REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

EDL PROTEST

The English Defence League (EDL) and counter demonstrators held events at agreed sites in Blackburn town centre on Saturday (2 April 2011). Only 12 arrests were made and these are mainly public order offences amongst the EDL. It was estimated that around 2,000 EDL and about 500 counter demonstrators took part in the events. The events passed mostly without incident and this was down to the local community and their help and tolerance during the events and the lead up to them. All our staff should also be commended for their efforts, as well as those who have worked alongside us from other organisations, in particular the Police in Eastern Division and their colleagues from neighbouring constabularies, community volunteers, marshals and mediators. I believe because this event was well handled, community relations are now even stronger in this town. We can never be complacent about and we will need to constantly work on this key area.

LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP (LEP)

Ministers at CLG and BIS called a meeting of Lancashire Leaders and MPs as well as the two chambers of commerce in early March to try to resolve the Local Enterprise Partnership structures in Lancashire. The private sector and majority of authorities in Pennine Lancashire have continued to support and be committed to a Pennine Lancashire LEP as the preferred option throughout this process. Ministers asked the Leaders in Pennine Lancashire and the Leader of Lancashire County Council to work together to reach a solution for Lancashire. We have had several meetings with the county council over recent weeks and made progress on a solution, looking at all the options available. On the 14th April Government announced the formation of a single Lancashire Local Enterprise Partnership.

REGIONAL GROWTH FUND

PLACE Joint Committee endorsed four projects which were put forward in the first round of the Regional Growth Fund (RGF) bidding fund. RGF is a three year programme worth £1.4bn. The government received 464 bids in the first round with a value of £2.78bn. The second round of the Regional Growth Fund opens on April 14 and PLACE will be putting forward a programme based bid in this round. The authorities will work together to develop the bid and PLACE Joint Committee and business leaders will endorse the final bid.

HOUSING

The Government's New Homes Bonus scheme was launched earlier this year. Almost £1bn has been set aside for the scheme for the next four years. From April 2011, the scheme will match fund the additional council tax from increases in housing stock for the following six years with an extra amount for affordable homes.

Based on the New Homes Bonus calculator for 2009/10, Blackburn with Darwen would draw down just £110,500. In comparison, other Lancashire districts will receive the following: Lancaster £289,283; Fylde £348,291; Chorley £377,395; Blackpool £466,147 and Wyre £850,259. Previously some of these authorities were not able to access other housing related funding streams as their housing markets have functioned well. Under the New Homes Bonus more affluent areas will now draw down more funding than they've had previously.

In addition, the government has announced that the Housing Market Renewal (HMR) programmes across the country will close. Blackburn with Darwen has accessed funding from several different streams to address serious structural weaknesses in the local housing market, including: Housing Market Renewal, National Affordable Housing Programme, and Property and Regeneration Grant. In 2009/10 this totalled £19.7m and for 10/11 is expected to be £11.2m. The programme was a 15 year strategy to transform the housing supply in the area and it is extremely disappointing that this has been halted mid-way through the programme, leaving areas incomplete and residents stranded in homes that have little value on the open market.

A recent review estimated that at least £20m was required just to bring the HMR programme to an orderly end.

Councillor Kate Hollern