

PLAN FOR PROSPERITY/BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

Working with businesses to create jobs and build the economy is one of my top priorities.

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.

In November, over a hundred businesses joined with the Council and other partners to sign up to the new Plan for Prosperity. The blueprint aims to make Blackburn with Darwen a more prosperous place.

It sets out priorities for the borough for the next six years. These include creating new jobs, getting more residents in to work, bringing in new investment and improving the infrastructure and housing of the borough.

The plan also sets out aims to get residents healthier and improve quality of life as well as encouraging business innovation. The event, chaired by Mo Isap, was staged at Accrol Papers.

Our residents are being let down on a national level. The economy is not growing as fast as it should. The cost of living crisis is not being addressed and despite the government imposing harsh cuts on local authorities, especially ones in the North, the deficit has not reduced.

But despite the tough times we face, we won't settle for second best. Only the best for Blackburn with Darwen is our motto and we will work with residents, businesses and other partners to build a prosperous borough.

YOUR CALL JUST GOOD FRIENDS EVENTS

The Just Good Friends event took place in November and was a big success.

More than 200 people attended and we had some very positive outcomes. For example, a lady whose husband had died and had not been out since his death was encouraged to go by her daughter. She went and she made five friends who she met up with the week after.

We also used this fun event to showcase adult social care services such as assistive technology.

We are planning two more events, one in Darwen and another one in Blackburn on February 24. Again, we are approaching businesses to sponsor the events and we will again use them as a way to promote Council services especially assistive technology.

Loneliness and social isolation are two of the big issues facing many of our resident especially members of our older population. The Council has a major role in helping tackle these problems by working with residents, communities and businesses.

TAKEOVER DAY

Takeover Day, which gives young people the chance to shadow jobs, get involved in decision-making and offer their opinions on key issues, was a big success this year.

Nearly 80 young people came into the Council. Guided by me and the Executive Members, their task was to come up with a budget which met the needs of the borough's residents.

In the morning session held at Blackburn Youth Zone, the young people divided into groups to look at separate budget areas. In the afternoon, the groups gathered in the Council Chamber to bring their ideas together and take part in a debate, ultimately deciding a council budget.

The quality of debate was excellent and I am hopeful the experience will keep many of them interested in politics and the work of local authorities. Indeed, some may even choose to become councillors.

We have good track record in this council of listening to young people and working with them. We continue to do so as this event shows. We will also use this information to shape our budget this year.