

Blackburn is Open

We launched our 12 twelve point plan under the banner Blackburn is Open in November and I am sure fellow councillors will agree it has been going very well.

The initiative is a call to action to transform Blackburn and pump new life into it. I see it as a vital plan for the long-term prosperity of the town.

The plans, which includes a drive to tackle empty properties and shops by offering them to creative businesses and kick-starting the night-time economy, are very ambitious but already we are reaping benefits.

Throughout December, Blackburn is Open held a series of events and activities including 'Open Thursdays' at the pop up arts centre.

The scheme also delivered the very successful Taxidermy Tuesday sessions at the museum by local taxidermist, Nicola Hebson. And it has showcased the talent, creativity and industry of the people in this borough.

I believe 2014 will see Blackburn is Open go from strength to strength and we will be making announcements soon on music and cultural events coming this year. The masterplan will continue to complement the continued regeneration of the town centre and help us create a unique, vibrant and bustling town centre for our residents as well as attracting new visitors.

Your Agenda Meetings

It is 12 months since we started the Your Agenda meetings, which we set-up so young people could speak to us about the issues that matter to them.

We were very clear that the agenda of the meetings would be set by the young people themselves and not us.

I am pleased to report back that these events have made a difference.

The young people told us they never got the chance to speak to employers or got the opportunity to get experience in the workplace so we got together and held a speed networking event.

More than 100 young people got the chance to showcase their skills to businesses to get a foot on the career ladder.

The comments received from both young people and employers were very positive and a number of young people have secured jobs or traineeships on the back of the event.

Another big issue that came up was the lack of a skate park facility in the borough. We pledged to look at it and now we have recently announced plans for the first ever indoor skate-park in the borough.

They also asked us for a music event in the town centre. We worked with them and gave them the use of Blakely's. It was well attended.

I am committed to listening to the views of young people, taking on their issues and working with them to solve those issues.

There will be many other opportunities for young people to give their views. I have also organised a visit for young people to come in and use the budget slider which will help them understand the challenges local authorities face in balancing the budget but also give them another opportunity to tell me what matters to them.

Takeover Day

In November, nine young people came to see me to find out more about council services and also ask questions about what we do and why we do it.

It was part of Takeover Day and I really enjoyed meeting with the young people and talking to them about their issues.

As part of the day, the young people visited Blackburn College to see the ground breaking of the new leisure centre, went to the Lancashire Telegraph to see Bill Jacobs and also spent time with the Mayor.

I also gave them a challenge and asked what they were going to do to make the borough a better place.

The young people included: Anthony Irvine, Maira Butt, Megan Stewart, Chloe Jones, Liam McNulty, Caitlin Gent, Amanda Holt, Callum Carrie and former youth MP Shabaz Khan.

The feedback from them was good with several saying it was a positive experience.

I am very keen to make sure the voices of young people are heard especially in these extremely tough times we are facing.

We have one of the youngest populations in the country so their views are very important.

By shadowing us, the young people can get a feel of how we do our jobs and make our decisions giving them an insight which they can use to get involved scrutinise and help shape our decisions.

Square Meadow

I was very pleased to take part in a clean-up at Square Meadow along with more than 30 residents who are looking to bring the land back into use.

It is the first step in transforming the land into a new sports facility for the area.

Residents led by Harry Blackwell have their own vision for the former sports field and I was very impressed with their plans.

They want to return the area to its former glory for the benefit of the community.

I have told Harry that we will work with him to achieve his goals through the Your Call scheme.

World War I grants

This year marks the centenary of the outbreak of the Great War. Hundred years on, everyone in the borough still has a connection to it either through their own family history or the heritage of Blackburn with Darwen communities.

The anniversary allows us to come together to remember the lives of those who lived, fought and died. I feel it is very important that the borough marks this anniversary. To do this, I am encouraging community groups who have taken part in Your Call to apply for small grants of up to £200 to hold events.



Any group that has taken part in at least three of these events from April 2013 – April 2014 will be eligible to apply for a grant.

I am pleased to say a number of groups have already applied but we welcome others do so as well.

Pennine Lancashire's contribution to Lancashire economy

Despite the really difficult times and the continued austerity and its impact, we are an important contributor to the Lancashire economy. We account for 36 per cent of the county's working age population, 34 per cent of employment and 34 per cent of economic output. We have a strong track record of enterprise and our birth rate of new businesses is higher than the rest of Lancashire.

The fundamental challenge for the Lancashire economy is the weakness of private sector employment and on this indicator Lancashire is ranked 38th out of 39 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). In terms of the shortfall, Lancashire would need to create about 72,000 additional private sector jobs to perform to the national average. Given the Government's incessant cuts to the public services, this is a real concern for us as the public sector is a major employer across the County.

A study found that Pennine Lancashire's Investment Plan has the potential to deliver 22,000 additional jobs and £1bn Growth Value Added in the local economy. Transport investment is and will remain critical. We have now agreed our East Lancs Transport Masterplan and will push forward our transport plans. A large share of the Local Growth Fund is set aside for transport and we must therefore make sure our road and rail schemes get funding to unlock our strategic sites and provide good quality jobs for our residents.

