

BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

Working with businesses to create jobs and build the economy is one of my top priorities. While some like to make out everything is rosy with the economy, the truth is businesses especially in the North West are finding times tough and as a result families are feeling the pinch. Cost of living is a major issue for our residents.

There is no doubt the economic recovery is mainly benefiting the south. Cuts to vital public services make things even harder for our business.

We are doing a variety of things to engage with business. We are listening to them, cutting bureaucracy and red tape so they can grow, creating jobs and wealth.

Other examples are we are due to launch our prosperity strategy in November, the work we are doing around Blackburn is Open and I will be supporting traders and independent retailers to celebrate Small Business Day in December.

I have met with traders from both towns to see what help I can give to support them on the day. I am pledging help with publicity including posters and leaflets, prizes, entertainment and attractions through Your Call grants.

ALLEYGATES

The scheme has been a success but we are struggling to satisfy demand because of the tough times we face and the unfair budget cuts we have to implement.

Residents want these schemes in their area. The schemes have, along with other measures, shown to be effective in cutting crime and anti-social behaviour. It is sad we have had to put new applications on hold. We are unable to increase the budget because it would mean cutting elsewhere and the government will not give us more money for them.

But I believe we can come up with creative ways of meeting this demand. We are looking at a variety of options which includes working with businesses and potentially linking it in with training opportunities. The Executive Member for Neighbourhood, Housing and Customer Services and I will keep residents informed of the situation.

LLOYDS COMMUNITY FUND

Blackburn Foodbank is one of two causes directly related to the borough which have been shortlisted for a Lloyds Community Fund award.

The Foodbank has fed thousands of people since it started. Sadly, I expect the trend to continue as more and more hard working families struggle to pay their bills and

face stark choices. Budget cuts to vital public services, so called welfare reform which in reality is attacking the most vulnerable in our society and the cost of living crisis mean continuing hardship for people. It is very sad foodbanks are needed so much in this day and age. But it's heart-warming that so many people are being helped through them.

The other group up for an award is the Residents of Sunnyhurst Association. The group hold community events, walking groups and family days.

The fund allows people in a local area to vote for four good causes which have been shortlisted. The good cause that achieves the most votes will receive £3,000, the next £2,000, £1,000 and £500 to help them benefit their community.

Voting for the awards has now finished but I wish them both the best of luck.

FIRST WORLD WAR COMMEMORATIONS

I am pleased to see so many communities coming together to mark the centenary of the First World War. I feel it is very important that the borough marks this anniversary.

Recently, I attended an event at Bank Top Community Centre. The Wensley and French Road Friends installed a plaque at the community centre as part of their commemorations. The event, which was part funded by a Your Call grant, also saw a bagpiper from Blackburn play tunes and members of social group the Recycled Wrens gave a poetry recital.

I was honoured to unveil the plaque. As the plaque says, rightly, every generation will always remember those who died.

I am also pleased to see residents working with officers to think creatively about how to mark the anniversary. Pupils from Witton Academy are working with neighbourhood officers to create the world's largest poppy.

On Tuesday November 11, Remembrance Day, around 1000 pupils will take part to create the design which when viewed from above will form a poppy. The pupils have been working with Blackburn Museum to identify names of local people who were involved in the First World War. The names of the soldiers will be written on the card forming the poppy centre.

JUST GOOD FRIENDS EVENT

I am pleased to announce we are working on a special event specifically for older people. The aim of the Your Call event is to get people together to meet old friends and make new ones. The Just Good Friends event will be held at King George's Hall on November 25. We are offering a free afternoon tea and entertainment.

It should be a superb event. We are looking to do more in the near future including some in Darwin.

YOUR CALL GRANTS

Community groups are still coming forward with great ideas to improve their areas.

We are in very tough times and are being forced to make massive cuts because of the substantial funding reductions we are facing. Without residents and community groups pulling together, things would be a lot grimmer than they are.

I set up the Your Call grants scheme to help community groups and residents turn their ideas into reality. They are only small grants and money is tight but I think it is important to help people who want to make their areas better. Dozens of groups have already benefited.

Any community group or residents with an idea can get in touch with me and we will see how best we can support them.