

**RESOURCES DIRECTORATE - COUNCIL FORUM UPDATE**

**Council Tax and Business Rate Collection**

It is pleasing to report that Collection targets for both Council Tax and Business Rates in 2009/10 have been exceeded despite the economic downturn and the introduction of the Business Rates deferral scheme:

	Target	Outturn 09/10	Outturn 08/09
Council Tax	96.8%	97%	96.7%

An increase of 0.3% compared to 08/09

Business Rates	98%	98.1%*	98.3%
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A decrease of 0.2% compared to 08/09\*

\*The total of deferred business rates (as a result of businesses being allowed to defer 60% of the increase in their 2009/10 rates bill) amounted to approximately £235k. We have been advised by the DCLG that this amount should not be included in the Business Rates Collection for 2009/10, as it has not yet been collected. The year on year decrease of 0.2% is attributed to this. If we had collected only 50% of the deferred amount in 2009/10, the outturn would have been 98.4%. An increase of 0.1% on 08/09.

The Council Tax collection performance has increased from 2008/09, and at 97%, is the highest since its introduction in 1993.

**Changes to Business Rates - Small Business Rate Relief**

Under plans announced in March, there will be a temporary increase in the level of Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) so that eligible ratepayers will receive relief at 100% on properties with rateable values up to £6,000 with a tapered relief of between 100% and 0% for properties with rateable values between £6,001 and £12,000. The new levels of relief will be available for 12 months from 1 October 2010 to 30 September 2011.

**Future Jobs Fund**

We recently welcomed a number of people who have joined the Council utilising the Future Jobs Fund. The Council is leading the way in Pennine Lancashire in offering opportunities for 18-24 year olds under this Scheme. There are now over 50 people appointed to the Council under phase 1 of the Scheme and plans are to expand these opportunities to other currently unemployed people from the Borough in future weeks.

## **Registrars**

### **Increases in the use of Blackburn with Darwen Registrar Services for 2009/10**

Figures relating to ceremonies at approved premises, birth and death registrations and notices of marriage/civil partnerships remained roughly the same as in 2008/9; however there was a dramatic increase in the following:

- marriage ceremonies at the Register Office, King Georges Hall increased from 263 in 2008/09 to 694 in 2009/10, an increase of 431 ceremonies
- Citizenships went from 268 to 523, an increase of 255 ceremonies
- Copy of Certificates issued went from 13373 to 22389, and increase of 9016!

### **Credit/Debit Card Payments**

The Registration Service is now able to take electronic payments via credit and debit cards. The new system went live at the Register Office on 1st April and customers now have the choice of paying by card instead of just cash or cheque. So far the system has been a success and is growing in popularity with the customers.

### **Business Support for Pennine Lancashire**

The Grant Funding Agreement with the North West Development Agency (NWDA) has now been executed which secures the funding for the provision of business start up support under the Pennine Lancashire Intensive Start up Support Programme. This programme aims to provide intensive specialist services and support for people considering setting up in business, improve survival rates of businesses and to contribute towards increased levels of enterprise activity within the under performing groups/areas of the Northwest region.

The Council undertook a mini procurement process on behalf of Pennine Lancashire Local Authorities for delivery of the Programme and contracts have been awarded to Consortium of Enterprise Agencies Ltd and The Princes Trust.