The LEPs growth plans need to be submitted to the Government by the end of March 2014 and over the next few months we will continue to work with Lancashire County Council to develop a plan that reflects the aspirations and needs of Pennine Lancashire.

Assisted Area Status

The stage two consultation on the Assisted Area Maps has now started. Pennine Lancashire has done exceptionally well following the initial consultation and if the Lancashire map remain as published on 18th December, then we will have gained coverage over an additional 17 wards from the 2007-13 maps.

I'm sure you will agree that this is excellent news for Pennine Lancashire and testament to our strong working relationship and commitment to deliver growth. Assisted Area status allows companies in less economically advantaged locations to benefit from additional financial support under EU regional aid. This support is offered to encourage business in these communities to thrive.

The consultation closes on 7th February and it is important that the Government commits to the map presented becoming the final map for Lancashire. We will be responding to the consultation to this effect to ensure all of the proposed 42 wards are on the final map submitted to the EU and Leaders have been asked to speak with respective MPs to ensure their continued support.

Changes to portfolio responsibilities

I want to make members aware of changes we have made to the responsibilities to the regeneration and environment portfolios.

From February 1, responsibility for highways maintenance will transfer to the Executive member for Environment. To mirror this change, the line management of highways maintenance service will be transferred to Director of Environment, Housing and Neighbourhoods.

To be clear, the Environment, Housing and Neighbourhoods department will be responsible for street lighting maintenance and delivery of the LED invest to save programme ; planned and reactive road maintenance including the delivery of the Network Recovery programme ; drainage ; flood risk and Highways Asset Management.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR SCHOOLS & EDUCATION**COUNCILLOR DAVE HARLING****PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING DIRECTOR:
LINDA CLEGG****DATE: 30 January 2014****SCHOOL INSPECTIONS**

Seven inspection reports have been published for schools within the Authority so far for the academic year 2013/14 (as at 19th December 2013). Five of these schools were judged to be good or better and two were judged to require improvement. Of the seven inspections, two have improved on their previous judgement, three maintained their current judgement and two moved down to a lower judgement.

As at the 19th December 2013, 82% of all schools within Blackburn with Darwen were judged to be good or better compared to 78% of schools throughout England at the end of August 2013; with 82% of children attending these schools within Blackburn with Darwen, an increase from 76% at the end August 2013.

LEVEL 4 SATS RESULTS

The Primary School Performance Tables published just before Christmas confirmed that Blackburn with Darwen overall performs at the national average in the key Reading, Writing and Maths level 4 or better measure – a rise of 3% year on year against a static national picture. Many of our schools perform significantly above this level and the two that achieved 100% in the measure (Belmont and Blackburn the Redeemer) were featured in national lists of the ‘best’ schools in the country.

The progress made by children in our schools also continued to be strong. A higher percentage are making good progress than is the case nationally in both Maths and Writing with performance in reading being at national average levels.

Our schools continue to face considerable challenges – the children entering their schools are not typical of those nationally: they come from poorer backgrounds, are more likely to speak English as an additional language and are more likely to have additional needs and require additional support. Yet, in spite of this, our Primary schools deliver results at the national average. While this is no cause for complacency, it should be celebrated; and the progress from 1998 and the creation of Blackburn with Darwen as a unitary authority – when our schools were 7% or more beneath national averages in the main measures for primary schools – is notable.

UNIVERSAL FREE SCHOOL MEALS

From September 2014 all KS1 pupils will be entitled to a free school meal. Nationally there will be additional revenue available for food, equipment and other associated revenue items and some additional capital funding available for any construction related modifications necessary. In December we received notification that Blackburn with Darwen will receive £503,581 capital

funding in 2014/15. An exercise is underway to determine the likely schools which would require investment should the numbers increase based on condition and suitability. Until this is complete we will not know if the capital allocation will be enough.

We are still awaiting notification of how the revenue will be made available, and an intelligence gathering exercise has commenced to establish the likely projected uptake of free school meals in September 2014. Again, until this exercise is completed we will not know the impact of this new entitlement.

It is expected that there will be a reduction in the number of parents applying for Free School Meals and as a direct result this is likely to have an impact of the amount of Pupil Premium received in local schools. A marketing campaign is planned to encourage eligible parents to apply for Free School Meals to lessen the impact Pupil Premium.

TODAY, TOMORROW AND BEYOND CAREERS EVENT 2014

Over 20th and 21st January, 1700 year 9 pupils (13/14 year olds) attended a careers event entitled Today, Tomorrow and Beyond at King George's Hall. This is the third year that this event has run to help pupils choose their GCSE options. Pupils attended from 11 schools in the borough and families came to learn more about future learning and career options for their children. Advice and guidance at the event helped the children understand which qualifications would most help them in a range of careers.

The event is organised by Blackburn with Darwen Children's Services and Education, the Via Partnership and the Education Improvement Partnership of Secondary Schools.

YOUR CALL UPDATE

Following a very successful publicity campaign the department was contacted by 18 members of the public and 14 internal colleagues all showing interest in becoming school governors. Letters have been sent to all Chairs of Governors with vacancies suggesting that they may wish to contact the individuals directly.

It is hoped that where schools have had difficulty filling community vacancies that they will find the interest generated through 'Your Call' to be very welcome. In terms of local authority positions on governing bodies, 8 colleagues from across the Council submitted applications which have all been considered by the Governors' Task Group.

