

**REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL****COUNCILLOR KATE HOLLERN****PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING CHIEF  
OFFICER: HARRY CATHERALL****DATE: 1<sup>st</sup> NOVEMBER 2012****JOB CREATION**

Regenerate Pennine Lancs have now launched their £7.5m Accelerating Business Growth programme, funded through RGF. Grant funding is available to local businesses of between £20k and £150k to support them in growing their business and creating jobs within 12 months of project completion. The programme has already attracted 100 expressions of interest.

The Pennine Lancs partnership has been successful in securing £4m in RGF round 3 for the Lancashire Enterprise Business Programme which will provide capital investment of between £5k and £50k to a minimum of 600 SMEs across Lancashire. The investment will be directly linked to growth potential, create at least 1000 jobs and leverage of £9m private sector investment. Regenerate Pennine Lancashire will deliver the programme with media partner Lancashire Business View. PLACE and Regenerate have worked hard with partners to secure this investment for the whole of Lancashire and create much-needed jobs.

We have also secured £2.4m ERDF for the Start up Lancashire programme. Regenerate will deliver the project on behalf of Blackburn with Darwen and the Lancashire district councils providing coaching, training and mentoring support to individuals who plan to enter self employment and to new businesses in the early stages of trading. The funding has been matched by the local authorities in Pennine Lancashire and private sector partners. The programme will start in November 2012 and operate until 2015.

Both of these projects are great news and particularly welcome during this difficult economic climate. The changes to Welfare that the government are imposing will have a massive impact on the area, particularly to low earning working families and the Pennine partnership is working hard to secure investment to provide the additional jobs the area desperately needs. The colleges and local authorities continue to invest in the education of our young people and future workforce and provide suitable opportunities for adults to up-skill and access these new jobs.

This is the second successful RGF bid which Regenerate will deliver and whilst good news, it is critical that the government move faster to get the funding through to projects and have the impact needed. Alongside LEPs and Enterprise Zones, RGF is the governments flagship growth policy but bureaucratic hurdles in the previous round has delayed the start of the majority of successful projects. We must call on the co-alition to increase the pace at which these growth policies are moving so we can bring new businesses to the area and support existing companies in expanding.

**CORPORATE PLAN**

The Council's Corporate Plan was endorsed by Policy Council on the 31st August. We brought forward the Corporate Plan process to the Autumn in order to plan better for Government cuts and the tough financial decisions that will undoubtedly follow. The delivery priorities set out in the plan are intended to not only ensure that the ambitions of the Council are delivered, they have also been developed to respond to the number of challenges that we and our residents are facing. Agreeing a plan for 2012-15 provides Elected Members, staff, partners and residents with clarity around the Council's priorities throughout this difficult period.

We will examine policies to ensure they are fit for purpose in these difficult times, and will continually challenge performance and delivery against our plan. Following Policy Council's agreement of the priorities and objectives, a great deal of work has gone into developing performance measures, baselines and targets to sit within the Corporate Plan. As residents would expect, the Executive Board will publish progress against these measures on a quarterly basis. Whilst it will be difficult to maintain levels of improvement in the current climate, we will remain open minded and constantly look at ways of improving services with an ever decreasing budget.

## **PEER REVIEW**

Elected Members will be aware that the Council recently invited a national peer review process which was undertaken in July, facilitated by the Local Government Association. The review was designed to be forward-looking; engaging Elected Members, staff, partners and residents in a series of focussed discussions around challenges facing the Council. The review team consisted of a Leader, a Chief Executive and an Assistant Chief Executive from impressive peer Councils and was supported by two members of LGA staff. The Council received the final draft of the peer review report in late September, and although there were no urgent recommendations made by the team, we are moving quickly to establish a high-level action plan for consultation with Elected Members and participants in the review process. The Council's Executive Board and Policy and Resources Committee will consider the report and action plan in November.

## **YOUR AGENDA**

I had the pleasure of attending an excellent face to face discussion meeting with young people at the Youth Zone recently as part of a Your Agenda programme. The issues they raised included jobs, transport, crime, homelessness, lack of opportunities and employers unwilling to give them even work experience. There were about 20 young people there and I wanted them to be open and frank so let them set the agenda and choose the topics they wanted to discuss. Many said they were trapped in a cycle where they were unable to raise enough money to turn their lives around by moving into their own accommodation or attending college. Others felt that they could not get jobs because they didn't have any work experience and employers were reluctant to give them that chance to gain an insight into working. I am now working with Executive Members and other partners to ensure that the young people's issues are addressed.