

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES

COUNCILLOR ANDY KAY

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: DENISE PARK**

DATE: 25th April 2013

HR

The HR team is supporting Directors and managers in the implementation of strategies related to the budget reduction programme. Currently there are over 500 employees at risk of redundancy and every effort is being given to consulting these employees on the impact of the changes and reviewing what steps can be taken to try and mitigate the impact of the service review programmes job reductions. A number of staff have volunteered for redundancy, others are considering their position and our vacancy management programme is also assisting others to be considered for alternative work. We are continuing to work with the Trades Unions and Senior Management on workforce implications of the budget reductions and we are constantly looking at ways to support staff affected by the job reductions and trying to minimise the numbers of compulsory redundancies in the coming weeks.

IT

The Council has initiated the next phase of the website to deliver digital services for the benefit of the citizens and businesses of Blackburn with Darwen. A procurement exercise has been completed to identify a strategic development partner for the Digital Services Programme, which will deliver fit for the future digital services to benefit the citizens and businesses of the borough while helping the Council to reduce costs and also deliver a new intranet site.

Current initiatives which will deliver significant benefits include; WiFi in the Council's major town centre sites; a new digital telephone system which will help to further reduce costs. Work will soon start to deliver improvements to the Council's Wide Area Network which will increase resilience and reduce downtime due to network failures and reduce costs by taking further advantage of the investments the Council has made over the past few years.

In addition an extended system to provide Public Access IT facilities across various council locations including but not limited to, libraries, leisure centres, children's centres and adult learning centres is currently being implemented.

WELFARE REFORM

As a consequence of increased national and local press coverage on welfare reform the number of customers contacting Customer Services has increased significantly in recent weeks. The two main reasons for the increased contact relate to the localised Council Tax Support scheme and the under occupation of registered social landlord properties. (the 'bedroom tax')

A ministerial announcement was made on the 12th March detailing two additional exemptions from the under occupation rule; parents of armed forces personnel and foster carers

The Benefits Service continues to promote discretionary housing payments for anyone affected by the under occupation issue. A new policy has been written and a number of key scenarios will be targeted. These include:

- Claimants in properties that have had major DFG monies spent on adaptations – e.g. structural, additional bathrooms, etc.;
- Claimants in properties that have had major adaptations made by the Housing Association, and;
- Claimants known to Children's and Adults who present a major safeguarding risk;

2013 BUDGET

On 20th March 2013 in his budget, the Chancellor announced that there would be a further 1% reduction in all unprotected Government Department's budgets in 2013/14 and 2014/15 including The Department for Communities and Local Government and Local Government budgets, in order to fund increased capital investment. However, he also stated that the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2013/14 will not change. The DCLG has confirmed this but has indicated that it is considering the implications of the Budget announcement for future settlements. The Chancellor also announced the overall national financial envelope for 2015/16 as well as forecasts for 2016/17 and 2017/18. Central Government departments are now working on the Comprehensive Spending Review for 2015/16. This is expected to be delivered on 26 June 2013.