STAFF CHANGES

I would like to record the Council's thanks to Lisa Bibby, former Director of Schools and Education, for her support and dedication to the children and young people of the borough and wish her well for the future. A welcome addition to the senior leadership team this month is Jessica Byrne, Head of Service, Education Excellence.

**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE
COUNCILLOR MOHAMMED KHAN**

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING DIRECTOR: SALLY McIVOR
DATE: 10 JANUARY 2014**

ADULT SOCIAL CARE

BETTER CARE FUND

Local planning is now well underway between the Council and its health and third sector partners to agree how Blackburn with Darwen will implement the recently announced health and social care Better Care Fund locally. The fund is designed to deliver closer integration between health and social care and will see resources transferred to provision such as reablement and intermediate care, the aim being to take pressure off the acute hospital and reduce care home admissions. The first draft of the plan will be submitted to NHS England on 14th February 2014 for assurance and further iteration, with the final deadline for re-submission being 4th April.

MOORGATE MILL

Building work is almost complete on new high quality individual apartments that will cater for adults with physical and learning disabilities and complex needs. The scheme is in two blocks (one of 12 and one of 8 individual flats) with the primary care and support being provided by Lifeways, a current adult social care preferred provider. People that could benefit from this type of scheme are being identified now with the first due to move in April. This is the first facility of its kind in the borough and will be a flagship scheme in its use of specialist build and assistive technology to improve the lives of the people that live there.

COMMUNITY INTEGRATED CARE

A scheme at the old Infirmary site is progressing through the planning process to provide high quality accommodation for older people including a 64 unit residential home that will provide specialist dementia care for people requiring both nursing and residential places. If approved, building will start in the summer with completion in early 2016. This will increase the provision of quality care in the borough and create a number of jobs.

ASSISTED CHRISTMAS SHOPPING

The Community Wellbeing Coordinators, employed within Adult Services, organised and provided a festive period assisted shopping initiative on 4th and 11th December. This included the support of the Deputy Mayor, Deputy Mayoress, elected members and Council staff who volunteered to assist older, disabled people to shop in the town centre. Free refreshments were provided by Debenhams and Your Support Your Choice. Feedback from shoppers and volunteers was unanimously positive. The shoppers said they thoroughly enjoyed the outing, having shopped for longer than they normally would and in particular, had enjoyed some pleasant company. Suggestions to improve the experience (that the shoppers all wish to take part in again) were, to offer the opportunity more often and to allow more time to shop and socialise over refreshments.

NEW SOCIAL CARE IT SYSTEM

The procurement of the new IT system from a specialist firm, Corelogic, was completed in August 2013, and we are on track to deliver the new system by early May 2014. The replacement system will bring about a range of benefits, most notably due to its increased functionality and more intuitive formats. It will enable social work frontline staff to spend more time with citizens doing 'face to face' social work as opposed to spending a significant

amount of time currently inputting social work data. The new system will be more user-friendly and will also be a platform that can support mobile working going forward.

PUBLIC HEALTH

WINTER WARMTH, HEALTHY PEOPLE

Living in a cold home is bad for health, increasing the risk of heart attack, stroke and respiratory infection in adults, asthma and poor school performance in children and mental ill-health in all ages. Blackburn with Darwen is in the worst fifth of local authorities nationally, for fuel poverty. This year Public Health is funding a range of additional support and advice for vulnerable residents during the winter months on how to keep healthy, homes warm and energy bills down. This initiative is being delivered through partnership working between the Decent and Safe Homes (DASH) service and a range of local third sector organisations, including Age UK, Healthy Living and Care Network. The LGA has cited our local work on this issue as a national example of good practice.

CAFÉ HUB LAUNCH

On 9th December Café Hub held a launch event, attended by elected members and others who have supported the development of the Recovery Orientated Integrated System (ROIS). Café Hub is a community café serving home-made, healthy food, which has been developed to meet the needs of those in the community who would prefer to socialise alcohol-free. It provides a safe environment for all, including community members and people in recovery, where they can build their networks, volunteer and acquire additional skills to enhance their chances of employment and a positive future.

HEALTH & WELLBEING BOARD

The Board continues to alternate business meetings and development sessions in order to ensure that progress is kept under review and learning consolidated during its first full year as a statutory partnership. The development session held in November focussed on winter planning and mental health as areas for discussion and challenge between members of the Board, the outcomes of which will be taken back as appropriate to both the Board's business meeting in January and next development session in February.

Despite the resignation and interim appointment of Chief Executives to the East Lancashire Hospitals Trust we are still looking to hold a collaborative inquiry with colleagues in Pennine Lancashire to formally scrutinise the outcomes of the second Keogh Review risk summit. However we still await the date of this second (follow up) risk summit, which remains entirely in the gift of the Trust Development Authority (TDA) to set. We are in dialogue with the TDA, and did anticipate the meeting would have taken place towards the end of November 2013, with a scrutiny review date in mid-January 2014, but other factors seem to have overtaken this event happening. It is important that we wait for the outcomes of the second risk summit so that we have expert views on the progress (or lack of it) that has been made; as this will form the framework on which we can focus our attention to support an outcome of better healthcare for those East Lancashire Hospitals Trust service users.

