

## CORPORATE PORTFOLIOS

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The 'Corporate' portfolio consists of:

- Councillor Lynn Williams – Leader of the Council
- Councillor Ivan Taylor – Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Partnerships and Performance

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

### Local Government Boundary Review: changes to ward boundaries

As councillors will be aware from the briefing earlier this year, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England is undertaking a review into the size of the council and the pattern of electoral wards for Blackpool.

Phase one completed on 17 August 2021, with notification from the Commission that they are minded to recommend that 42 councillors should be elected to the council in future, retaining the existing number of members. Phase two commenced on 24 August 2021, with the Commission inviting proposals from the council, interested parties and members of the public on a pattern of electoral wards based on that number of councillors. The consultation runs until 1 November, 2021.

In drawing up a pattern of electoral wards, the Commission will seek to make sure that each councillor represents a similar number of electors in Blackpool, to create boundaries that are appropriate, and that reflect community ties and identities, and take account of local needs, views and circumstances. Proposals they receive will be tested against this criteria, and inform the final proposals drawn up by the Commission.

Proposals can be submitted via the Commission's website <https://consultation.lgbce.org.uk/node/29508> and I would encourage everyone with a view on ward boundaries to contribute.

### Town Centre Transformation: Talbot Gateway Phase 3, bringing over 2000 office jobs to the town centre

As I write this report to Members I can confirm that we are very close to a key milestone in the regeneration of our town centre and wider town. The Council has granted outline planning approval for

a new office block on King Street, whilst negotiations are now at an advanced stage with the prospective tenant and their commercial advisors. The necessary Compulsory Purchase Order has been confirmed by Department for Housing, Communities and Local Government, meaning that all the land and property covering the development area is now owned by the Council.

The breadth of exciting developments now in train in the resort is truly remarkable – from our new conference centre and hotels, market, new cinema and shopping centre extension, tramway upgrade, museum, new affordable homes, Blackpool Central and everything happening on our Enterprise Zone and so much more. Further detail on these schemes is covered in the Places Report.

The fundamental point of all of this work is to create job and business opportunities for our residents, and I am so proud of what this administration is in the process of delivering for the town and its people.

## **Corporate Issues**

### **Financial Year 2020/21: A challenging and uncertain year**

I am pleased to report that despite the constantly-changing picture caused by the pandemic, financial losses relating to Covid were kept below earlier forecasts at just over £3m, helped by receiving a range of government grants, as well as specific grants to support Blackpool Transport and the Winter Gardens. Spending on services was £4m below budget, with an overspend in Children's Services offset by savings in Adult Services. Working balances ended the year at £6.3m, just above the £6m target, while earmarked reserves increased by £21m to £71m, largely owing to £15m of business rates not due to be released until 2021/22 financial year, and a further £4m of external funding towards the Blackpool museum project. Added to this was the delivery of a successful and significant capital programme totalling £50m principally around the areas of regeneration, transport and housing including schemes such as the central business district phase two, the conference centre and the Troutbeck housing development.

Given the context, this represents a remarkable outcome for the Council from a finance perspective, and I extend my thanks to all involved in enabling us to reach this position.

### **Financial Year 2021/22 Monitoring: Further challenges ahead**

As at 30 June, the full-year forecast position shows a fall in working balances from the £6.3m noted above. When factoring £3.5m of Covid-related costs, we expect to have a deficit of £261k by the end of 2021/22.

As recently reported to Executive, Children's Services are forecasting an overspend of £3.6m including £762k of net Covid costs. Strategic Leisure Assets is forecasting a pressure of £4.1m including £3.4m net Covid costs, after assuming modest income from the Sales, Fees and Charges compensation scheme of £139k. The Leisure Assets medium-term financial plan now forecasts the service to break-even, in-year, during 2025/26. In Adult Services, an overspend of £2.5m is forecast, including £2.2m net Covid costs that we anticipate will be covered by Government grants relating to 2021/22. Adult Commissioning Placements is forecasting a £2.5m overspend. The total Covid cost of £5.1m is partially offset by the Infection Prevention Control grant (£1.2m), Lateral Flow Testing grant (£922k) and a contribution from the Blackpool Clinical Commissioning Group (£783k).

Whilst information from this financial year so far shows a marked deterioration in the Council's financial position, we are developing plans to address the in-year pressures, including progressing some outstanding budget savings.

