

CORPORATE PORTFOLIOS

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

Full Fibre and Wireless Blackpool – major growth planned

The establishment of the fibre spine by the Fibre Blackpool co-operative has catalysed private sector investment in Blackpool, with announcements made totaling around £90 million, taking us closer to the goal of every home and business having access to a full fibre connection. Recent connections include all of the new Blackpool Coastal Housing properties at Troutbeck, @thegrange and the new Conference Centre, with support for other regeneration projects such as Anchorsholme Park, the new museum and the planned new Central car park also in the offing. The current investment in CCTV and a new control room is also significantly benefiting from the Fibre spine. Further development plans include a pilot expansion project to 15 sites in Bispham, connecting schools, Council sites and a NHS health centre by the end of the summer. If the pilot is successful this will be expanded further to cover more schools, Council and NHS sites creating a public sector Full Fibre network.

The fibre spine has also enabled us to offer free public WiFi (Wireless Blackpool) at every tram stop and between the train station and the Winter Gardens, complementing existing coverage of all Council buildings and libraries. The network can attract up to 5,000 daily users, with over 76,000 users in May.

Corporate Issues

Financial Year 2021/22 – ongoing challenges in Children’s Services

The Provisional Revenue Outturn for 2021/22 is £149,280,000 compared with the approved budget of £149,062,000, therefore the Council is reporting a modest overspend of £218,000.

The year-end variance position is summarised as follows:

Summary	2021/22 Variance £000
Directorates	4,103
Budgets Outside the Cash Limit	(3,353)
Strategic Leisure Assets	1,079
Leisure Assets – financed from Earmarked Reserves	(1,079)
Contributions and Contingencies, Levies and Capital Charges	(532)
Total	218

Directorates

The main reason for the net service overspend within the Directorates relates to Children’s Services at £4,455,000. The Children’s Social Care budget was increased by £8.173m in August 2020 following the approval of a Children’s Social Care Medium Term Financial Strategy (CSCMTFS). The additional investment was required to cover the historical increases in Looked After Children (LAC) numbers and unit costs, whilst also developing the placement market and increase the capacity within internal fostering. The CSMTFS aimed to reverse the current trend and this investment alongside other service improvements was planned to reduce placement spend by a third. However, LAC numbers have not reduced in line with the plan and placement unit costs have continued to increase significantly resulting in an overspend within the Children’s Social Care of £4,260k. As a result, we are revisiting the SCMTFS in summer 2022 in advance of setting the Council’s 2023/24 budget.

There was also an overspend of £900k against the Education Service line relating to £722k of Transport Services demand pressures and a historical savings target that has not been achieved. There are also pressures on income and staffing of £150k within the service. The balance of £28k relates to the net COVID-19 cost. However, other services within Children’s Services have underspent by £705k, mainly due to staff slippage and vacant posts during the Early Help Service restructure.

All other Directorates reported a combined net underspend position of £352,000.

Budgets Outside the Cash Limit

Underspends of £3,353,000 within Budgets Outside the Cash Limit helped to mitigate the Directorate overspends. Treasury Management underspent due to record low temporary borrowing rates, though this area will now require careful management as interest rates begin to creep up. Concessionary Fares underspent by £938k due to COVID-19 funding being received, the compensation scheme used in 2020/21 being extended until the end of the 2021/22 financial year and a reduction in such passenger numbers. Subsidiary Companies also underspent by £525,000 due to the release of a long-term provision and an expected reduction in charges, mainly relating to debt management.

Strategic Leisure Assets

The Strategic Leisure Assets cumulative overspend of £14,945,000 brought forward from 2020/21 is included within earmarked reserves along with the 2021/22 in-year overspend of £1,079,000. Offsetting this was a precautionary COVID-19 contingency of £2,987,000 which was agreed as part of the 2021/22 budget-setting process and applied in full at year-end. When the service begins to break-even it will then start to repay the reserve overspend. This is in line with the Medium Term Financial Plan.

Council Tax collection

At the end of March 2022 the amount collected for Council Tax (excluding Police and Fire precepts) was £55.1m and the collection rate was 88.00%. This compares to £52.8m and 87.76% at the same point in 2020/21. The amount collected has risen by £2.3m which is mainly due to increases in both the Council Tax rate and base offset by the impact of COVID-19, primarily deferred payments and revised instalment arrangements. The target collection rate is still 97.5% over a 4-year collection period.

As at 31 March 2022 the level of arrears has increased to £24.0m (compared to £21.7m in 2020/21) and the provision for bad debts has increased to £9.9m (compared to £9.0m in 2020/21). These reflect the current economic climate due to the COVID-19 pandemic, rising costs of living and the risks associated with the CTRS.