'DRY JANUARY'

Following on from the Council motion in November 2013 to work with other Local Authorities to lobby central government for alcohol minimum unit pricing, and as another element of the emerging alcohol strategy for the borough, Public Health have engaged with Alcohol Concern to promote the Dry January campaign.

While challenging individuals to make a 31 day alcohol-free start to 2014, Dry January is primarily about having some time without alcohol and reflecting on the place of alcohol in our lives.

It is a campaign that intends to create conversations about alcohol and give people a different perspective on their alcohol use and the effects of drinking regularly (not necessarily more than recommended guidelines). Dry January aims to enable Blackburn with Darwen residents to ask different questions about alcohol such as 'What positive impacts can drinking less have on my life?'

Alcohol Concern will monitor all sign-ups to Dry January with a Blackburn with Darwen postcode and feedback through an evaluation report.

HEALTHWATCH

The Healthwatch Board is now fully functioning with Sir Bill Taylor as Chair and five board members who have all undergone a training and development programme and is now looking to ensure that it has a representative membership through targeted recruitment by post code.

The Healthwatch information and advice service is being developed and delivered in partnership with Your Support Your Choice. Healthwatch has also developed a clear social media presence, with over 400 Twitter followers.

The Board has agreed an engagement strategy, working terms of reference and a draft business plan. In December, the Healthwatch Board agreed Articles of Association, which means that it will be established as a social enterprise by the end of February, and exit plans are being developed.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES**COUNCILLOR FRANK CONNOR****PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: LINDA CLEGG
DATE: 30 January 2014****NUMBERS OF CHILDREN IN CARE AND OTHER CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE INFORMATION**

Towards the end of December 2013 there were 350 children in care. Since January 2012 the numbers of children in care has been consistently within the range of 340 to 360. The number of children subject to Child Protection Plans has risen to 204, similar to figures in July 2012. The number of open cases has continued to reduce since its peak in the winter of 2011/12 and now stands at 1,590.

YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE INSPECTION

Inspectors visited Blackburn with Darwen on 9th December 2013 to examine how the Youth Justice Service and its partners work to address the needs of girls and young women who are at risk of offending. We were one of 6 areas inspected over the course of a week. Staff and managers from a number of services were interviewed and case files were read.

The inspectors commented on our efforts to deliver more integrated working and the quality of our prevention work (including triage). Partnership working with health workers, Engage and our work with the Courts was recognised as a strength. The inspectors also shared some potential areas for further improvement – for example, consider whether we need to introduce more gender specific working and some further policy development to demonstrate the effectiveness of what we do.

The report is due to be published in the Spring.

ADOPTION RECRUITMENT

An adoption recruitment campaign, commissioned using adoption reform grant funding, was launched on 21st January with an event at Blackburn Rovers. Strategic community leaders attended alongside adopters and prospective adopters

The campaign includes the launch of a recruitment brand for adoption, a new adoption website and strategic publicity across Blackburn and surrounding areas. Media coverage comprises of social media as well as more traditional methods such as radio, press and bill board advertising.

This recruitment strategy enables us to place more of our children waiting for adoption with our own adopters and generate income to pay for the placements of children who require placements further afield.

RECOGNITION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE FROM BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN

On 16th November 2013, a group of young people supervised by Blackburn with Darwen Youth Justice Service attended the second 'Annual Living Well Trust Awards' night in Carlisle.

The Living Well Trust had won the commission to deliver a Summer Arts Programme in Blackburn in partnership with the Youth Justice Service for 10 young people for 3 weeks during August 2013. The aim of the programme was to reduce offending, improve literacy and numeracy and prepare young people for college and work.

The quality of the work saw 3 young people nominated for an award, although all who participated achieved Arts awards due to the high standard of their work. Brandon Lee from Blackburn won the Inspiration Award for his efforts to turn his life around.

COMMON ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK (CAF)

Work is underway to implement the action plan detailed as a result of the strategic review of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) which will see the implementation of a range of refreshed support systems for those who take the lead professional role.

Ahead of this work the number children being supported through the CAF process is steadily increasing, with 342 open CAF at a mid-point in December 2013.

There has been an increase in the number of schools and health professionals taking the lead professional role. There has also been an increase in the number of families who are stepping down from social care to CAF as a planned exit strategy.

YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE REPARATION SHOWCASE EVENT

Blackburn & Darwen Youth Offending Team has been working in partnership with Child Action North West's Youth Justice Team to provide 'Triage' Reparation for young people as an alternative to them entering the Criminal Justice System.

An event was held in October to showcase how young people get involved in reparative activities and what services are provided for those who commit minor offences.

Those identified for reparation are assessed for issues that may have caused them to offend and then a series of measures are identified to reduce the potential for them to offend in the future. These measures include signposting to agencies, reparative and restorative justice interventions, one to one work on the consequences of crime and victim awareness.

Some of the projects that have benefited include Lifeline in Blackburn, Cornfield Cliffe supported housing project, Darwen Cemetery and Lower Darwen Community Centre.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT

CLLR JIM SMITH

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: SAYYED OSMAN
DATE: JANUARY 14**

PUBLIC PROTECTION & ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

SHISHA

Shisha compliance work is continuing along the two-pronged approach of advice and enforcement, with shisha businesses being encouraged to comply with legislation, and a code of practice which promotes basic good practice drawn up to assist them.

