

## LEADERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

I have taken over as Leader at a very difficult time for both the Council and the citizens of the Borough. There are major funding threats coming from the national ConDem Government and we need to seek to provide stability here in Blackburn with Darwen following a period of political uncertainty caused by the previous administration. In my first report to the Council I would like to set out some of the key objectives my colleagues and I will seek to achieve in the times ahead.

My first task together with the Chief Executive and officers is to ensure a smooth transfer of the Council's political leadership and ensure that services continue to be delivered to all the people who live in the Borough. There needs to be changes in the priorities of the Council from that of the previous administration in order to cut out waste, to protect all our communities and ensure we are well prepared for the expected austerity ahead. In this respect my cabinet colleagues and I will be carefully reviewing all policy commitments of the previous administration to ensure they are in line with our priorities and that they meet the test of value for money.

In particular for immediate action we will reverse the damaging policies of the last administration by:

- Ensuring funding and support for the valuable police community support officers believing these are vital for the safety of all our neighbourhoods and communities.
- Providing ongoing support for our community centres in a planned transfer to local people who we believe with good support and a commitment to local control are well equipped to run these centres.
- Review the closure of Shadsworth Leisure Centre and other areas of leisure services which are so important to the health and wellbeing of our community and also provides an outlet for many young people keeping them occupied and off the streets

During the three years that they were in office the Coalition made a number of unwise spending commitments such as allocating £3m to refurbish the Town Hall and buying up business premises that remain empty and unused. This has led to approximately 34% increase in the Councils debt which now stands at £139 million. This level of debt is unsustainable and in the medium term we will address this.

In addition:

- We will review neighbourhood engagement, recognising the importance of working with long standing and respected local organisations such as community associations, tenants' federations and parish & town councils etc.
- We will place an important focus on a community cohesion approach that ensures strong neighbourhoods and using previous successful processes such as 100 & neighbourhood voices. We will re-launch the revised strategy in a major event towards the end of autumn.
- We will consult with our partners to restructure the valuable LSP to make it more efficient and to reflect the changes in funding, the 2030 vision and the need to integrate more effectively with our new approach to neighbourhood engagement.
- We will continue to work with other public sector bodies aiming at integrated budgets to make efficiencies and to improve services.
- We will continue to work with the voluntary and community sector to revitalise the Compact with those bodies recognising the importance they have in representing the grassroots and supporting our communities.

- We will review our role and commitment to the Pennine Lancashire Partnership with the aim of ensuring that in the future both the political leadership and the Council's officers concentrate on what is best for the citizens and communities of Blackburn with Darwen.
- We will continue the work with health to fully integrate with the Council to:
  - To improve front line services of health and social care by joining up functions to the citizens of the borough
  - To maximise savings from back office functions and other appropriate areas which can be used to support the front line
  - To bring greater democratic influence and member involvement into health and wellbeing
- We will continue to deliver excellence in our children services by rapidly moving forward on improving our schools and improving the early year's services.

Finally we will ensure the officer structure of the Council more accurately reflects the above priorities. We will move very swiftly to correct the uncertainty and concerns of the workforce caused by the damaging publicity and use of the media by the last leader. We guarantee that in the future we will ensure that we communicate with our staff and their trade unions on all areas of change.

Since taking office we have been looking very closely at the chief officer structure to ensure it reflects the importance of key priorities. Early signs suggest we will be able to exceed the target of £850k savings from chief officers posts suggested in the press.