Council Tax Reduction Scheme

At the end of March 2022 the amount collected (excluding Police and Fire precepts) in respect of the CTRS and Council Tax for those who have to pay CTRS was £2.89m and the collection rate was 63.26%. This compares to £1.92m and 66.78% at the same point in 2020/21, the latter year's net collectable having been reduced by applying the £150 COVID-19 grant support to working-age households. The underlying rate of collection of CTRS was under greater pressure than 2020/21 due to accumulated arrears, limits on the amount that could be recovered from Attachment of Benefits of £3.60 per week, the impact of COVID-19, the ending of furlough payments in September and the temporary £20 uplift to Universal Credit in the autumn.

During 2021/22 the Council received a government grant of £2.6m for the COVID-19 Council Tax Hardship fund. This grant was used to reduce the amount payable for working-age council tax support recipients.

National Non-Domestic Rate (NNDR) collection

At the end of month 12 the amount collected for Business Rates was £29.17m and the collection rate was 92.27%. This compares positively to £15.48m and 85.77% at the same point in 2020/21, excluding the 'Extended Retail/Nurseries etc.' relief provided by central government. In 2020/21 100% relief was provided. In 2021/22 a new relief scheme was introduced which provided 3 months' relief (April 2021 to June 2021) at 100%, and 9 months' relief (July 2021 to March 2022) at 66%. For 2022/23 the relief for the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors reduces further to 50%.

Positively, as at 31 March 2022 the level of business rate arrears has decreased to £9.6m (compared to £9.8m in 2020/21). Due to the situation regarding COVID-19 the Government has extended the deadline for the completion of the NNDR 3 (actuals) return until 30 June 2022. Figures for the level of appeals provision, bad debt provision and shares of the surplus or deficit will not therefore be available until this NNDR 3 return is completed.

£150 Council Tax rebate

The government announced a £150 Energy Rebate payment to most households living in a Council Tax band A to D property earlier this year. It has been a significant amount of work to make these payments but we successfully paid 39,085 people, who pay their Council Tax by Direct Debit, into their bank accounts in early May. Where people do not pay their Council Tax by Direct Debit, a Post Office solution was put in place where the Council Tax payer can take a letter and identification proof to any Post Office and they can exchange the barcode on the

letter for £150 in cash. We have issued 25,301 letters in batches, and as at 1 June 2022, 73% of these had been cashed. We are still working through queries and if someone does not cash their payment before the expiry date of the letter we will post the payment onto their Council Tax account. In addition to this, work is now commencing on developing a discretionary scheme. We have received £524,850 to support others who are either not eligible under the main scheme eligibility criteria or where we may wish to give additional support. Early modelling of potential options is underway.

Working with Partners

Blackpool and Lancaster University Innovation Catalyst

The innovation catalyst is funded by the Community Renewal Fund, with the ultimate goal of encouraging a cluster of Net Zero data centres in Blackpool which take advantage of high speed local and international connections. These would be powered by renewable sources of energy, with various sources of power currently being explored, alongside the potential to make use of the waste heat – which could make the project net carbon negative, reducing our greenhouse gas emissions.

The catalyst is a taskforce that consists of stakeholders from the University, Council, business, digital infrastructure and renewables sectors and is working towards holding a symposium at the Winter Gardens on 15 September 2022 where it will share its learning on the opportunity open to us.

Increasing Digital Inclusion in Blackpool

The Digital Blackpool project is a brand-new initiative delivered by Groundwork and Blackpool Council. The pilot project aims to improve digital access, providing residents with the equipment, skills and confidence needed to access the digital world. Through a referral, residents can borrow either a Chromebook device or 4G connectivity for up to 42 days. The Chromebooks have been built from recycled laptops which would otherwise have potentially been disposed of, contributing to sustainability. Demand has grown steadily, with residents using devices for activities such as job searching, online training and skills development.

The Sandcastle - John Child

In a day of mixed emotions on 9 June we celebrated the Sandcastle Waterpark's Managing Director, John Child's 36th year working at the Internationally acclaimed and multi award winning venue. John has also spent 25 years at the helm overseeing multiple improvements and

has helped transform the business into a successful and profitable Tourism attraction that is renowned for its culture of Guest Service Excellence and Inclusion for All. John started as a lifeguard on 9 June 1986 after leaving University, he has seen many changes over the years including the change of management back to the Council and the introduction of innovative and exciting new rides and features. After a very busy and profitable 2021, the most successful year the venue has seen, John felt it was time for a fresh adventure and will be moving on after his marathon stint. We would like to thank him for his service to the business and to the town and wish him well for the future. John leaves an excellent team at Sandcastle Waterpark who will continue to run the venue whilst the Board and Blackpool Council consider new management arrangements.

