

POLICY COUNCIL MEETING
Thursday 4th December 2014

PRESENT –*The Mayor Councillor A. Cottam (in the Chair), Councillors Akhtar H., Akhtar P., Ali, Bateson, Brookfield, Browne, Casey, Connor, Daley, Davies, Desai, Entwistle, Evans, Foster D., Foster K., Gee, Groves, Gunn, Hardman, Harling, Hollern, Humphrys, Hussain F., Hussain I., Jan-Virmani, Johnson, Kay, Khan Z., Khonat H., Khonat S., Lee, Liddle, Mahmood, McFall, McKinlay, Nuttall, O’Keeffe, Patel, Pearson J., Rigby C., Rigby J., Riley, Roberts, Shorrocks, Sidat, Slater Jacqueline, Slater John, Slater Julie, Smith D., Smith J., Surve, Talbot, Taylor, Walsh, Whittle and Wright.*

RESOLUTIONS

46. Notice Convening Meeting

The Chief Executive read the notice convening the meeting.

47. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Hollings, Hussain S., Khan M., Maxfield, Mulla, Rehman and Whalley.

48 Minutes of the Council Forum Meeting held on 6th November 2014

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Council Forum meeting held on 6th November 2014 be approved as a correct record.

49 Declarations of interest

No Declarations of Interest were received.

At this point of the meeting, the Chief Executive advised that in line with the Constitution, the Policy Council would now be held in Committee.

50 Council Vision and Priorities – The Corporate Plan 2015-2018

A report was submitted which asked the Policy Council to reaffirm the Council’s Corporate Plan Priorities and subsequent performance framework as agreed at Finance Council in 2014, to extend into 2015-2018.

A video was shown to the Members which highlighted the positive impact of the Public and Private Sector working together with residents for the benefit of the Borough.

Members were reminded that Policy Council 2013 agreed the Corporate Plan for 2013-2015 and with it reaffirmed six key priorities that were to drive the Council’s business and ensure that improved outcomes were achieved

for residents. In line with the Council's policy and decision making framework, the report updated on the progress made in delivering these key priorities to date, alongside an overview of future delivery objectives for the Council for the 2015-2018 Corporate Plan. It also offered Policy Council the opportunity to debate the current national policy context and offer an opinion on future policy directions for the Council.

Council Forum in September 2014 had received details of the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy, and the latest predicted budget position for 2015-2018. Council also approved a range of advance budget savings proposals for early implementation to enable the Council to deliver a balanced budget for 2015/16 and make further savings in the following two years.

Plans were now in place to deliver these savings particularly those required for 2015/16 which unfortunately meant a number of staff had been put at risk of redundancy. A number of public consultation exercises had also commenced in some service areas and Finance Council would consider the position further in the New Year.

Since the Corporate Plan was put in place in 2012 the Council had been working hard to deliver the six priorities against a backdrop of key national policy changes.

The Council had faced unprecedented severe reductions in funding each year since the change in Government in 2010, for the funding periods 2011-13 and 2013-15. At the same time it had to respond to key changes in policy and financial reforms relating to a new local council tax support scheme, welfare reform, local business rates retention scheme and changes to schools funding amongst others.

Over the last 12 months the Council had seen a decrease in JSA claimants; however, it had more people working less than 10 hours compared to regional and national averages. Despite living in working households many families faced in-work poverty which was demonstrated through increasing demands for the local Foodbank. In the long-term these conditions would increase child poverty and impact on nutrition and the health of children and families. The national squeeze on wages and the rising cost of living was reducing the spending power of residents. This along with the cuts in public spending which had seen a reduction in the numbers of full-time jobs had resulted in shrinking local spending thereby impacting on small local businesses.

Additionally, following ongoing national delays, the Government's flagship Universal Credit Scheme had recently started to be implemented in the Borough. At this stage, only new claims from single people and couples would be processed through the Universal Credit System – despite promises of 1 million people being on the new system by April 2014, only a few thousand claims had been registered nationally. Applications could only be made online and the Council had therefore made provision at the

libraries and in partnership with the college for residents who need support with IT. New claims took up to five weeks to process and therefore additional short-term support may need to be offered. The Council was also working with partners to support claimants who needed help managing their finances as payments are made direct to bank accounts once a month.

There had also been significant changes around the Education system which has impacted severely on local educational delivery. Some schools had been forced to convert to Academy status whilst others have chosen to make this change. There had also been an increase in the number of local free schools. This in turn, had impacted on the role of the local authority within the local education system and combined with the funding changes, areas of traditional local authority control had been handed over to schools to run.

Ofsted continued to raise expectations around children's social care services. The current inspection framework, implemented in November 2014, introduced lengthier inspections with a more intensive process and from April 2015, there would be full multi agency inspections under an integrated inspection framework. This would see the local authority inspected alongside health services, the Police and Probation Services by five inspectorates working alongside one another. This was a significant change from previous inspection regimes the local authority participated in.

The financial context and savings requirements outlined would hit all of the Council's services very hard which would have a knock on impact for residents. Despite these pressures, the Council had continued to deliver for its residents and continued to work in partnership.

A key part of this would be the development of new relationships with residents. This would recognise that residents were the Council's biggest resource and that co-producing services was fundamental. The Council would build on the successes of Your Call to implement innovative working with residents to encourage and enable them to take responsibility for places (localities) and themselves.

At the heart of these plans would be three cross cutting key partnership plans to help deliver identified priorities: the Prosperity Plan (LSP Board and Hive Network), the Community Safety Strategy (Community Safety Partnership) and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy (Health and Wellbeing Board).

There would be a commitment to the development of an inclusion strategy which embodied the principles of Fairness. Some initial steps towards fairness for Council employees had seen the implementation a local living wage for Council workers.

Over the coming years there would be a continuing positive focus on the image of Blackburn with Darwen to encourage investment into the Borough.

Building on the positive image of the Borough and marketing our assets would support the approach for growth in business, housing and people.

Councillor Julie Daley seconded by Councillor Michael Lee moved an amendment to the report, by adding an additional recommendation as follows:

2. As Corporate Parents for the Council to review opportunities for our Children Looked After when they are leaving school and for the Council to consider a range of meaningful work experience opportunities to improve the outcomes for some of our most vulnerable young people.

Following debate there followed a vote on the proposed amendment, which was lost.

There then followed a wide ranging debate on the key issues arising as outlined in the report.

RESOLVED –

That the Council's Corporate Plan priorities and subsequent performance framework be reaffirmed as agreed at Finance Council in 2014, to extend into 2015-2018.

51. Year Planner for 2015/16

Following submission of the draft Year Planner for 2015/16 to the meeting of the Council Forum on 6th November 2014, Policy Council was asked to approve the Year Planner for 2015/16.

RESOLVED – That the Year Planner for 2015/16 be approved.

Signed at a meeting of the council
on the day of
(being) the next ensuing meeting of the Council) by

MAYOR