

**REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL  
COUNCILLOR KATE HOLLERN****PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING  
DIRECTOR: HARRY CATHERALL  
DATE 31st JANUARY 2013****LOCAL GOVERNMENT SETTLEMENT AND MEETING WITH BRANDON LEWIS**

I was recently asked to participate with other prominent council leaders in a teleconference with local government minister Brandon Lewis in December. This followed the disappointing financial settlement which means we face a budget shortfall of £30m over the next two years. I asked the Minister if he thought the Coalitions austere announcement was going to help our Council support local 'hardworking, striving families' and explained the last two years have seen this Council lose £40m. Unsurprisingly he couldn't give me an answer.

Following this I was invited to meet him personally in Whitehall to further raise my concerns. I described what we have done together to meet the challenges so far through a wide range of initiatives, including Your Call, and emphasised the harsh reality of the cuts to places like Blackburn with Darwen.

Sadly, the government seems hell bent in implementing its savage cuts programme focusing on unravelling years of investment in our communities & this is backed up by independent observers. The Guardian newspaper, for example, has released figures showing that once again the worst cuts have been inflicted on the poorest deprived areas who have faced cuts up to 10 times that of more wealthy boroughs mainly in the South. Blackburn with Darwen is the 6<sup>th</sup> worst affected borough in the country with every person losing £205 as a result of the Coalitions smash & grab. Just 50 miles away in George Osborne's leafy constituency residents of Cheshire East have lost just £20 & people living in West Oxfordshire whose MP is David Cameron have only lost £34. .

The cuts we have to deal with are coming on top of a range of severe economic pressures. These include growing demand for Council services and new responsibilities for local authorities that are coming our way from Government. Blackburn with Darwen faces greater disadvantages than other places and the cuts are a further damaging blow. Added to this is the impact of the welfare reforms which will be hardest felt amongst the strivers – those working people who are on low incomes trying to make ends meet for their families.

Despite these difficult challenges we fortunately have strengths to build on. People in Blackburn & Darwen have traditionally showed resilience in times of hardship. A clear example of this has been the magnificent & overwhelming response we've had to the Your Call initiative. We will continue to do our best to support those who are prepared to assist in their localities & we will work with all our local communities as best we can to help them through these hard times.

**LANCASHIRE POLICE AND CRIME PANEL**

As members will be aware I chair the Police & Crime Panel which is responsible for supporting, challenging and scrutinising the performance of the Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Lancashire. Following the election of Clive Grunshaw as the new PCC, the Panel had had its first meeting with him where it endorsed the appointment of Ibrahim Master who lives in Blackburn as his deputy.

Mr Grunshaw & his team face a difficult task. The government's 20% cuts to policing are already having a damaging impact on police forces across the country. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary has estimated that these cuts will lead to the loss of over 16,000 police officers across the country over the next 4 years. This at a time when other cuts will be having a detrimental effect on communities raising the risk of rising crime with less resource to fight it.

## **PROMOTING SOCIAL COHESION**

I recently was approached by the DCLG to help support the Government's Integration and Cohesion Strategy that was published last year. A national working group has been established to share & promote good practice similar to that developed in BWD around community engagement & cohesion. This includes initiatives such as the Life-swap project, Neighbourhood Voices and our Belonging Campaign. A work programme has been agreed by the Group & I will keep Members updated of further developments throughout the year.

## **"PLACE" LEADERS**

The PLACE Leaders meet regularly and at our last meeting in January we endorsed the draft Pennine Lancashire Investment Plan which will now go out to consultation with partners. We are arguing strongly for the HCA and also the Lancashire LEP to support our Investment Plan which sets out our investment priorities reflecting our ambition to drive jobs and housing growth in the Pennine area. There are also several major job creation projects that will be delivered over the plan period as well as infrastructure improvements to key transport corridors, including the long sought after upgrading of Blackburn to Manchester rail line.

Agreeing this Investment Plan shows central government that, despite the recession and the harsh cuts the Labour authorities in Pennine Lancashire face, we are committed to working together across our borough boundaries to ensure that what little funding that exists is directed to the projects which will achieve the biggest impact to our local economies.

The group has also discussed proposals for a Pennine Lancashire Development Gateway based on our Investment Plan. With government departments we are developing a proposition to bring some freedoms and flexibilities to potential gateway sites across the area which will also be supported by our well established business support programmes.

## **NOMINATIONS ARE BEING SOUGHT FOR THE UNSUNG HEROES OF BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN**

We have decided to introduce the Your Call Good Neighbours award. This will recognise the contribution of residents in the Borough who go above and beyond in order to help others. The people we are looking for probably have never been recognised before for the valuable things they are doing. We therefore want to reward local people who make a real difference in their communities.

As members are aware the Your Call campaign has been very successful. Residents have rallied around and embraced the ethos. Now we want to reward in a small way, people who display this ethos every day and make their streets a better place. For example, we want to recognise those people who knock on the door of their elderly neighbour to make sure they are okay or organise a party for neighbours on their street. These awards will highlight people who give their time to the community and expect nothing in return. They are the people who keep our communities strong & together.

I'm delighted to say that both the Lancashire Telegraph and The Bee radio station have agreed to support the Good Neighbour awards which will be great in promoting this important initiative & helping get more people nominated. A number of local businesses have responded positively to supporting the awards too.