

Your Call Report

As members will have seen, we recently published the first annual report detailing the success of the Your Call campaign to date. We put the report together to show what has been achieved since the campaign started in November 2011.

The report shows residents from all walks of life, of all ages, from different parts of Blackburn with Darwen showing community spirit and doing different things that makes life here better. The report showed the work residents are doing to clean-up areas and tackle dog fouling. It also shows how young people are helping to solve problems they face, how adult social care service users are providing help and support to others and how volunteers are helping bring their streets together by holding events and generally being good neighbours.

We are in really tough times because of the unprecedented funding cuts to all public services but as the report shows people are pulling together, and with Council support, are helping make Blackburn with Darwen a greener, cleaner, safer and more prosperous place.

More than 5000 people have taken part in Your Call activities. Many of those residents were celebrated at a special event in March at King George's Hall. At the event, we heard from young people who have got involved in clean-ups. They said they were pleased to be able to give something back at the same time as getting experience they could use on their CVs to help them find jobs. It shows your call is making a real difference not just to the area but people's lives as well.

In April, we will also be launching the Your Call mobile phone application, an exciting new way for residents to talk to Council. The app will help residents report a wide range of issues at their convenience, without having to wait for council offices to open. It will also allow users to submit requests for information and make suggestions about how we deliver service to the public. Real-time Information about news and events across the borough will also be available.

My pledge is that this Council will continue to support people to play their part. The Council is not able to try to solve every problem Blackburn with Darwen faces on its own. But what we can do is work with residents, businesses and others to tackle issues.

If residents in the borough have a your call idea, this Council will listen to it. We will then work with residents and see what we can achieve together.

Regional Growth Fund round 4

An RGF 4 bid has been submitted to create hundreds of new jobs across Pennine Lancashire. The £7m Accelerating Business Growth PLUS bid which, if successful, will be managed by Regenerate offering medium-sized businesses financial support to help them grow and bring an additional £30m private sector investment. Businesses who can demonstrate growth potential and job creation will be able to access between £150k and £1m if Ministers give the programme the green light.

If the Government are serious about rebalancing the economy and making steps towards closing the North/South divide, they must approve this bid at this critical time in the UK economy. Our mid-sized businesses have lacked the focus of Government support which has been directed to large corporations. In Blackburn with Darwen and the wider Pennine Lancashire area we have companies with growth ambitions to become leading suppliers. This programme will help these companies to achieve their aspirations and bring new employment and much needed apprenticeship placements to the area.

The Pennine Lancashire authorities and our local MPs are all supporting the bid which will have a massive impact on short, medium and long term job creation in high value manufacturing roles as well as construction jobs and supply chain benefits. We are already working with companies, colleges and the university across Pennine Lancashire to ensure the workforce is equipped to meet the employment

demand of expanding local companies. If the bid is successful Pennine Lancashire will have a package of financial support for all types of businesses from £5k to £1m. The Government will announce successful bids in the summer.

Lancashire LEP Board and the Government's response to Lord Heseltine report

The LEP are developing a Growth Plan for Pan-Lancashire which will be structured around key themes and issues including delivering economic outcomes of national importance; business support; transport; skills and international trade and investment as well as raising the profile of Lancashire. Having this in place will allow the LEP to access capacity funding from the Government.

Given the significant role the Government is giving to LEPs it's imperative that Lancashire's LEP is high performing to drive forward growth. Members will be aware that the Government have now published a response to Lord Heseltine's recommendations in his review 'No Stone Unturned'. LEPs will be given extra powers and funding creating a Single Local Growth Fund which will be allocated through a process of negotiation and awards based on performance and the strength of new strategic multi-year plans for local growth which the LEPs will be asked to develop. Full details of this Single Local Growth Fund are still awaited but it will include elements of transport, housing and skills budgets. Alongside this a significant proportion of England's share of European funding will be notionally allocated to LEPs. The Government say this is "a something-for something deal".

However, we must be sure that this is not a programme of growth that allows the South, who have well established LEPs and Ministers in key cabinet position, the opportunity to access un-ring fenced funding at a higher allocation than the North. The Government have already made significant disproportionate cuts to funding in the North and particularly to Labour authorities and once again there is a risk that demographic need will be disregarded as they focus their attention on the quality of Strategic Plans.

Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)

I am delighted to inform Members that Pennine Lancashire has been approved as a Development Priority Area for the HLF from April 2013 onwards. This means that the HLF Development Team will dedicate time and resource to working with the PLACE Strategy Unit to encourage and support the development of good quality applications, with a particular emphasis on voluntary and community groups. The HLF budget for new awards has doubled to £375m per year and their Strategic Plan for 2013-18 sets out a new funding regime focussed on supporting projects with local economic benefit. HLF will be taking a broad view of heritage – historic buildings, places and objects linked to history as well as people's memories and experiences and cultural traditions. Being approved as a Development Priority Area is testament to the strong partnership the Pennine Lancashire authorities have and will be a real boost to community heritage projects in the area.

LGA Improvement and Innovation Board

I am now a member of the Local Government Association's Improvement and Innovation Board, with an invitation to join the Board coming in response to Blackburn with Darwen being one of the first nationally to undergo a peer review in summer 2012, following which we hosted a regional conference for north west authorities. The LGA are keen to ensure that 'early adopters' and active supporters of sector-led improvement remain involved and continue to shape the roll-out of the peer review programme. The Board provides an excellent opportunity to influence emerging national initiatives (often at 'drawing board' stage), share and receive early sight of good practice and identify funding and other opportunities for Blackburn with Darwen. Early issues that have been influenced and considered by the Board are the national asset and procurement strategies; new performance data and benchmarking arrangements; impact of new regulations regarding data and transparency; and the LGA's programme of support and development for Elected Members in 2013-14.