Transforming Services

Procurement – new system for monitoring spend

The procurement team are working with colleagues in Finance and Exchequer Services to migrate details of 1,200 contracts onto the new TechnologyOne Finance System, due to go live in April 2023. This will help us improve the link between contract spend and budgets.

Of just over £227m third party spend in the 2021/22 financial year, an extremely encouraging 46% was with local providers.

Millions of pounds of local benefit delivered by Social Value processes

Social Value is included in the evaluation assessment criteria of tenders awarded by the Corporate Procurement Team as a way of ensuring that the benefit of local public service spending is felt by local businesses and people whenever possible.

We track progress on Social Value by using a series of indicators selected from the national “TOMS” (Themes, Outcomes, Measures) framework. The table below shows the total social value being delivered to date on 6 key projects currently underway across the borough, which equates to over £20 million, with figures from Showtown yet to come. These highlight the benefits of adopting social value as a part of assessing tenders, with the actual value achieved by the council through social value components of other projects meaning the overall figure is significantly higher. The bulk was from the Conference Centre (£10,948,242) but significant amounts were achieved across all projects listed (Holiday Inn - £2,797,917; Colton House - £380,850; Hounds Hill Shopping Centre - £1,598,099; Troutbeck - £4,589,446):

Social Value Reference	Measure	Overall Target	Current Overall Total to date (June '22)
NT1	Number of local people employed (FTE)	18.5	16.33
NT3	Number of employees (FTE) taken on who are long term unemployed	17	7
NT7	Number of hours dedicated supporting unemployed people into work	50	39
NT8	Local school and college visits – delivering careers talks, curriculum advice etc.	171	291.5
NT9	No of training opportunities on contract (BTEC, C&G, NVQ,HNC) that have been completed during the year	54	56
NT10	No. of apprenticeships on the contract that have either been completed during the year, or that will be supported	156	8
NT11	No. of hours dedicated to support young people into work (e.g. CV advice under 24	136 plus 6 sessions of workshops	812 plus 1 session of workshops
NT12	No. of weeks spent on meaningful work placements or pre-employment course;	60	76
NT13	Meaningful work placements that pay Minimum or National Living wage	10	1
NT15	Provision of expert business advice to VCSEs and SMEs (e.g. financial advice, meet the buyer events	28	9
NT19	TOTAL amount (£) spent through contract with LOCAL micro, small and MSME's		20,219,947
NT20	Demonstrate commitment to work practices that improve staff wellbeing, recognise mental health Hrs / sessions	60 hours and 9 sessions	79 hours and 6 sessions
NT21	Diversity training for subcontractors	20	50
NT25	Initiatives to be taken to tackle homelessness	40	4
NT28	Donations or in-kind contributions to local community projects (£ & material)	£25,000	£25,046
NT29	No hours volunteering time spent towards local community projects	104 hours and 20 days	169 hours

In addition to the social value delivered on the above key projects in the table, other social value work has been taking place across various projects in the town. For example, an event was held on 1 March 2022 at The Winter Gardens to help inspire Blackpool's construction small to mid-size enterprises (SMEs) to encourage them to upskill their teams on social value in order

to improve future capacity. Attendees were also able to hear from our Climate Team about the role that businesses can play in addressing the climate emergency.

With regards to individual suppliers, Robertson Construction have been working with employment teams, Positive Steps into Work and More Positive Together, to provide group and individual tailored sessions to help those aged 16+ facing long term unemployment with interviews, career/CV and specific construction jobs. The Robertson team have also given specialist volunteer time (50 hrs +) to assist Counselling in the Community (New Waterloo Road mental health and community hub) with building control drawings, risk assessments and approximately £500 worth of donated materials to help fit out the building .

Arrow County have supported Blackpool's Clean and Green Week (May 2022) by providing litter picking equipment for volunteers which will then go on to be donated to the Langdale Green team. The Langdale Green team and Blackpool Centre for Independent Living (BCIL) have also received support from Graham Construction who replaced all vital equipment that was stolen from the centre's premises. The £7k replacement tools handover ceremony was a great success and brought leaders, operational and support staff and volunteers together in a celebratory style gathering on 12 May 2022 at Blackpool's New Langdale facility for Independent Living.