

TOUGH TIMES

We are in exceptionally tough times as a Council and as a borough. The government's continuing budget cuts to local public services, its cuts to benefits, spun as welfare reform and the cost of living crisis means many families in this borough are facing hardship.

And as my colleague has outlined we, as a local authority, are being forced to make extremely painful cuts which will substantially affect every service the Council provides to residents.

We have gone through each service individually, looked at every penny spent in those services and measured that spending against what residents want and expect from the Council.

Residents need to be under no illusions though – the scale of the cuts will have a massive impact on what we can deliver.

I certainly did not go into politics to make such massive cuts and I am sorry we have to go through this once again. This government does not seem to care that its draconian settlements are unfair to Northern cities and towns and that they favour the South despite our many pleas. Places such as ours, where funding is needed the most, suffer because of the bias of ministers.

Independent research by the University of Sheffield shows that Councils in the north-west have been forced to make cuts of £234.76 per person, when the average for England as a whole is significantly lower: £130.06 per person. This trend will continue under the current funding allocation arrangements.

Such stats show starkly that the current government is letting down people in the North. I am of the opinion many in Scotland believe in independence because they can see and feel this unfairness.

The North has some of the most disadvantaged areas in the country and we are being failed entirely for political reasons.

The situation in Scotland brings issues up for us here. It is time for us to revisit the debate around regional devolution. Localism under this government has been feeble and the research on a North/South divide is crystal clear. I am fully behind moves to devolve real powers to the North through a regional government settlement so we can stand up for ourselves more and get a better deal for Northerners.

GOOD NEIGHBOURS/YOUR CALL CELEBRATION

I am delighted to tell fellow members of the success of the Good Neighbours Awards and Your Call celebration we held at the end of August.

Your Call has gone from strength to strength. More and more people in the borough are displaying the Your Call attitude which is pleasing considering the tough times we are facing. These residents are standing up and fighting for the borough. Without these residents, this borough would be a lot worse off.

This fighting spirit is displayed by all those nominated for a Good Neighbour Awards and especially the eight people who won the main prizes.

I am always happy to give support to people who want to make things better. I passionately believe many problems in the community can be solved by members of the community. I believe it's the Council's role to help support them and foster that can-do attitude.

I set up the Good Neighbours awards to celebrate people who had never been recognised before for the work they do to make their communities tick. I am really pleased with how the event has snowballed.

It's great we are being backed by the Lancashire Telegraph, Blackburn with Darwen Clinical Commissioning Group, Blackburn Rovers and Capita and that the awards and Your Call in general have been nationally recognised.

The main winners were:

- Amanda Chinery, who won the prize donated by Capita, a voucher for Stanley House.
- Joe Lightbown, who won one year's free gym membership donated by Blackburn with Darwen Clinical Commissioning Group
- Peter Leyden, who won a corporate meal for two at Blackburn Rovers.
- Rick Wilson, who won a trip to watch Blackburn Rovers players train
- Pat Nunn, who won the trip to Blackpool for the Singing Legends Weekend courtesy of the Lancashire Telegraph
- Tanya Foster, who won a meal at the Pack for two.
- Christine Walker and Rizwana Tai both won £50 worth of Mall vouchers each.

2014 ENTERPRISING BRITAIN AWARDS

I am extremely pleased that the Hive, the borough's Business Leaders Network, has been commended for the role it plays in improving the town's prosperity as part of the 2014 Enterprising Britain Awards.

The awards are run by the Government as a way of celebrating good practice which supports small to medium sized businesses. Projects had to demonstrate how they met strict criteria including simplifying administrative procedures and helping access to new markets. Since launching in September 2012, Hive has quickly become a

leading example of getting things done through partnership working. It is supported by well-known brands and some of the borough's most influential business people.

Activity identified by Hive as part of its submission into the awards included an overview of recent events aimed at getting more of the borough's firms to consider exporting. In 2013, Hive hosted the government's Trade & Investment Minister, providing an opportunity to learn about the support to start/increase exporting activities. In April 2014, a second event was held with Hive's support and was aimed at encouraging SMEs from across the region to consider the growing market of Southern Asia. The presentation for the Enterprising Britain Awards was held on the 9th September 2014 in the House of Commons and was attended by Khalid Saifullah, Chair of the Hive Network and Director of Star Tissue UK, along with myself. Prizes were awarded by Ed Vaizey MP, Minister of State at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, with responsibility for digital industries.

DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Andrew Lightfoot has made a huge contribution to the borough over the last twelve years and had a responsibility for a wide range of council services that people rely on. He has also led all the main regeneration projects supporting the economic growth of the borough: His efforts will continue to be built on. I would like to thank him sincerely and wish him well in his new role which will allow him to further influence the future of local government in the North West.