

CABINET MEMBER FOR LEVELLING UP: PEOPLE - COUNCILLOR JO FARRELL

Portfolio areas of responsibility:

- Public health and health protection
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Harm reduction
- Domestic abuse
- Leisure services including leisure management, Active Blackpool, Community Sport, PE and schools' sports and outdoor pursuits
- Libraries
- Housing options and homelessness
- Decent Homes
- Housing related support and sustaining private sector tenancies
- Catering
- Equality and diversity
- Adult Learning
- Getting People into Work including Positive Steps and Business Growth Prosperity
- Relationship with Department for Work and Pensions and Job Centre Plus
- Social Value
- Welfare benefits and Council Tax Reduction Scheme

Introduction

The cabinet member will present the report to Council and report on any key issues.

Theme 1 – Adult Learning (Blackpool Learning Rooms 2022 to 2023)

Blackpool Learning Rooms, formerly Adult Community and Family Learning, priority is to help residents aged 19+ develop a range of skills that can help them and their families in their everyday lives. Blackpool Learning Rooms are funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency and currently deliver person-centred programmes in IT, Employability, Health and Well-Being, Family Learning, Cooking, English and Maths.

Adult Community and Family Learning moved into the Healthworks building in May 2021 to make the Service accessible to more residents, and also to strengthen partnership working with Positive Steps into Work and the Department for Work and Pensions. In September 2022 the newly renovated and branded Blackpool Learning Rooms were officially opened, located on Floor 1 of Healthworks and have provided bespoke accredited courses for 182 Positive Steps

into Work clients so far. To date 20% of these clients have gone on into work, with the expectation that this will increase.

Courses continue to be delivered in schools, libraries and community centres in the heart of our communities. Specific qualifications are delivered to enable residents to be work-ready and guarantee interviews for those that complete in partnership with employers.

In the 2022/23 academic year Blackpool Learning Rooms has continued to build on the success of pre-pandemic years by delivering learning to 1,274 individual residents, of whom 674 have progressed onto further learning opportunities. 86% of residents that attended accredited courses (264 learners) achieved their qualification. In June 2023 towards the end of the first full academic year in Healthworks, Blackpool Learning Rooms maintained its OFSTED overall 'good' rating and also achieved 'outstanding' in the behaviors and attitudes section of the inspection which acknowledged both staff and learners attitudes to learning.

Blackpool Learning Rooms delivers a Supported Internship Programme, Project Search, for learners aged 16-24 with Education Health Care Plans. These learners are given the skills and work experience to progress them at the end of their 12 month programme into work. Now in its tenth year at Blackpool, the success rate is almost ten times above the national average of 6% of learners with learning difficulties in to paid employment at 65%.

Blackpool Learning Rooms is currently leading on the new Government-funded Multiply programme which is aimed at helping adults who do not have Maths GCSE at grade C (or equivalent) to improve their numeracy skills. Work is being undertaken alongside a number of training providers and Blackpool College to deliver this programme which is funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Theme 2 – Cost of Living Crisis

Although increases in inflation may be starting to slow, locally the crisis is far from over, which is reflected in the support funding available. In the six months prior to 31 March 2023, the government provided £1.745 million, with a further £400,000 from the Council and NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board. In addition, Blackpool has been allocated further Household Support funding of £3.4 million from the Government for the financial year 2023/2024, with further funding coming from Public Health budgets.

Support schemes have been developed to help households that are struggling with the rising costs of gas, electricity, water, food and wider essentials. These schemes include:

- Support for families normally receiving school meals support through the holidays, where families receive £15 per week of supermarket vouchers.
- Short term financial support is available to residents struggling with household energy costs. An award of £200 will be made to households of two or less, or £300 for

households of three or more. Payments are usually made direct to the energy provider and will be credited to the residents account with their utility provider.

- The Discretionary Support scheme, subject to criteria, is available for residents that need wider short-term emergency support e.g. essential furniture and kitchen items.
- An online directory of local support organisations that can help people with cost of living issues is available on the FYI Directory and the Council's website.
- A free phone support service is available Monday – Friday 10 am – 3 pm, to help people find the support they need, including those with difficulty accessing the internet.
- The Blackpool Together Partnership has been formed with our local voluntary sector, and community organisations have been invited to apply for funding for a wide range of innovative projects that will support people struggling with the cost of living.
- There are now over 30 active projects supporting people with food, cost of energy and wider essentials. These projects include:
 - Welcoming places where people can get something to eat and take part in activities
 - Lunch and tea time clubs, including support at weekends
 - Community laundrettes and drying facilities
 - Shower facilities
 - Help with emergency essentials for cooking, heating and clothing
 - Targeted help for people with disabilities, special needs and children with SEND
 - Help with emergency essentials and the cost of utilities
 - Help for those struggling with the cost of removing excessive household waste
 - Information and tips to reduce household bills
 - Cookery classes and tips for buying food on a budget
 - Community pantries and food distribution points
- The offer will be extended during the winter when demand is likely to be higher, including:
 - Publicity campaigns, including Your Blackpool newspaper, social media, leaflet drops
 - Community outreach events from a range of organisations, including debt management and help with checking eligibility for benefits
 - An extension of the warm hubs programme outside of 9-5 and at weekends
 - Extension of the advice and information offer to target those struggling with cost of rent and mortgage costs
 - Continued consultation with our Blackpool Together Partnership to assess demands and changes to planning due to fluctuations in prices and evolving situations

At the present time it is unknown if Government funding will continue after 31 March 2024 and any allocated funding must be spent by this time. The Council will continue to investigate other funding opportunities and develop other support mechanisms going forward.

