

LEADERS REPORT TO COUNCIL – NOVEMBER 2010

PROGRESS ON OUR PRIORITIES

In the two months since assuming control of the Council we have made significant progress on meeting our stated priorities. We revisited the major restructure of senior managers & directors and have ensured the new structure will help deliver the key services we have prioritised and have also ensured additional savings have been made. We have also looked again at some of the damaging decisions around closing or withdrawing services and where we can we have been working with the community to reinstate and support vital services. As some of the reviews that were instigated by our predecessors begin to report we will continue to ensure that front line services will be prioritised.

COMPREHENSIVE SPENDING REVIEW

Following the recent announcement by the Chancellor we are now examining the consequences for the citizens of Blackburn with Darwen of the Con Dem Government's severe and unfair cuts to local government funding. We have been told by the Government that there will be an average reduction of 7.25% in Council spending each year over the next four years. However, commentators suggest that Boroughs like ours with deprived areas will be unfairly hit much harder than the average and the cuts could be much more severe especially in the first year. We are also seriously worried that previous commitments such as Building Schools for the Future and the continuation of employing popular PCSO's in our communities are under risk. We will therefore continue to monitor developments and keep everyone informed as the full extent of the savage reductions on our communities become clearer.

My Executive Board colleagues will give a more detailed breakdown of issues affecting their respective portfolio's and during November I will be involved in providing full staff briefings to discuss the outcomes and impact of the CSR.

CITIZEN CONSULTATION

In line with commitments I gave on becoming Leader we intend to set up a consultation process across the Borough over the next few weeks with representative community based organisations and members of the public. This will allow a wide range of views to be heard as we discuss what our priorities should be in the future. The meetings will provide up to date information on the effect of the Government's spending cuts and the options we face as a result. We will pass on independent analysis from organisations such as the Institute of Fiscal Studies that is already showing that the poor and those fairly well off will suffer more than the very rich. Other commentators have pointed out that two thirds of the cuts will unfairly hit women and affect their career prospects and projected outcomes such as this will need to feature in our calculations.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S INVOLVEMENT

I am always committed to finding new ways to involve our citizens in the engagement and decision making process of the Council, in particular young people who are the future of our borough need to be fully engaged. To take this forward I have asked for a report to be placed on the agenda for this meeting to make the Youth MP and a Deputy Youth MP, observers with full speaking rights at the Executive Board. This is a further step towards ensuring the policies of the Council are sensitive to the wishes of our community.

PENNINE LANCASHIRE

Members will be aware that in the past I have expressed serious reservations regarding the openness, transparency and lack of democratic accountability of Pennine Lancashire matters. I am determined that all decision making in this organisation is open and democratic in the future.

During the meeting I raised concern that areas like Pennine Lancashire will suffer in a disproportional way from cuts in public spending and that a minister should be approached to visit the area to see how vital it is to upgrade infrastructure including our rail services such as the Darwen to Bolton single railway line.

REGENERATE PENNINE LANCASHIRE REMODELLING

Since becoming leader I have had concerns that as a result of the government's reduction in regeneration funding the existing structure and size of Regenerate Pennine Lancashire was no longer appropriate. Consequently, a decision to restructure the company in line with available reduced resources has been taken. All Regenerate staff have been declared at risk redundancy and have been issued with notices to this effect. Consultation has begun with staff and trade unions regarding proposals to reduce staffing by approx 50% by January 2011.

LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP'S

Members will be aware that the government wrote to local authority leaders and chief executives and also business leaders in June, inviting partnerships to submit proposals for the formation of Local Enterprise Partnerships by September 6.

Along with the other Pennine Lancashire authorities and with endorsement from local business leaders we support a proposal to establish a Pennine Lancashire LEP. The LEP will have strategic responsibility across several different themes- enterprise and growth; employment and skills; funding and investment; connectivity; spatial planning and housing. The proposal is built on a strong evidence base, years of existing partnership work and a determination to work together to stimulate economic growth in the area. Feedback from government as to whether the proposal has been successful is awaited.

Councillor Kate Hollern