### **Supporting our Wholly Owned Companies**

I am proud of the role our Wholly Owned Companies (WOCs) play in delivering quality services, enabling us to keep them focussed on the needs of the town and not the needs of a remote group of shareholders. The diversity of our businesses led to a number of the Council's Wholly Owned Companies (WOCs) facing significant income losses as a result of lockdown and subsequent social distancing restrictions, impacting both company profitability and cash flow.

We have taken prompt action to ensure that they are able to continue their work, accelerating their recovery and protecting their viability. In November 2020 Executive approved the establishment of a £24m Covid Recovery Fund (PH46/2020), £20m plus a 20% contingency ring-fenced to the companies and drawn from the existing Business Loans Fund. To be eligible to access the Covid Recovery Fund facility, we challenged our companies to produce a 5-year Covid recovery plan starting in 2020/21, with a requirement that they achieve a cumulative breakeven income and expenditure position by the end of year 5 of their recovery plan, or as close as possible to this term.

To date there have been loan approvals of £13.3m against that facility of which companies have accessed £7.3m. The Council's Business Loans Fund Panel monitors progress against the companies' respective recovery plans on a regular basis.

Taking the position of the companies together, the consolidated forecast financial position is a loss of £4.5m based on their individual Month 3 financial monitoring reports. This represents an improvement of £700k from the Month 2 position, resulting from some businesses forecasting better than expected trading in the initial months of the 2021/22 financial year, coupled with clarity regarding the continuation of certain funding streams. Other companies have been impacted adversely by the Government's delay in relaxing Covid restrictions from 21 June 2021 to 19 July 2021.

### **Council Tax and Business Rates: help when it's needed**

Without Council Tax income, the Council would be unable to provide many vital services, so maintaining high collection rates is important. The Council Tax collection rate at the end of July 2021 for financial year 21/22 was 37.21%, an improvement on the same time last year but not yet comparable with 19/20 collection rates. We know that 2021 continues to be a difficult year for residents as recovery from the pandemic progresses, and are pleased that the majority have continued to pay throughout.

The Council has many measures in place to help those who are struggling to pay including affordable payment plans, council tax reduction or allowing a longer time over which to pay debts. We are currently helping 1,716 households with payment arrangements for the current year. We can also arrange for independent debt and benefits maximisation advice to help residents afford this priority debt, and I would urge anyone who needs help to get in touch. We want to help people before we have to take further action, which could increase costs and lead to further problems.

Retail, hospitality and leisure businesses within Blackpool have benefitted from a reduction in Business Rates of 66% in response to the impact of Covid, and we have now issued bills for the remaining balance.

We are also continuing to issue self-isolation payments, and have awarded £320k for main scheme cases and £105k for discretionary cases to assist residents to self-isolate since the scheme started.

## **Working with Partners**

### **Strong relationships helping tourism recovery**

Our Tourism Recovery Group continues to meet on a weekly basis to enable key stakeholders to share performance and customer insights, as well as focus on forward-looking activities around recruitment, training and destination marketing. The group has been integral to ensuring a strong, co-ordinated response to the challenges of Covid and will remain in place for the foreseeable future.

Work on the governance structure of the newly-established Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID) is gathering pace. The TBID will work in close liaison with the existing Town Centre BID, with each organisation having their own steering group to influence day-to-day operations, and a combined Blackpool BIDS board providing strategic direction.

Whilst we have no formal research on visitor numbers available until later in the year, key indicators such as car parking, inbound rail and tram usage indicate that Blackpool's tourism industry has enjoyed a very strong recovery with businesses across most tourism and hospitality sectors reporting exceptional results compared to 2019, the last full year of tourism activity pre-pandemic. In the final week of the school summer holidays, car parking patronage was around 30% higher than the comparative week in 2019.

I am keen to see us support this recovery, and this year will see a significantly enhanced programme of events to complement the extended Illuminations season, promoted by an extensive marketing campaign including radio, TV, digital and outdoor advertising. The return of events such as Ride The Lights, Switch-On and World Fireworks has provided an excellent springboard to launch the autumn and winter season, and that will be further enhanced in coming weeks by a two-week Lightpool Festival over the October half-term. A strong Christmas offer will start in early November, and this year will comprise of an outdoor ice rink, Christmas Market, new projection shows and themed festive entertainment across the resort.

