

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

**CLLR YUSUF JAN-VIRMANI**

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING  
DIRECTOR: SAYYED OSMAN  
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**TROUBLED FAMILIES PROGRAMME UPDATE** - We continue to make good progress, 435 of the target 465 families have now been identified. The total claims submitted to date of 221 (i.e. 48% of contract total).

Government has confirmed that there is further funding available for 2015 – 2016

In Phase 2 of the programme (2015-2016) existing criteria will be expanded to cover more families to enable earlier intervention.

**SKILLS FUNDING AGENCY (SFA) CONTRACT AND PREPARATIONS FOR OFSTED INSPECTION** – In early May, the service held a two-day Pre-inspection Health Check (PiHC) with external Ofsted inspectors. Feedback from the inspection team was very positive and validated that the service is 'inspection ready' as a good provider. All staff who came into contact with inspectors were praised for their commitment and enthusiasm for their work; inspectors also judged partnership work to be of an outstanding quality.

**NATIONAL CAREERS SERVICE CONTRACT UPDATE** - The current National Careers Service contract has now been extended to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2014. The service has recently appointed a new member to the IAG team who is permanently based in Blackburn Jobcentre (JCP). The post is funded by the DWP Flexible Support Fund and the post-holder works closely with JCP advisers and the service's IAG team to offer intensive support to those on JSA.

**EMPTY PROPERTIES** - TVH have nearly completed the refurbishment of the 14 empty properties on Queen St in Darwen. A further 3 properties on Harwood St are currently being refurbished, once completed the properties will be offered for affordable rent through the BwithUs scheme. Negotiations are ongoing on further properties to be bought and refurbished.

**Empty properties for CPO** – Three properties have been approved for CPO 40 Gillibrand Street, Darwen – The CPO was made and submitted to DCLG in February 2014. No objections to the order were received and the Secretary of State has given the Council power to confirm the order. 12 Westwell Street, Darwen – CPO will be submitted to DCLG within the next 4 weeks 44 Shadsworth Road, Blackburn – CPO will be submitted to DCLG within the next 4 weeks

**The Royals, Blackburn (David Wilson Homes)** – The development is progressing well and has generated a lot of interest from prospective purchasers. To date a total of 53 new homes have been built, out of which 3 are show houses, 48 occupied and 2 are available for sale. An additional 32 properties are currently under construction, out of which 14 have been sold off plan. The anticipated build completion date is July 2015.

**SELF SERVICE WITH ON-LINE FORMS** - The self-service/on-line options for Benefits and Council Tax have proved very popular over March and April 2014. The Council Tax forms cover all applications, including applying to pay by Direct Debit, discounts, exemptions and notifying the Council of a change of address. Many hundreds of forms have been completed each month.

The Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support application forms have proved more popular with 607 on-line forms completed in March, with a further 711 completed in April. The popularity of on-line forms now means that during April, 56% of the new applications were made on-line.

**HOUSING STANDARDS ENFORCEMENT** - Following a successful prosecution for non-compliance with an Improvement notice served by the Council, the owner of a rented property was referred to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) for failing to provide a gas safety record. She has now been fined £260 and ordered to pay costs of £207 for failing to arrange an annual gas safety check and failing to comply with an improvement notice from the HSE.

The Housing Standards Team will continue to work with the HSE where owners of rented properties fail to provide the necessary gas safety records.

**TRADING STANDARDS PROSECUTIONS** - The Consumer Protection Team has prosecuted a window fitter for supplying and fitting an unsafe door. The door contained plate glass rather than toughened glass required by regulations to be fitted in areas liable to be subjected to hard use. The court imposed penalties totalling £400.

In addition, cases resulting from fireworks enforcement have finally reached trial. Two individuals were prosecuted for selling fireworks to volunteers under the age of 18. Total penalties of £220 and £560 were imposed in these cases. A defendant failed to attend in a third case, which will be relisted and heard in absence if necessary.

In addition, a shopkeeper has been prosecuted for illegal storage of fireworks. For public safety, fireworks must be stored in closed containers to avoid being lit by stray sparks or other ignition sources. During routine inspection a retailer was found to have displayed his fireworks openly in the shop, in full reach of members of the public. The shopkeeper was fined a total of £2245.