

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING NEIGHBOURHOODS AND CUSTOMER SERVICES

COUNCILLOR JAN – VIRMANI

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: SAYYED OSMAN
DATE: SEPTEMBER 2015**

CUSTOMER SERVICES

Contact Centre

In addition to fully deploying the new telephony system in the contact centre, customer services has been looking to support other departments and expand its use into other high volume customer contact areas. Both the HR department and Electoral registration have already moved onto the new system with several other departments also being considered.

Once service areas move to the new telephony system customer contact reports will be produced that will allow a greater understanding of calls received. This information will assist with managing customer volumes and promotion of on-line alternatives.

Digital and On-line Access

Customer Services has continued to promote the uptake of electronic forms whenever possible. Council Tax, Benefits and Environment are three key services areas that have high volumes of customer contact and have had success in moving customers from the traditional methods of contact.

Council tax forms have increased significantly since March 2015. Compared to the last year there has been an increase in usage of 140%. The on-line Environment forms have also increased by 131% in the first quarter of 2015-16. The increase in take up has been a combination of successful promotion by customer services staff and genuine appetite by residents of the Borough.

NEIGHBOURHOODS

Deep Clean Keep Clean

Neighbourhood Managers Emma Coster and Tim Birch are working with Gary Johnston (Group Manager Consumer Protection) and Phil Winstanley (Environment Manager - Operations) on a new project to reduce litter and fly tipping for the Bank Top "Gateway" into Blackburn. With local Ward Councillor support, the project will engage residents and businesses to form a "Friends of" style group to help redesign their local street scene services. If businesses join they will receive extra support from Gary's team, and residents will be supported by the local Community Officer. The new Friends group will be supported to produce a 6 month action plan of community events to raise awareness of street scene issues and encourage responsible behaviour.

Recognising that engagement along Bank Top/Whalley Banks will be a challenge, the Neighbourhood Manager applied successfully for £7,800 to the Locality group to support the engagement process. In addition it is anticipated that this project will also support the delivery of the Gateways Improvement Project - funded through the Local Transport Plan. Initial engagement will take place from October with the anticipated launch of the Friends group and their 6 month action plan in March with a "Deep Clean Keep Clean" week of your call style community clean ups. If the project is successful it can be rolled out to other areas, subject to Councillor support.

For further information contact Tim Birch on 01254 222129.

HOUSING

DECC Central Heating Funding

The Lancashire home energy partnership has received £2.2m funding from the Department of Energy and Climate Change to deliver heating and insulation improvements for low income and vulnerable households who do not have proper central heating. As a key partner Blackburn with Darwen will administer the funding on behalf of the partnership.

Two key target groups have been identified, Private Landlords with Eligible Tenants, and qualifying Elderly Fuel Poor private house owners. These two groups have been identified due to the high incidence of fuel poverty in these types of households.

It is expected that 300 insulation measures will be carried out as well as 650 new heating systems dramatically improving the wellbeing of over 1500 local residents

Dispersed Properties for Victims of Domestic Abuse

Earlier this year the Council successfully bid for government funding for further accommodation and support for domestic abuse victims. The Council's Housing Needs service is leasing 5 flats from Twin Valley Homes to provide temporary accommodation for families who are difficult to place in the refuges (including larger families) and also to provide move-on accommodation from the refuges to make best use of refuge provision. Extra support services for families are also being provided.

Infirmary Area Consultation on Selective Licensing

Following the Executive Board decision to sustain the Selective Licensing programme, consultation is now under way for redesignation of the Infirmary Area. Consultation events for residents and landlords were held in August at Ivy Street Community Centre, and they are also invited to respond to questionnaires by 9th October. Officers will review submissions made and take account of points made during consultation with a view to redesignating the Infirmary Area in November.