Pressure is being maintained on non-engaging businesses, which are being targeted in enforcement operations; as a result, actionable offences were found at one premises during the latest operation.

Officers have begun to assess carbon monoxide levels within shisha lounges in relation to potential offences under health and safety legislation, and as a result an improvement notice has been served at one premises. This legislation is more powerful than smoking laws, and focusses on the owner of the business rather than a person in charge of the building at any given time.

SCRAP METAL DEALERS

The licensing process for scrap metal dealers and collectors is now complete, with 16 sites and 15 collectors now being licensed to operate within the Borough. All licensed collectors are required to display prominent identification plates on their vehicles.

Coordinated enforcement activity in November and December has seen the number of complaints about domestic nuisance caused by scrap metal collectors drop drastically. Enforcement focus has now switched to identifying and prosecuting unlicensed collectors. Static and mobile multi-agency operations are being used to disrupt illegal collectors' activity; to date two static and one mobile operation have been carried out, and further operations will continue on a regular basis, focussing on weekends and out of hours work wherever possible, subject to police availability.

In tandem with the enforcement activity, an education campaign is planned for January to encourage the public to use licensed collectors and avoid leaving scrap metal on the driveway.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR LEISURE, CULTURE AND YOUNG PEOPLE

COUNCILLOR DAMIAN TALBOT

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: MARTIN EDEN
DATE: 30.1.14**

SUNDAY OPENING AT BLACKBURN CENTRAL LIBRARY

New weekend opening hours commenced at Blackburn Central Library from December 7th 2013. From that weekend, the doors opened on both Saturdays and Sundays from 10am until 4pm. This weekend offer reinstates the previous Sunday opening, which had proved popular with families and those who wished to make use of the free computer and Internet facilities. It will contribute to the 'Blackburn is Open' campaign, which includes a host of new and exciting initiatives supporting the re-launch of the town centre as a vibrant and busy place to visit.

BLACKBURN MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY

The Hittites exhibition opens on 8th February 2014 replacing the popular Blackburn Artists exhibition.

The Hittites were an ancient civilisation living in the area of Modern Turkey and Syria they are one of the earliest advanced civilisations. Living at the same time as, and going to war against, the ancient Egyptians the Hittites are known for the Battle of Qadesh and for being part of the world's first peace treaty.

This ancient civilisation was discovered by the famous archaeologist, John Garstang, who was born and grew up in Blackburn and the images and descriptions are taken from his original camera and diaries. The artefacts on display are on loan from the British Museum and will be a rare opportunity to see them outside London.

There is an introductory talk by Leonie Sedman of The Victoria Gallery, Liverpool University arranged by the Friends of Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery on Thursday 9 January. Liverpool University were partners in the research and production of the exhibition due to the connection with Professor Garstang, the exhibition will be on show until the 24 May 2014.

ARTS SERVICE – BLACKBURN IS OPEN

Blackburn is Open programme started in December with a range of Thursday night events working with local artists and creatives to fill 4 empty shops, create artworks in shop windows and engage local communities in arts activities including taxidermy, lantern making and screen printing.

The pop up arts centre opposite the Town hall will be formally launched on January 22nd by designer Wayne Hemmingway. Following this an ongoing programme will be developing kicking off with Blackburn College Art Foundation course 'taking over' St John's Centre for three months to transform it into artist spaces and contemporary exhibition in January. The opening of the first 'creatives' shops on Town hall Street and First Thursdays events which will see events happening across the town on the first Thursday of every month from March 6th.

BLACKBURN LEISURE CENTRE DEVELOPMENT

The contract for the building work was awarded to Eric Wright Construction and work started mid November 2013. There was a "ground breaking" event attended by the Mayor and senior council members hosted by the College, with several photo opportunities to promote the Partnership.

The construction work is going well with the piling well under way. Section one (sports halls) completion is on target for end of August 2014 and section two (pools) spring 2015.

KING GEORGE'S HALL

King George's Hall Pantomime – Cinderella 2013

Cinderella at King George's Hall in December 2013 enjoyed unprecedented success over its run of 29 performances and was very well received by customers and staff. The pantomime achieved a 24.3% increase in attendances from 14,037 in 2012 to 17,459 in 2013. Schools and Groups booking also increased for the 2013 pantomime; and the majority of schools and groups have already requested the same seats to be held for 2014's pantomime. This is the highest attended pantomime at King George's Hall since 2009.

Bars & Catering also enjoyed an increase in customers due to the higher footfall and had specific success in offering a lower priced 50p ice creams offer to all school group bookings – this was very successful and co-ordinated by the Box Office.

DARWEN LIBRARY THEATRE

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz - 2013

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz at Darwen Library Theatre ran over 22 shows in December 2013. The DLT pantomime saw a 15.2% increase in attendance from 3,458 in 2012 to 3,982 in 2013 for the run. Schools and Groups booking have also increased for the 2013 pantomime, this is the highest attended DLT pantomime since 2004.

