions will apply nationally so the public understand the implications:

- Agreed a need for joint communications lines similar to those prepared for drought;
- Need to involve Public Health England to support communications work;
- NFU and CLA would share local contacts to engage land managers; and
- The importance of information on apportionment of sources for each bathing water catchment. The Environment Agency agreed to ensure that this information was shared.

It was also agreed to investigate the potential for funding works to improve bathing waters through the Coastal Communities funding allocations and Local Enterprise Partnerships.

Blackpool Council continues its partnership working across the Fylde Peninsula with Wyre, Fylde and Lancashire County Council along with United Utilities and the Environment Agency and United Utilities have a series of meetings with Area Forums and Community Groups to present their plans for bathing water improvements.

Following the determination by Ofwat in December 2014, work has commenced this year on a new sea outfalls at Anchorsholme and one due at Harrowside.

In addition, the regional Turning tides Partnership has produced a new action plan based on the predictions produced by the Environment Agency, which also provide source apportionment.

It is important to note that the Fylde Peninsular Water Management Partnership has been shortlisted for "Partnership of the Year" in the Local Government Chronicle Awards 2015, with the winner to be announced in London on the 11 March 2015.

Flood and Water Management Act and Regional Flood Coastal Committee

The Council is delivering its obligations under the Flood and Water Management Act in particular the actions prepared in the strategic flood risk management plan.

Due to the reapportionment of funding, an opportunity has arisen to bid for low value flood risk schemes and officers are collating evidence from various studies to assess if Blackpool meets the necessary criteria to bid for these funds.

Marton Mere replacement pump and spillway works have commenced on site, this will provide

protection to properties and ensure the spillway is now fit for purpose. In addition, an opportunity arose to bid for an additional mobile pump, this bid was successful and £16,000 has been allocated to the Council. The benefits for the Council mean that this can be deployed in the event of a flood and assist in protection of properties.

Fylde Peninsula Water Management Partnership

The Partnership is still awaiting formal confirmation on the legislation in respect of the Sustainable Urban Drainage role, however it would appear that this would now be a Planning decision role with the lead local flood authority as a Statutory Consultee. In the meantime, the Partnership continues to develop its strategies for ensuring all development considers its drainage proposals ensuring they address the need for sustainable drainage.

The Fylde Peninsula Water Management action plan has also been revised and work is currently ongoing in respect on the bathing water specific plans. This document will provide information on the works completed and the short medium and long term plans from all Partners.

Dates have now been confirmed for the Local Government Association Coastal Special Interest Coastal Group who will host its Annual General Meeting in Blackpool from the 30 June to 2 July 2015. This will involve representatives of all coastal towns in England visiting Blackpool to look at the coastal investment and its associated economic benefits.

Phones and IT

Windows 7 Upgrades and device Deployment

The IT Service is continuing with the refresh of Windows software and hardware devices. This is necessary due to the withdrawal of Windows XP and the age of many hardware devices significantly exceeding their serviceable lifespan. Windows 7 was selected over Windows 8 to ensure future compatibility with over 250 software applications and the failure of Windows 8 and 8.1 to gain wider adoption amongst larger organisations across the globe. The Windows 7 operating system is future proofed until 2020.

In the January and February a further 271 devices were rolled out taking the total number of devices upgraded since the programme started to 2124. The new devices will enable faster access times, improved productivity and flexible working.

Digital Inclusion

Wireless Blackpool the Council's free WiFi offer available in Council Buildings, Libraries and the Winter Gardens has had over 50,000 successful registrations this year.

The Digital Inclusion Sub Group is working on evidence to develop a picture of need in relation to ICT skills, access to equipment and support across Blackpool. This will help to focus resources on areas and sections of the community with high levels of need. Proposals are being developed for joint working with the Department for Work and Pensions around online support available to job seekers through a dedicated job skills site that can be customised to meet Blackpool's requirements.

We have also submitted a bid for £10,000 of funding from the Digital Experts programme, which would support our Channel Shift programme by re-designing services to be delivered through our website and supporting residents to access digital services. Ultimately, this would improve customer service and save money through the reduced transaction costs incurred by online services compared to those delivered by telephone.

Joint working with NHS

Provision of the free Wi-Fi facilities has been extended into Victoria Hospital, Fylde Coast Medical Services Whitegate Drive and Trinity Hospice.