

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR NEIGHBOURHOODS, HOUSING AND CUSTOMER SERVICES

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PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR:
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NEIGHBOURHOODS

Troubled Families update – Troubled Family Intervention Key Worker have been recruited. To support the work of the programme an Education Welfare Officer has been seconded to help Key Workers engage with schools, support data collection, attendance and to address enforcement options to tackle truancy/absence. The target update so far is as follows:

- 154 families identified as meeting the troubled families criteria
- 70 families are currently being supported via a Key worker
- 20 families have made substantial progress in increasing school attendance and reducing ASB as well as adult members moving along the pathway to work.
- A funding claim was submitted against these 20 in July 2013.

Housing Needs & Support – Welfare reform - Community Care Grants – We have been administering Community care Grants since April 2013 and so far we have dealt with over 200 applications for assistance. The average cost per approved application stands at £729.

Bedroom Tax – This came into effect in April this year and the B-with-us scheme has been amended to award priority for those under occupying in order to assist them to obtain smaller homes. There is a lack of one bedroom properties in the social rented sector and this has had a knock on effect for other single people on the 'waiting list'. Twin Valley Homes and the other registered providers have seen a significant fall in the number of bids for their three bed properties. We expect to see an influx of cases from those with arrears due to the bedroom tax over the next few months.

Benefit Cap – We have invited all those affected by the cap to come in for an interview and those that have attended have completed income and expenditure sheets. Advice has been offered and where appropriate a DHP has been recommended, although this has only applied to a small number as it was deemed reasonable for many of the families to be able to manage on the £500 per week cap after they have acted on advice given to reduce their outgoings.

Griffin Area Regeneration – We have purchased 156 properties. There are 9 properties remaining to be purchased in the clearance area. A total of 112 properties have been demolished in the regeneration area. Further demolition is planned for a further 17 properties at Norman Street in October 2013.

Empty Properties

Homes Communities Agency First Round – To date around 174 owners of empty properties have registered their interest in the scheme. We are progressing applications with our partner TVH.

Cluster Bid – Proposals to transfer 14 properties on Queen Street to Twin Valley Homes has been approved by Executive Members, heads of terms have been agreed and the sale documentation is with legal. The heads of terms for 16 /17 Green Street East have also been agreed and is being processed by legal services.

Empty properties CPO'd by the Council – Four properties have been agreed for sale. We are offering 2 further properties for sale at 109 Infirmary Street Blackburn and 76 Hancock Street. A number of offers to purchase the properties has been received and are currently being evaluated.

Shorey Bank, Darwen (Keepmoat consortium) - Negotiations are underway to finalise the Development Agreement and the Care Contract. We are making good progress towards agreement in September 2014.

Orchard Grove, Darwen (TVH) To date 73 homes have been completed of which 47 are occupied with the remaining 26 being available for purchase. 22 homes are being constructed in Phase 3 of the development and the whole scheme is planned to be completed by March 2014.

The Royals (David Wilson Homes) – This brand new development on the former Blackburn Royal Infirmary site. The scheme is due to complete in June 2016; it will provide 116 brand new homes. The development has a scheme mix of 1, 2, 3 & 4 bedroom homes. The development is making good progress and has generated a lot of interest for home ownership. To date 30 new homes have been built (of which two are show homes) 22 have been sold (17 already occupied) and 6 are available for sale. The next phase of 20 homes is now under construction.

Moorgate Mill – The scheme to develop 20 units to provide housing for people with physical and learning disabilities has been delayed due to unforeseen complications with the withdrawal of the care provider. The Contractor is back on site and negotiations to secure a care provider are underway. The scheme completion date has been slipped to March 2014.

Affordable Homes Guarantee Programme - The Council has supported our preferred partner RPs to submit bids for Affordable Homes Grant to the HCA. This will fund the building of 139 new affordable homes within the borough. The bids are:

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| The Together Housing Group (TVH) | Ashton Road | 15 homes |
| | North Road | 16 homes |
| | Shadsworth Hub | 20 homes |
| | Hereford Rd | 15 homes |
| Great Places Housing Group | Belgrave Mill | 50 homes |
| | Moorgate Mill | 18 homes |
| | Cromwell Street | 5 homes |

CUSTOMER SERVICES

ADVICE SERVICES The joint working agreement between the Citizens Advice Bureau, Age UK and the Councils own advice team has now been agreed and signed. The new service has been rebranded as 'Advice for All' and will seek to provide a comprehensive service for welfare, housing and debt advice to all residents in the Borough from its new location in the Library.

ONE STOP SHOP The refurbishment of the Blackburn One Stop Shop will be completed in the week commencing 19th August, and opened to the public from Monday 26th August. The new facility is intended to address the current problems of lack of waiting areas, poor acoustics, and provide a new modern self-service area to facilitate the move to on-line services.

The new one stop shop will be further enhanced by the deployment of a new Queue Management System. A number of software packages are currently being reviewed to find the best solution for customers accessing the Town Halls. Once deployed, the system will provide comprehensive management information, interview room booking facilities and automated kiosks for visitors and appointments. It is envisaged that once the system is fully deployed, the flow and management of customers and visitors will be much improved. There are also further service and IT based improvements being considered which will significantly improve customer service.

CUSTOMER SERVICES The One Stop Shop and Contact Centre have continued to deal with increased customer contact. The increase is primarily as a result of the welfare changes, namely, the introduction of Council Tax Support and under occupation of registered social landlord properties (bedroom tax).

The enquiries received in respect of the under occupation have now substantially diminished, however, the debt recovery activity over arrears created by the new local Council Tax Support scheme has continued to generate many customer contacts. To assist with the continued pressure on Customer Services, the temporary staff we currently have in place will be extended until March 2014.