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

CLLR ARSHID MAHMOOD

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: SAYYED OSMAN
DATE: 30 JANUARY 2014**

NEIGHBOURHOODS

TROUBLED FAMILIES PROGRAMME UPDATE

To date, 240 families have been identified and 188 are currently being worked with. A total of 64 payments by results claims have been made and the next claim period will be 14 February 2014.

SKILLS FUNDING AGENCY (SFA) CONTRACT UPDATES – COMMUNITY LEARNING, ADULT SKILLS BUDGET AND NATIONAL CAREERS SERVICE (IAG)

In the autumn term of 2013, over 800 learners accessed the service's learning provision to take up courses including healthy living, ICT, family learning (supporting parents in helping with their children's school work), the 'First Steps into Employment' programme (to develop CV writing, interview techniques and skills for the workplace), ESOL, maths and English classes.

In quarter 3 (October, November, December) of the Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) team's National Careers Service contract, a total of 1325 clients were seen.

TALK ENGLISH PROJECT

The borough has recently been successful in securing DCLG funding under the English Language Competition Fund as part of a North West consortium of LAs and learning providers. The aim of the project is to complement existing ESOL provision engaging volunteers and the wider community into supporting people to develop their written and spoken English.

HOUSING

Empty Properties

HCA First Round – To date around 210 owners have registered their interest in the scheme. The Together Housing Group (TVH) have carried out initial surveys on 103 properties, 53 of these have now progressed to a second survey. 6 properties have been purchased and a further 2 purchase offers are with legal. 1 property has been leased and 1 lease offer has also been accepted by the owner. Letters continue to be sent to owners of properties that have been empty for 2 years and over.

Cluster Bid –The transfer of 14 properties on Queen Street to Twin Valley Homes has been concluded. The transfer of 16 /17 Green Street East and three properties on Harwood Street is imminent. Refurbishment to these properties is scheduled to commence in the New Year.

Empty properties CPO'd by the Council – Four properties have been sold under contract. A further two properties have sales agreed, 109 Infirmary Street Blackburn and 76 Hancock Street, refurbishment on both of these properties is anticipated to be completed by March 2014.

Housing Growth Projects

Roe Lee Redevelopment, Blackburn (BwD) – A project team has been created to scope regeneration options for the wider Roe Lee area. Potential landowners / stakeholders were invited to attend a meeting to discuss the Council's aspiration to develop land for housing and welcomed their comments and future plans. We will be commissioning Capita Symonds to carry out this work and plan to have a draft masterplan by spring 2014.

Orchard Grove, Darwen (TVH) – The development of 95 homes at Orchard Grove, Darwen is now complete. Of the 95 properties there are 57 occupied, 2 are show homes and there are currently 36 properties completed and available for sale.

Pearl Street & Gretna Walk, Blackburn (TVH) - Contractors began development works in August and the development is scheduled to complete in June 2014.

North Road, Blackburn (Great Places) – Development work is progressing well with all services running across the site having been diverted to enable building work to continue. Development remains on track to complete in June 2014.

The Royals, Blackburn (David Wilson Homes) – The development continues to progress satisfactorily and is planned to complete in June 2016.

Moorgate Mill, Blackburn (Inclusion Housing) – Plans to develop 20 one bedroomed apartments to provide housing for people with physical and learning disabilities are progressing well. Negotiations to establish a care provider are ongoing. The scheme is planned to complete in March 2014.

LITTLE HARWOOD ENERGY EFFICIENCY SCHEME

Energy efficiency schemes for several areas in the borough are being developed using the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) funding. The first scheme in Blackburn is a partner arrangement with Trade Energy and Isothane, the insulation manufacturer, has seen residents in the Little Harwood area signing up to have works carried out. Up to 650 homes are being targeted for specialist foam insulation for cavity walls that cannot be treated with standard insulation products. Other measures include boiler replacement for benefit recipients if their boiler is defective. The other measures more widely available include loft insulation and standard cavity wall insulation.

A similar scheme is already under way in Darwen and others are under discussion.

CUSTOMER SERVICES

ON-LINE FORMS

Through the procurement of new software, from February the Council will support the application of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support on-line.

The move to on-line forms for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support does support the Council's move to greater digital engagement with the customers of the Borough, provide greater choice to customers and landlords, and speed up interaction with the Council. The overall impact should be a reduction in the number of customers visiting the Town Hall and a reduction in duplication or delay.

All other customer forms for reporting or applying for specific Council Tax, Business Rates or Benefit issues will also be available for use.

A number of public access PC's have also been made available in the new One Stop Shop facility.

QUEUE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Work will commence in January to implement a queue management system for the Blackburn and Darwen Town Halls. In addition to managing the waiting times of appointments in a more professional manner, the new systems will provide accurate management statistics for all customer contacts and provide text and email confirmation for visitors and customers.

PUBLIC PROTECTION & ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

UNDER AGE SALES

Trading Standards staff are maintaining high levels of under age sales test purchasing activity; so far this financial year, a total of ten test purchasing operations have been carried out.

Five operations have related to alcohol; 60 test purchase attempts made, with sales taking place on only 2 occasions (3%).

