

LEADER'S COUNCIL FORUM REPORT JUNE 2013**Your Call - Good Neighbour Awards**

I am pleased to tell fellow councillors about the success of the first good neighbours awards. The awards were set up to pay tribute to helpful neighbours, unsung heroes who have never been recognised before for their efforts and who make their street a better place.

We received nearly 70 entries and what was so pleasing was we had nominations for people from all walks of life and from different part of the borough. It was especially pleasing to see the age range of entries as well. We had nominations for 11 year olds and one nomination for a 91 year old. The judging panel, which included myself, the chief executive and the deputy editor of the Lancashire Telegraph, were overwhelmed by the quality of the entries. Each nomination told a story of someone who really cares about making their neighbours' lives better. We picked eight winners but the two main winners were Maurice Ffelan and Richard Grimshaw.

Maurice, a Roe Lee resident, has been involved in dozens of Your Call clean-ups. He helps grit the area he lives in and makes sure his neighbours are safe and well.

Despite having learning disabilities, Richard is a key volunteer at ACT at the Cheetams, which provides activities and a drop-in centre for young people in Wensley Fold.

I hope fellow councillors will join me in congratulating them and all those who were nominated.

We are planning to hold a celebration event so we can thank them in person for all the good work they are doing. They are people who really make their neighbourhoods tick.

I was really pleased that the awards have been supported by the Lancashire Telegraph, Blackburn Rovers and Capita as well as other businesses who all donated prizes.

£2m Arts Council funding

Blackburn with Darwen is set to benefit from a successful £2m bid for funding from the Arts Council to deliver a radical arts programme inspired by waterside communities along the Pennine Lancashire stretch of the Leeds – Liverpool Canal. The Canal and River Trust submitted the bid with the support of the Pennine Lancashire authorities and partners.

The programme will engage artists and communities in experimental arts projects, extraordinary events and international exchanges to re-awaken the cultural potential of the canal, exploring historic and contemporary links with waterside communities.

This is an exciting opportunity for the area to develop our cultural and artistic offer attracting visitors across the UK as well as increasing the number of local people engaging in world class arts. The programme will also support local artists and art communities to develop skills and capacity to deliver excellent art. The programme is funded until 2016 but will be a catalyst to embed arts in Pennine Lancashire.

Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)

As Members will be aware, Pennine Lancashire has been approved as a Development Priority Area for the HLF for their next Strategic Planning Framework 2013-18 which means the HLF will dedicate time and resource to working with the Pennine Lancs Strategy unit to encourage and support the development of good quality applications, with a particular emphasis on voluntary and community groups.

To start the five year programme, a series of workshops will be arranged over the coming months across the region to outline the funding streams and support available. Blackburn with Darwen is committed to working with community, voluntary and faith groups and the success of Your Call is testament to the strong community ethos our residents have. We have a real opportunity to benefit from HLF investment over the next five years with investment between £3k and £5m available which will be a real boost to community heritage projects.

Lancashire Enterprise Partnership (LEP)

The LEP Board met recently. Three projects in Pennine Lancashire have received commitment from the LEP for Growing Places Fund (GPF) which includes Cathedral Quarter. The LEP is performing well on allocating its £19.3m GPF which is due to the high quality of projects being submitted by Pennine Lancashire and our ability to deliver. We received a progress report on Lancashire's Business Growth Hub, now referred to as BOOST which brings together key agencies in Lancashire to support the growth of businesses. Regenerate Pennine Lancashire will deliver Growth Business Start-Up support as part of this £7.2m programme. EU funding and the Structural Investment Fund Plan which LEPs are expected to submit to Government was also discussed. Officers are in the process of developing the Plan over the summer and will consult with local partners to ensure the plan reflects our priorities.

Local Strategic Partnership Review

Elected Members will be aware that throughout the spring period a consultation process has been underway regarding the future of the Local Strategic Partnership. A review of the LSP allowed us to take stock of our existing collective commitments whilst also focussing on areas where changes would be beneficial.

Following consultation the new model was agreed at LSP Board on May 13. This will include a 'slimmed-down LSP Board meeting in public quarterly with membership from the five chair of the thematic groups : Community Safety Partnership; Health and Well-being Board; Prosperous Group; VCS Voice Forum. A review of the work programmes of existing thematic groups will be undertaken.

Members may also wish to note that Mike Murray has stepped down as Chair of the LSP Board. He has been Chair since the LSP was established in 1997. I hope Members will join me in recording thanks to Mike for his enormous contribution to the borough over the years.

HIVE Business Leaders Network

There are now 140 organisations registered to the network to date, with good representation from CEOs, MDs and owners actively encouraging other BwD businesses to join. Recent meetings have been held with the Federation of Small Businesses and Blackburn based 'Just Construction and Property networking' regarding future joint working. Current priorities are; promoting business, growing local procurement, supporting infrastructure and cultural development, improving access to finance, tackling local unemployment and promoting manufacturing. A new website for Hive is being built by Blackburn based Source Creative, including an interactive member directory. HIVE founder members, the LSP Prosperous Group had a successful meeting on 10th June at Lancaster University strengthening the links between Blackburn with Darwen and the services the University can offer on business growth with particular reference to the ERDF projects that the university runs so we can maximise the opportunities for the borough.

Assistance to Industry

Since the inception of the Assistance to Industry programme in 2009, it continues to be popular providing investment support in the form of capital grants to encourage businesses to expand, relocate or safeguard employment in the borough.

The project continues to be delivered by Regenerate Pennine Lancashire on behalf of the Council as part of the "Open for Business" campaign.

The 2012/13 budget of £270,000, allowed 26 projects to be approved for grants, of which 21 projects actually took up grants totalling £261,000 generating £1,117,075 of private sector investment and creating 83.5 new jobs and preserving a further 35. Enquiries are now being pursued for 2013/14; one scheme has already been approved totalling £15,000 and creating 5 jobs. A further 6 schemes are now progressing totalling £67,500, which could generate over 30 new jobs.

Tackling Youth Unemployment

The three key areas the Council will be focussing its internal efforts on to help contribute to reducing the boroughs youth unemployment agenda during 2013/14 are:

1. Apprenticeships

- Increasing the number of apprentices in the workforce during 2013/14 – mapping roles against likely future employment opportunities.
- Retaining existing Apprentices in the organisation while they undertake their apprenticeship and also on successful completion.

2. Work experience

- Developing a robust and innovative work experience scheme which adds value to the individuals, supports the management of placements, helps develop the young people involved and showcases the diversity of roles/professions available within Local Government.

3. Understanding and retaining our current young workforce

The Council currently employs 125 young people aged 16 – 24. We need to engage with them to gain an understanding of how we may:

- attract and retain more young people to apply for and work within the organisation
- understand and work to remove any barriers that may exist
- Develop career grades and paths
- Simplify routes both into work but also progression opportunities