Other services also support this agenda. In particular the Blackpool Eco Coaches service provided by Groundwork via the Council's UK Shared Prosperity Funding will launch town-wide in autumn, following a successful project delivered via European Regional Development Fund funding on Grange Park. Based at Palatine Library with the Cosy Homes in Lancashire project, it will focus on practical measures to reduce energy use, and therefore bills, which also reduces carbon emissions.

Theme 3 – Holiday Activity and Food Programme

The Blackpool Holiday Activity and Food programme is a government funded programme for children who are in receipt of benefits-related free school meals (Reception to Year 11). The Council works with local providers to deliver the Holiday Activity and Food programme to eligible pupils across Blackpool to provide a wide range of activities, health and nutrition information and free healthy meals each day to the participants.

Children in Blackpool face particular high levels of poverty, with 38.56% of children living in income deprived households. Given these high levels of deprivation, children in Blackpool are particularly vulnerable to holiday hunger and learning loss during the school holidays. The Schools, pupils and their characteristics: Academic Year 21/22 report highlights there were 8,269 pupils known to be eligible for free school meals across primary and secondary schools.

The Grant requirements from the Department for Education for the Holiday Activity and Food funding only requires local authorities to deliver a free holiday provision to children eligible for benefits related free school meals for the equivalent of at least four hours a day, four days a week for just 6 weeks; four weeks in the Summer holidays and a week's provision in both the Easter and Christmas holidays. As detailed in another report, the growing need to support children in Blackpool during all school holidays has led Public health to fund the Holiday Activity and Food in the remaining school holidays meaning our provision currently covers all school holidays, 11 weeks per year. The extra funding for this provision is from reserves that Public Health has carried forward from previous years.

Public Health is responsible for coordinating the programme and has worked tirelessly to create a new open framework allowing us to build a consortium of Providers that meets the Department for Education and Blackpool Council's requirements for the Holiday Activity and Food Programme. There are now ten contracted providers on the frameworks, namely, Blackpool Football Club Community Trust, Active Blackpool, Park Rangers, The BoatHouse Youth, Boys and Girls Club, House of Wingz/Skool of Street, Magic Club, Groundworks @The Grange, Blackpool Carers Centre, and Dealmaker Lt, who have worked extremely hard to increase their provision.

The new framework of provision and partnership working has been extremely successful in increasing the reach and commitment to supporting eligible children. For example, in summer 2022, our six week Holiday Activity and Food programme, supported 1,460 unique eligible children but by Easter 2023, the provision was able to support 1,285 unique eligible children in just two weeks, with over 1,160 places available each day. The Council has also been successful in increasing the SEND specific offer, with 3 providers now offering camps for those with mild to moderate additional needs across the town and one providing a summer residential stay. This summer 2023, the largest and most varied Holiday Activity and Food programme was offered,

with over 1,500 places available per day, at 34 clubs in 28 locations spanning the length and breadth of the town.

Whilst attendance throughout the Holiday Activity and Food provision is predominantly primary aged children, the provision is beginning to see an average of 20.5 % of attendances from the secondary aged cohort. Providers have taken their clubs out to the areas where this age group gather, offering activities to engage them and at times better suited to their needs such as evenings. More clubs have also been provided in areas of higher anti-social behaviour, with great take-up.

Overall our Blackpool Holiday Activity and Food programme has grown not only in both reach and size of provision but also the quality of the activities and food offered. The Holiday Activity and Food provision provides all participants with at least one healthy nutritious meal per session with all food provided of school food standard. Work was undertaken with a new provider, Dealmaker Ltd, at Christmas to create recipes for a low-energy “Dish Up” Recipe box initiative. Each box containing ingredients and instructions to make one meal for a family of four that could be cooked using a kettle or microwave, making meals accessible during the Cost of Living Crisis. In total 1,804 boxes were delivered to 902 Holiday Activity and Food families across the town, encouraging participants and their parents to make healthy, nutritious quick and easy to cook recipes together at home as a family. The partnership is both collaborative and reactive and strives to achieve the best for participants. In 2022/23 the programme reached 19.4 % of the Free School Meal HAF Cohort. The Council aims to increase this figure by promoting the programme, increasing the existing provision and also increasing the number of providers.

General questions / comments

Councillors will have the opportunity to raise questions / comments on any matter in the Cabinet Member’s portfolio.