Four test purchase operations have been carried out in relation to tobacco, with 11 sales resulting from 47 test purchase attempts (23%). The relatively high sales rate reflects the fact that test purchasing has been concentrated on small independent retailers following an intelligence assessment which indicated there was a need to focus on this trade sector. Following an intensive advice campaign aimed at this sector results have improved markedly, with the latest operation resulting in zero sales from nine test purchase attempts.

One firework test purchasing operation was carried out, with 3 sales resulting from 13 test purchase attempts. This year, fireworks test purchasing staff worked closely with the Police and Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service as part of the Brightspax campaign, and all available intelligence was used to select target premises, with some success.

HOUSING STANDARDS ENFORCEMENT

Selective licensing: there have been 2 successful prosecutions for unlicensed premises; each received a £250 fine and were ordered to pay £350 costs and £25 victim surcharge. In addition, rent repayment orders have now been applied for (rent repayment orders allow the Council to apply for rent which was obtained while rented accommodation was rented out without being licensed, and constitutes a more effective deterrent than the outcomes of the prosecutions themselves). In addition, in one of these properties, the owners were prosecuted for non-compliance with an improvement notice. The threat of legal action has secured compliance with licensing provisions in 12 further cases.

Other enforcement: there has been one successful prosecution for failure to comply with an improvement notice and the owner resulting in a fine of £400, victim's surcharge of £40 and costs of £697. The threat of legal action has secured compliance in one further case.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION

**COUNCILLOR
MAUREEN BATESON**

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR:
BRIAN BAILEY
DATE: 22.01.2014**

**LOCAL PLAN PART 2 - SITE ALLOCATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT
MANAGEMENT POLICIES**

The Local Plan Part 2 approved by Council Forum in November will be published on the 27th January 2014 for a statutory six week period until the 10th March 2014. A number of supporting documents will also be published which provides the justification for the policies and proposals in the Plan. At this stage comments must be made in writing within the six week period. A standard form will be provided to guide people in making their comments so that they include information which will be helpful to the Inspector. The Plan will be deposited at the two town halls and the six libraries and also made available on the Council's website. Everyone who attended one of the Local Plan consultation events in 2013 and left their details will receive a letter inviting them to make comments. The letter will also include guidance on how to respond and a leaflet summarising the key issues from the earlier consultation and how these are addressed in the Plan.

Following this statutory consultation, the Plan will be submitted to the Government for examination into its soundness. An Independent Examination in Public will then be held later in the year, where all comments received during the six week consultation will be considered by an independent Inspector appointed by the Government. The Council cannot respond to comments made during the period.

HAMIS

Network Recovery

Resurfacing work for this financial year's Network Recovery schemes is well underway with many roads in the borough having already been surfaced or patched. Several further projects are starting in January, with a number of these being carried out over weekends. This year's approved capital expenditure of £2.45m is on programme to be completed by 31st March, with a busy three months of surfacing ahead.

A draft list of future schemes is being compiled, with next year's schemes being subject to an independent technical review before being presented to members. The final version of the recommended £2.4m scheme list for inclusion in Network Recovery's second year will be presented to the Executive Member for consideration in February.

LED Street Lighting Retrofit

The European Tender for the new energy efficient LED lanterns has been completed and subject to Executive Board approval will be awarded later this month. The Council has partnered with Warrington Borough Council to reduce costs and benefit from reduced prices through economies of scale.

Winter Maintenance

The winter maintenance season is well underway, but to date we have avoided any significant snowfall. The gritters are now all equipped with trackers as an additional safety feature and we have a new weather forecasting system that is working well. Members are now advised when there is planned gritting action via email, although further updates can be obtained via the BwD Winter Maintenance web site.

REVITALISING BLACKBURN TOWN CENTRE

The Council's 12 point delivery plan to revitalise Blackburn town centre has been launched, and includes activity to stimulate new creative businesses, develop an annual cultural events programme, promote visits through the free parking offer and kick start the night time economy.

The ballot for Blackburn Town Centre Business Improvement District (BID) closed on 8th November 2013, with 75% of eligible town centre businesses voting in favour of the BID, a resounding success for the BID Board and the Business Plan.

The BID will run for 5 years and this first year will establish the way forward with the existing Steering Group becoming the Interim Board and inviting other levy payers to be involved to take up vacancies across different business sectors. The BID's four areas of focus have been developed in response to extensive business consultation and will be - marketing and promotion, security, environment and attracting and supporting businesses.

CATHEDRAL QUARTER DEVELOPMENT

Work has now started on site following a sod-cutting ceremony on 7th November 2013. Phase 1 includes a high quality office building with retail/restaurant underneath, a 60 bed Premier Inn with restaurant at ground floor, a new transport interchange for buses in front of the Railway Station and a new public square and gardens. This is forecast to deliver around 500 jobs in total and transform this important gateway. It will be completed in autumn 2015. The first 9 months of construction works will concentrate on enabling works including utility diversions, strengthening of the culvert roof and walls, site remediation and preparation and the demolition of Jubilee House and the old toilet block. The office and hotel will be built together and their construction will start in late summer this year. Work is ongoing to minimise disruption and ensure management of the works is coordinated with the other developments particularly the construction of the new Bus Station.

Clergy Court, the Cathedral's new residential building which includes offices and a refectory open to the public is expected to start on site early spring 2014 and will complete around the same time as the rest of the development.