### **#itstopshere**

We remain committed to challenging and defeating the pervasive issue of street harassment and improving the safety of women and girls across the whole of Blackpool through our #itstopshere movement. Since my last report the Everyone's Invited website [everyonesinvited.uk](http://everyonesinvited.uk) has collated the anonymous testimonies of people reporting historic and current sexual harassment in schools. It gives a flavour of the extent of sexual harassment in schools across the UK which, sadly, is vast. We want to ensure that we work with our schools partnership to ensure that children in our schools feel that they

are in a safe environment that responds quickly and appropriately to concerns. We will not tolerate young people experiencing sexual harassment in their schools - #itstopshere.

In Blackpool, online magazine Blackpool Social Club has created a map designed to allow members of the public to plot harassment as part of the Reclaim These Streets movement that emerged following the murder of Sarah Everard in March ([www.blackpoolsocial.club/32419-rts-mapping-harassment](http://www.blackpoolsocial.club/32419-rts-mapping-harassment)). A worrying amount of incidents have been reported by girls travelling home from school and clearly in school uniform. We will not accept street harassment of women and girls - #itstopshere. I would like to formally thank the creator of the site who very kindly allowed us to link our Safer Streets funding bid to her work. Irrespective of the outcome of the bid we will use this valuable and impactful information in the work that shapes our approach to understanding and addressing the concerns of women and girls using the public realm. We are researching evidence-based education and awareness campaigns which can span across community and education that can have the greatest town wide impact and are grateful to our partners, including our third sector colleagues from across the town for their ongoing commitment to addressing this issue head on. #itstopshere.

## **Transforming Services**

### **ENVECO Phase 2 transfer: a step change in Street Scene services**

In 2019, we brought kerbside waste collection back into the Council to be delivered by our new Waste company ENVECO. A little over two years later, we have now completed the successful TUPE transfer of around 160 staff involved in front line Street Scene services, with the council retaining delivery of Highways, Integrated Transport, and some other services by staff not based at Layton Depot. The transfer included all associated fleet, plant and machinery, along with Layton Depot itself and the Household Waste Recycling Centre at Bristol Avenue, where ENVECO now has full responsibility for maintenance and Health and Safety.

The transfer reflects our satisfaction with ENVECO's approach and delivery, and represents a significant milestone in their development. Their team has now grown from around 50 staff with a turnover of circa £3m, to over 200 staff with a turnover of over £10m. By bringing the two services together, ENVECO can take an integrated approach to delivering better and more improved environmental outcomes to residents, visitors and businesses in Blackpool. They are also supporting the Council's commitment to the Climate Emergency through the increased use of electric vehicles, as well as innovating through the introduction of new technology to work better and smarter.

### **A Phased Return to our Main Buildings**

With the guidance of our Director of Public Health, the Corporate Leadership Team have started to implement a phased plan that will see staff return to our main office buildings in significant numbers. Phase 1 began on the 6 September, allowing for the use of approximately 1 in 3 desk spaces in our main buildings. These arrangements allow for the continuation of social distancing, and all Covid secure arrangements remain in force, protecting staff and ensuring business continuity for our residents.

The course of the pandemic remains uncertain, and all arrangements will remain under review. Should circumstances allow, it is our intention to move to Phase 2 in the Spring. Phase 2 will include the use of

all desk spaces in our main buildings, alongside the continuation of hybrid (home and office) working where appropriate.

**Award shortlist nominations for our staff and services**

I am very pleased to report to Members that the efforts of our outstanding staff are being recognised by judges in this year's Local Government Chronicle Awards, with no fewer than four shortlisted nominations! Our Head of Commissioning and Corporate Delivery, Kate Aldridge, will represent us in the category of Outstanding Individual Contribution for her work during the pandemic and, in particular, her support for the Children's Services improvement journey. The Back-to-School marketing campaign implemented in August 2020 has been shortlisted in the Campaign of the Year category, whilst our use of digital technology to improve outcomes in regeneration and transformation will be showcased in the Digital Impact category. Finally, we also have a joint entry from the Council and Blackpool Housing Company in the Housing category, based on our work to deliver quality, affordable housing in our most deprived areas.

Good luck to all of the shortlisted nominees! We will find out if we have been successful in November.