

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**COUNCILLOR KATE HOLLERN****PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING CHIEF
OFFICER: GRAHAM BURGESS****DATE: 13TH APRIL 2012****YOUR CALL CAMPAIGN UPDATE**

As members will be aware the Your Call campaign was launched in November 2011 aiming to build on the strengths we know exist in the communities across Blackburn with Darwen. To date the impact has been impressive as people across the Borough have risen to the challenges we set them to take responsibility and a pride in their communities.

Although the campaign was partly a response to the challenging financial situation which saw a reduction in our budget of £40 m over two years, the focus has been on working together and helping each other. As we continue to face difficult financial times it is really heartening to receive numerous requests from people who want to help each other and improve the places they live for themselves too. The organised activities are creating a sense of community and is encouraging change to behaviour that in the past has led to blight and grot.

Recognition of the campaign is steadily growing. To date nearly 900 people have been involved in community action associated with the campaign, including 33 new community clean ups. The highlights of the first phase of the campaign has included clean streets/environmental improvements, promotion of shopping local and tackling anti social behaviour..

The campaign was recently boosted by the Your Services, Your Call event in Blackburn Market which attracted more than 350 people and was part of an on-going conversation with residents about their priorities and the impact of the ongoing financial situation. Unlike the Government, when we say we are all in this together, we mean it.

Planning for the second phase of Your Call is now underway.

IMPACT OF NATIONAL POLICIES ON OUR RESIDENTS

As our Borough contains areas with high levels of deprivation where residents earn below average wages and where a number of families rely on welfare benefits I am extremely concerned of the scale of change facing many of our residents in the next few months. National policy decisions; particularly regarding reform of housing and council tax benefits over the course of the next year are going to have a considerable detrimental impact on both people and local business..

There is also a direct impact on Council budgets as the Council will receive 10% less for Council Tax subsidy in 2013-14, which amounts to a potential additional burden for low income residents of £168 per year. Similarly, national changes to the way Local Housing Allowance claims are calculated mean that some residents are seeing a reduction to their housing benefit from January 2012 of £8.51 per week. In addition from April 2012, changes to Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit will mean that the burden of child care costs will increase for many families, making it uneconomical, particularly for women, to continue to go out to work.

We have pointed out to the Government that their policies have a disproportionate impact in Blackburn with Darwen compared to more affluent areas but to date they appear to have ignored what we have said.

In advance of the next national Spending Review we will be working hard with partners to ensure that regional and national decision makers understand fully the impact of their economic policies and welfare policies on areas such as ours.

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

The Council's campaign to support business as part of 'Your Call' continues to be making a valuable impact. The business buddy scheme is working well and has already seen many businesses working with Council Officers to resolve issues and support growth in the local economy. A number of companies have been early beneficiaries whilst also helping the Council to better understand business needs. Issues resolved include planning, highways, business support, car parking, recruitment and creation of apprenticeships. We aim to build on the success of this programme by rolling it out further.

The Assistance to Industry programme is also proving to be highly successful and further detail is provided in the report by the Executive Member for Regeneration. MS Upholstery, Precision Parts Engineering, Great British Envelopes and MDA have all benefitted from the Council's proactive approach to business support.

The Prosperous Group of the LSP is also working to progress its three priorities for the year including greater local procurement, increased take up of apprenticeships and a higher profile for local business. A wider network of local organisations is being brought together by the group to widen the message and engage more support.

POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONERS

Members will be aware that Lancashire Constabulary has had a budget cut of £41.76m (20%) which has led to a loss of 800 posts and is putting the Police Force under considerable pressure as they seek to serve our communities.

The Police and Crime Commissioner elections will take place for Lancashire along with the rest of the country on 15 November 2012. The implementation costs of the Police and Crime Commissioner programme have grown to £75m nationally and at a time when budgets for front-line policing are under pressure are a questionable use of valuable resources and a distraction.

To prepare for the new arrangements a significant amount of preparatory work is underway. This is being led by the Constabulary and the County Council, with our authority leading the coordination and providing the Returning Officer in the forthcoming elections.

Members will share my concern that the additional costs of these elections, which for our Borough alone is £100k, is equivalent to the cost of employing four street cleaners and I know which our residents would prefer.

Alongside the new Commissioners, Police and Crime Panels will be established for each force area, providing a scrutiny and challenge role to the new Commissioners. A County-wide working group is preparing the governance matters for the Panel, which will be established in the summer and will be a formal Joint Committee of the Lancashire authorities. It is likely that Lancashire authorities will be invited to approve the

constitutional/terms of reference matters and their nominees to the Panel at their Annual Meetings in May of this year. The Panels will be politically balanced in accordance with the normal rules of proportionality.

LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICE BOARD

Mindful of the heightened pressures within public sector organisations and the extreme challenges being faced by residents, it was agreed at the January meeting of the Local Public Service Board (LPSB) that a thorough review of its areas of focus was required. Common themes emerged that have now been built into a new work programme for the LSPB in 2012-13.

Local Public Service Board partners have been proactive in their support of the Council's Your Call initiative, so at the March volunteer event, I was able to announce the establishment of a small pot of money for volunteers. This will represent a small token of our thanks to the many volunteers and community organisations who have answered our call to support their neighbourhood. The pot will be made up of funds from the Council and other local public sector, community and business partners and will be timed to enable volunteers and community groups to put on events to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee during the early summer.

We all recognise that money is very tight at the moment but at the same time I think it is important to reward and recognise those who have taken part Your Call campaign. I also think it's important the Council and its public sector partners do something to mark the Diamond Jubilee. The best way to do that is to facilitate and support community groups put their on their own events within their own communities in order to create a real buzz around their neighbourhoods.