

REPORT TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER OF NEIGHBOURHOODS & CUSTOMER SERVICES

PUBLIC PROTECTION

Tobacco Enforcement

We continue to enforce against illicit tobacco and under age sales of cigarettes, working closely with the Trading Standards North West Illicit Tobacco Team. Prohibition of cigarette vending machines requires spot checks on premises. We also check niche tobacco (generally chewing or shisha tobacco) sold in the Borough is correctly labelled with warning phrases. Three cases are currently proceeding through the Courts relating to tobacco – two with regard to shisha houses, and one with regard to retail supply of illicit niche tobacco. Under age sales operations are continuing; the latest operation saw all retailers who were tested refusing to sell to the under age volunteers; the current rate of sales to young volunteers working with the PPS is 12%, compared with 25% for last year.

Cheetham Hill Disruption Exercise

The PPS is continuing to enforce trade marks legislation to prevent counterfeit products being sold in the Borough, and has recently contributed staff to a disruption exercise in Cheetham Hill, Manchester. The scale of the operation was too large for a single department to undertake, so local authorities across the region contributed staff to assist. Approximately £1.5 million worth of counterfeit goods were seized, there were numerous arrests, a number of illegal immigrants were deported and £5000 cash was seized.

Sustainable Neighbourhood Services

Community Asset Transfer/Capacity Building Training Update:

We are continuing to deliver management transfer of community assets. The Council is currently engaged in handing over Barlow Institute following a period of capacity building and support for the Barlow Committee. We have recently tendered Accrington Rd and Greenfields and have selected partners for these centres. Bangor Street and Mill Hill were also tendered but have proved slightly more challenging due to competing interests in the case of Bangor Street and not enough interest in Mill Hill. The Council has taken the step of suspending the procurement of Bangor Street to allow further consideration of community issues.

Community clean ups:

Over 500 residents have taken part in 11 community clean ups since July under the Your Call initiative. Community officers are working in partnership with the Environment department to loan equipment and deliver health and safety training to residents.

Shadsworth with Whitebirk Big Local Lottery update:

The next phase of the programme is being launched on 8th and 9th February and will introduce the visioning process for the area as well as introducing the next steps for the 'Getting People Involved' (GPI) stage. It is important to capture not just residents' perspectives but also the views of key stakeholders who could contribute to the overall vision for the area. The launch will take place on Wednesday 8 February at 6.15pm in Westbury Gardens Church Hall or Thursday 9 February at 2.30pm in Shadsworth Well being & activity centre (Community Centre).

Community Safety:

Community Action against Crime Innovation Grants - The Government announced a grant award scheme for community groups to apply for funding from £1000 to £50,000 to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour. The community safety team supported a total of 16 applications, of which 6 totalling circa £216k have made it through to the final stage. The bids range from a scheme to tackle female perpetrators of domestic violence to tackling intergenerational concerns around crime and facilities for young people at risk of becoming involved in anti social behaviour. The bid applicants should find out if their application was successful by the end of January.

Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) - The current CCTV system within Blackburn with Darwen has been enhanced by the addition of a monitored camera at Longshaw Green Play area, funded by the local Tenants Association.

Alleygating - Some 11 schemes are currently in the process of being installed/approved, securing a large number of streets in the Borough.

Anti-Social Behaviour - Twin Valley Homes are now delivering ASB workshops to Year 6's, 7's and 8's in most schools in the Borough. These workshops will prepare young people for the pressures they may face inside and outside of school relating to ASB, bullying, drugs and alcohol etc. We have also been offered the opportunity to make use of the attendance centre in Accrington. Young people at risk of serious enforcement action who are already working with us through Acceptable Behaviour Contracts will have the opportunity to take advantage of the 12 week programme aimed at moving them away from acting in an anti social manner.

Serious Acquisitive Crime - Measures continue to drive acquisitive crime figures downwards including delivery of a vehicle crime reduction project across Blackburn with Darwen. A combination of enforcement, CCTV, advice and support in identified hotspots of the Borough is underway.

CUSTOMER SERVICES

Contact Centre

In December the Contact Centre handled a total of 21,278 calls with a performance attained of 79.65% of calls answered within 20 seconds. The December figures are particularly pleasing as are the yearly performance which continues to exceed target and currently runs at 75.85 %.

One Stop Shop

From the information available, the number of visitors accessing the Blackburn and Darwen Town Halls from December 2011 and 2010 has increased slightly from 7,883 to 8,748.

(Unfortunately, the data can only be used as indicative numbers at this stage – the project to improve the customer contact database is still ongoing).

Advice Services

Following the changes to work procedures, the Advice team has significantly improved the turnaround of customer requests and appointments.

At the 4th January 2012 customers are being dealt with within the following timescales:

- Initial advice through the triage facility is within 24 hours.
- Full interviews/case work is split as follows; Welfare Advice 10 working days, Housing Advice 5 working days and Money Advice 15 working days.

(NB. Urgent cases such as evictions, court and tribunal hearings are dealt with as a priority with advisors setting aside time for priority work in their diaries each week).

The initial internal report reviewing the Advice Team has been completed, however, under instruction from the Chief Executives Strategy Group, the review is now to be extended to include a wider list of advice functions, and engage with the Voluntary Sector. The project will now be headed by Harry Catherall.