CHRISTMAS IN THE MARKETS

Darwen Market hosted a raft of successful events during the Christmas period. Once again, the Disabled Children's group decorated the Market Hall Christmas Tree. This annual event has now celebrated its 10th year.

Santa's Grotto opened in the Annexe. Darwen Brass Band and various members of the public arranged to play and sing. Many Traders were dressed in festive costumes.

The Market team and traders at Blackburn market came together to create a 12 days of Christmas video which showcased various market stalls. The video generated a phenomenal amount of activity on social media and YouTube following the "premier" of the video launch which was attended by the Mayor.

The Cast of Cinderella had a walkabout in the market which was a big success and generated good publicity and Facebook comment. A showcase event was held with the Bread and Butter Theatre Company who brought fun and laughter to the Market throughout the day with the cast dressed as Elves and Christmas Crackers. Throughout the Christmas period groups of Carol singers entertained customers in both markets.

TOWN CENTRE EVENTS

The two successful Christmas Light Switch On events this year were both attended by large crowds, who were entertained by a variety of artists, and fireworks displays. In Darwen there was a special laser display and the lighting of Darwen Tower for the night. The annual Lantern Parade took place on Thursday 12th December with a series of workshops held beforehand in empty shops in Blackburn Town Centre, Youth Zone, local schools, St Peter's Church in Darwen and Blackburn College. This year Blowjangles, a local street band entertained the crowd and led the procession to the Cathedral Grounds for a ten minute musical firework spectacular display. This was followed by the annual Carol Service in the Cathedral.

TOURISM AWARDS

Marketing Lancashire held the 10th Lancashire and Blackpool tourism awards at Blackburn Cathedral in November. This was also timed to coincide with the launch of the Cathedral Quarter project on site. The event was hugely successful and oversubscribed; nearly 450 guests from across Lancashire attended. The Cathedral looked stunning and was beautifully dressed and lit both inside and outside and a full kitchen was set up in the Nave by Blackburn catering company, "With a Twist". The high quality of the food, service and production values of the event meant there was fantastic feedback from all the businesses that attended, particularly via social media. The Cathedral is now considered to be a wonderful new venue for the town centre and Lancashire and other large events are now being considered. It was definitely a night to take a huge amount of pride in Blackburn as we delivered an event of the highest quality.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES**COUNCILLOR ANDY KAY****PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: DENISE PARK****DATE: 30 January 2014****Local Government Finance Settlement for 2014/15**

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) have now published the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2014/15 and indicative figures for 2015/16. The Settlement Funding Assessment (business rates and Revenue Support Grant) for 2014/15 and 2015/16 is £88.815m and £76.22m respectively. There are reductions on the SFA of £8.683m in 2014/15 rising to £21.233m in 2015/16. Figures for all specific grants are as yet incomplete.

We have reviewed the Council's two year budget strategy for 2013/14 and 2014/15. This is on track, although difficult decisions have still to be implemented, progress is being made in achieving the savings targets of £30M over the 2 years. Finance Council in March will consider the 2014/15 budget and the Medium Term Financial Strategy for future years. We will be starting to consult and plan for 2015/16 as further significant savings will be harder to deliver and will have a significant impact on the borough.

IT Update

ITM&G are working with colleagues across the council and are currently implementing new systems for: the customer contact centre; Environment, Neighbourhoods and Housing; Adult's Social Care; Culture Leisure Sport and Young People; Customer Services; Children Services and HR. In addition, ITM&G are upgrading the FLARE system for Environment, Neighbourhoods and Housing; the planning system; the youth offending team and the elections' team. All this work should help council departments become more efficient and improve services for customers.

Court Of Appeal re: Peel case

Peel Land and Property Investments PLC (Peel) own and operate the retail shopping park at Whitebirk Drive, (the Peel Centre). The case involving intricacies of planning legislation and case law, which the Court of Appeal recognised was of significance nationally. Legal Services supported the Council's response to Peel's appeal to the Court of Appeal. The Court of Appeal unanimously dismissed the appeal, as Peel had not demonstrated that the judge at the High Court was wrong to dismiss Peel's claims or to decline to make the declarations claimed by it. Peel is applying for leave to appeal to the Supreme Court. The Council's legal team are applying for our costs.

Procurement of Replacement HR System

At Executive Board in December, approval was given to the procurement of a new HR Payroll & Personnel system. Over the next year the HR service will be changing the way that employees and managers interact with the service and will be delivering efficiencies as part of the continuing drive to lower costs. The implementation of this system will deliver efficiencies across the whole organisation which will include reduction in management and employee time due to the automation and simplification of processes and forms. There will also be a direct reduction in staffing costs both across HR & payroll and in support roles across the organisation. Real time information will also allow the organisation to proactively manage workforce issues including key business decisions, with more effective workforce and resource planning which would potentially reduce the number of redundancies.

The new system will also positively support the ability to deliver services to other organisations.

HR Service Business Development

The HR service was insourced from Capita in October 2012 and has delivered significant savings as part of the two year budget strategy approved by Council in March 2013. During 2013 the HR Service has delivered on the staff reduction programme for the Council minimising compulsory redundancies wherever practicable across a range of services. The HR Service has also been approached to provide HR & Payroll Services to other organisations including some schools.