

## **LEADER'S COUNCIL FORUM REPORT SEPTEMBER 2013**

### **Your Call Jobs event**

I was very pleased with the success of our recent your agenda special networking jobs event for young people.

More than 100 young people got the chance to showcase their skills to businesses to get a foot on the career ladder. The event saw nearly 30 businesses tell young people what they were looking for, give hints and tips to them about applying for jobs and also offer work experience.

Young people were offered 85 work experience placements from businesses as well as the Council and already at least two people have got paid work on the back of the event. I am sure more young people will secure jobs through this and we will be catching up with people who attended to see how they have got on.

We organised this event because when we spoke to young people at Your Agenda meetings they told us that their top priorities were jobs and tackling unemployment.

Young people also told us they were worried they never get a chance to speak to businesses. Employers said to us that they don't get to talk to young people so we brought them together. The comments we received from both young people and employers have been very positive.

Comments from the young people included the event was "perfect", "very useful" and "fabulous." Other comments included "Everything was perfect, it was really helpful" and "Would have liked more employers."

Comments from the employers included "Great initiative" (Optima Control Solutions) ; "Well organised" (Capita) ; "Carry on and do more of them" (More Polythene) ; "We have some job vacancies and will interview a number of young people from the event" (HSL) ; "Young people were very well dressed and polite" (Blackburn Rovers).

Jobs is a top priority for me and the Council and we will be looking at other events to help tackle unemployment in the near future.

### **BAE Apprenticeships event**

BAE apprentices will be leading a local apprenticeships recruitment fair at Blackburn Rovers Football Club, Ewood Park, on Thursday October 10 between 4pm and 8pm.

The application process begins November 1 and ends February 28. 70 apprenticeships will be recruited to at local BAE sites.

### **Your Call mobile apps**

As members will be aware, we have just launched the Your Call mobile phone application for residents. The app helps people report a wide range of issues at any time of the day so they don't have to wait for council offices to open. Residents can also put in requests for information and make suggestions about how we deliver services to the public.

Real-time information about news and events across the borough are also available through the app. More than 150 people have signed up already. You can download it from Google Play, iTunes and Blackberry World. The app will be continually updated with new features and content as it develops.

Your Call is all about everyone in the borough working together and talking with each other to solve problems. This app will make it easier for residents to talk to us so we can tackle issues together.

## **Road safety**

Just before the summer holidays, schools in the borough took part in a Your Call road safety project. We invited schools to come up with a catchy radio campaign to help change the behaviour of car drivers so they consider the way they drive and park near schools. I was really pleased to hear the quality of the ideas the children came up with.

We are in the process of judging the entries and the winner will get the opportunity to have their campaign professionally produced and then played on local radio.

It is one of a number of initiatives the Council is doing to promote road safety and educate people of issues.

In Ashleigh School, for example, we have done a lot of work to improve road safety around the area after parents came to me about problems there which included cars parking on zig zag lines.

I am pleased to say we put in place several measures to address parents' concerns including more zig zag lines, road safety education and practical training, a parking crackdown and cycle training.

## **Darwen's Square Meadow**

As members are aware, our Education Department has written to the Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove to ask for permission to dispose of the site of Darwen Moorland site. We are still waiting a response.

However, Councillor Connor and I have met with residents to reassure them that the square meadow behind the school will not be part of any sell off.

I am pleased to say we are looking at turning the meadow into a community facility and we are fully behind the local campaign, which supports this aim.

The campaigners are looking to set up a committee and they will contact local sports clubs with a view to getting them involved.

## **Investments**

The Lancashire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) has been given a notional allocation of €266m under the new European Programme 2013-2020.

This is a good allocation for Lancashire compared to other North West LEPs.

To get the funding, the LEPs are being asked to develop plans setting out activities to be funded.

This needs to be submitted to Government by October 7, followed by negotiations before final plans are agreed in the New Year.

The Lancashire LEP are also developing plans for the Single Growth Fund – the government's £2bn fund which will pool local transport, skills and housing funding.

Final Plans need to be in place by March 2014 followed by a period of negotiation to develop a Growth Deal. Funding will be available from April 2015.

We are playing a leading role in developing these plans. We need to make sure Lancashire does not lose out to the South.

Members should be clear though that this is not new funding and just a rehash of existing budgets. It is nowhere near enough to tackle the cuts the Tory-led Government has imposed on this area and which have brought hardship on residents and businesses.

## **Heritage**

Members will be aware that Pennine Lancashire has been designated as a Priority Development Area by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for their funding period 2013-2018.

This is recognition that the area has received significantly less funding per head of population compared to other places. While there is no single funding pot given to Pennine Lancs, the HLF have committed officers to work with organisations to develop applications likely to be successful and attract investment.

We are meeting with partners in October to outline expectations of the programme, the funding available and what this means for the area. Information and training events are also being planned on a more local level.

English Heritage has also made a commitment to Regenerate/PLACE over the next three years to develop a Heritage Investment Plan for Pennine Lancashire and bring forward funding bids. This presents an opportunity to co-ordinate both HLF and English Heritage programmes to get as much investment as possible.

## **Regenerate Pennine Lancashire**

Regenerate has launched their BOOST Business Lancashire programme. The £7.2m European Regional Development funded programme with match funding from partners will create 1200 new jobs by June 2015. The programme offers a comprehensive package of support for new and existing businesses to grow through mentoring, start up support, innovation, sector growth specialists and access to finance.

Members will recall that Blackburn with Darwen in partnership with Regenerate were successful in Round 3 of Regional Growth Fund accessing £4m to provide grants between £5k to £50k to local businesses across Lancashire. The programme has now been launched as FUSE Fund and will provide support to 600 businesses, directly creating 1000 new jobs.

The Council and Regenerate have now been successful in three of the four RGF rounds, testament to our strong track record of delivering support to local businesses and our partnership working across Pennine Lancashire.

All this is welcome but I stress once again we have been badly affected by the Tory-led government's cuts. The South have been much more shielded from the cuts than us and good news though this is, we are still much worse off compared to many southern areas.

### **Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) update**

The new look LSP Board met for the first time in July, where local business man Mohammed Isap was appointed to take over the role of chair from Mike Murray, with myself appointed as vice-chair.

Alongside running a successful business, Mo has founded two social enterprises and is a very active member of the local community, playing a role in governing bodies for the college and a number of the borough's schools.

The Board was provided with an update on activities delivered over the past eighteen months and some of the challenges that lie ahead over the next two to five years.

The next meeting of the Board will be a development session in October and they have agreed that the session will look at key priorities over the next few years that can make a real difference for the borough. They will also consider the first draft of a growth strategy, which will set clear objectives for partnership working to grow our local economy.

### **Police and Crime Panel**

At the most recent meeting in July, the Police and Crime Panel agreed, in the interests of openness and transparency, the hosting of the Panel should be shared between the County Council and the two unitary authorities. The Panel agreed these responsibilities would initially transfer from Lancashire County Council to Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council this year with a senior officer from this Council assuming the role of Secretary to the Panel. Actions have been taken to make sure arrangements for a smooth transition.