

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL –‘CORPORATE’ PORTFOLIO AREA
COUNCILLOR SIMON BLACKBURN

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>

Corporate Issues

Financial Monitoring

Financial performance monitoring in the early part of 2015/ 2016 has highlighted financial pressures emerging in Children’s Services, Adult Services, Property Services, Concessionary Fares, Parking Services, Community and Environmental Services and Places with estimated working balances forecast to fall by £3,466,000 against the budgeted position over the year. This fall is in the context of working balances at the start of the year of £6,188,000, an erosion of 56%.

The latest month 3 financial performance report for 2015/ 2016 was reported to the Executive on 14 September.

The Budget for 2015/ 2016 required total savings to be found of £25.2 million. As at 30 June 2015 (month 3) 67% of the 2015/ 2016 savings target had already been delivered. The current full-year forecast predicts that 86% will be achieved by the year-end, which takes into account new in-year pressures and savings and work is underway to close this gap further with alternative savings plans.

The full-year effect of the 2015/ 2016 savings in 2016/ 2017 amounts to 62% of the £25.2 million target. This is an encouraging position after only three months.

Revenues and Benefits Performance

Council tax collection at the end of July was 36.4% (36.4% as at July 2014). A review of collection and recovery options for working age Council Tax Reduction customers is underway. The aim will be to focus resource on collection from those who are able to pay and engage other services with those who cannot to provide budgeting or other advice. Business rates collection at the end of July was 35.7%, a significant improvement on the same period last year of 33.5%.

The average time to process new benefit claims and changes for July was 34 days. Work is ongoing to reduce the backlog.

Member Induction and Training

Since the election, the Democratic Governance team has been working with the eight new members to arrange induction sessions into the work of the Council. This has covered a number of areas of the work of the Council and allowed the members to settle into their new roles quickly. We have also taken the opportunity to refresh the Member Training Panel to

enable it to lead on and assess specific projects relating to member learning and development. This will hopefully involve new and long serving members and be a key cross party group.

Blackpool Council Plan 2015/ 2020

Consultation on the refreshed Council Plan is now complete and the final document will be submitted to the next Council meeting. The purpose of the Council Plan is to provide a clear and concise summary of the Council's vision for Blackpool and the key actions that the Council will take to work towards achieving that vision. Over three quarters of the 397 respondents to the consultation reported that the new vision for Blackpool "fully" or "mostly" reflects their own view. Actions felt by the respondents to be particularly important in addressing the two priorities were the regeneration of the town centre, and encouraging civic pride and community involvement.

Budget-setting engagement

An exercise encouraging residents to consider how they would allocate funding across services was launched last month and will continue into September. Used by nearly 100 different Councils across the country, the Simalto method allows people to make decisions between competing priorities, allowing them to take a view on the budget as a whole and understand the financial challenges we are facing. Residents have been invited to take part face to face or through an online survey, with the findings being used to inform initial discussions on the budget setting process. This is a precursor to consultation on specific proposals later in the year.

Strategic Issues

Risk Services

The Corporate Risk Management Group, in conjunction with the Corporate Leadership Team, has reviewed the Council's Strategic Risk Register to ensure that it is fit for purpose and that there is a robust process in place for monitoring progress against the identified controls. The Corporate Business Continuity Plan is being updated and refined including prioritising the critical activities list to be clear in relation to which services cannot fail in order to provide essential services to the community should an incident at the Council occur.

The Council is participating in the North West Chief Auditors Group to develop a peer review process to ensure that the requirements for an external review of the internal team against the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards can be met in the most cost effective way.

A spend-to-save business case is being implemented which has seen investment in a system to assist with the detection and investigation of potentially fraudulent insurance claims.

Community Connectors

The Community Connectors programme was launched on 3 September under the auspices of the Fairness Commission. The first cohort of connectors has been identified due to their involvement with the Area Forums previously and they will help to shape the future direction of the project. It is hoped that within five years we can have as many as 1500 community connectors, who will be community minded citizens who will embark on basic training to allow them to help the community support each other. For example, they might organise litter picks or planting projects, they might support lonely or isolated people who want to go

to local clubs and groups but do not have the confidence to go alone, there are a range of projects for them to undertake depending on their skills and interests.

Blackpool Museum

The Council has set out to create a brand new museum for Blackpool and for the nation. It will bring together the objects, stories and memories which together tell the local, national and international Blackpool Story. The museum will be in the Pavilion Theatre within Blackpool's historic Winter Gardens.

Blackpool Museum Project held two public open days in the Pavilion Theatre on 28 and 29 August, 11am to 4pm, to allow members of the local community and visitors to get a taster of what is to come, give us their feedback and tell us their stories.

Policy Issues

Welfare Reforms

The impact of the welfare reforms announced in the recent Chancellor's Budget is being analysed to understand the effect on residents. A report will be made available providing information and case studies to inform members and officers.

The changes will have an impact on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for working-age customers and place additional costs upon the Council. Impact and financial modelling is underway, the data will enable Scheme options for 2016/ 2017 and beyond to be prepared and appraised.

Transforming Services

Channel Shift

The Channel Shift Bulky Matters service review is now complete and the process can be completed end to end on the website. Missed Bins process is currently being tested together with the revised process for reporting fly tipping.

ICT Support

The team has recently supported the following implementations to enable services to become more efficient and effective:

- Catering services have recently equipped schools kitchens with an app (Cypad) to enable Schools kitchens to be managed more effectively
- School Admissions service with a pilot of web chat to enable for more effective delivery of the schools admissions process
- Libraries with the implementation of new public access Google Chrome Devices and Self Service Printing Facilities

Working with Partners

Support for People in Crisis

The Council is working with the Blackpool Food Partnership and the Citizens Advice Bureau on a bid for funds to assist people in crisis. It is hoped that funds will be secured for an additional debt worker within the Central Advice Team.

ICT Supporting Partners

The Council has recently signed off the implementation of delivering a managed IT Service for local charity Empowerment.

Through partnership working with the Blackpool NHS IT Services the free Wi-Fi Service (Wireless Blackpool) is to be extended further beyond Victoria Hospital and walk in centres to additional NHS sites to include some GP surgeries and health centres.

Faith engagement and social action

In partnership with Together Lancashire and the local Faith community a major exercise has been completed to map the extent of social and community support contributed by Blackpool churches and other faith groups. Well over 60 initiatives are now included and when the work is finalised it will help to deepen cooperation between faith groups and Council services to work together on tackling poverty and social need. It is also hoped the project will lay the foundations for a new strategic Faith Covenant between the Council and faith leaders in the town, to build on the work of recent initiatives such as the Blackpool Food Partnership.

Combined Authority for Lancashire

I have been involved in talks with Leaders of all the Lancashire district councils, Blackburn with Darwen Council and Lancashire County Council to consider setting up a Combined Authority to oversee strategic decisions, which could bring in additional funding to the whole of Lancashire as part of devolved powers for the English regions. The Chief Executive and I will have delivered an update to councillors before this meeting and a formal report on the governance review and a full scheme will be submitted to Council at the next meeting in November.