

## **REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

**COUNCILLOR MOHAMMED KHAN**

**28 JANUARY 2016**

### **BUDGET SETTLEMENT**

Despite the national headlines that the Local Government Finance Settlement was a better settlement for Councils, early indications are the shortfall in our budget is actually worse than we outlined on December 3 Council Forum meeting.

As my fellow Executive Member will report, detailed work by officers to analyse the full impact of this settlement is ongoing but it looks like the Council is facing up to £48m cuts over the next four years.

Clearly, we are going to have to make tough decisions to deliver a balanced budget. Services will have to be radically change or stop altogether. The size of the cuts mean every single area of the Council will be affected. Between now and Finance Council, we will be working senior officers to go through every single penny we spend and matching it against our priorities.

### **COMBINED AUTHORITY UPDATE**

Members will be aware that the public consultation exercise for the Combined Authority proposals is now live until 19<sup>th</sup> February. Communications have gone out to all of our key stakeholders and there is also a campaign locally through Shuttle, social media and other channels.

I would urge you to complete the on-line survey and encourage residents, groups, businesses to also have their say. The outcome of the consultation will be considered at our next Council Forum meeting in April when members will also be asked to formally agree to join a Lancashire Combined Authority. All Lancashire councils will be going through this process. At this stage Wyre Council have chosen not to be part of the Combined Authority discussions.

We had a very successful Lancashire Leaders workshop on 5<sup>th</sup> January to consider devolution as part of a combined authority proposal for Lancashire to help us achieve our ambitions. Representatives from Government departments including the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department for Transport also attended the session along with the Chair of the Sheffield City Region Combined Authority who was able to share his experience with us.

If Lancashire is to play a strong role in the Northern Powerhouse and give our residents and businesses the best opportunities we must be ambitious. The future of Local Government will depend on our ability to generate income through business rates and council tax and the Government has been very clear that future funding will be delivered through Combined Authorities and areas that are working together.

We will be seeking devolution to bring forward strategic transport schemes, address skills and employability issues and a growth and development fund to close the productivity gap and unlock employment and housing sites. We will be expected to increase housing growth across Lancashire. Blackburn with Darwen is in a strong position to benefit from this opportunity to increase our council tax base through the recent adoption of our Local Plan and the land we are making available for housing development.

## **IMAGE AND BRANDING UPDATE**

Marketing the borough and showing the great offer we have in Blackburn with Darwen is a key part of our strategy to get businesses to invest and encourage people to live, work and visit here.

As part of that agenda, the Local Strategic Partnership have been seeking an external partner to help us develop a brand. We had a very strong response to the initial design brief with 8 of the 9 agencies we approached putting in a submission. Three were shortlisted, who presented to a panel made up of the Strategic Branding Group – a sub group of the LSP Board.

The Strategic Branding Group Panel agreed to appoint Thinking Place as the design agency to undertake the development to create a visual and narrative brand identity for Blackburn with Darwen.

Thinking Place did the most professional, passionate and comprehensive presentation and their answers demonstrated that they were the most able to respond directly to the brief. The panel also felt that they could undertake this high profile work with partners, with confidence that they would be acting on behalf of Blackburn with Darwen partners.

Thinking Place are already undertaking the place brand work for the wider Lancashire area through Marketing Lancashire which will provide good alignment and also the opportunity for the borough to feature strongly in the wider Lancashire narrative.

## **GOOD NEIGHBOURS AWARDS**

The Council will once again team up with the Lancashire Telegraph to search for the borough's best neighbours. Now in its fourth year, the Good Neighbours Awards is about recognising people who make their communities tick.

I am delighted to announce that several partners have signed up to sponsor and support the awards.

This year, national social care charity Community Integrated Care, McDonald's, Blackburn with Darwen Clinical Commissioning Group and Capita have all agreed to support this celebration of the borough's best neighbours.

It will be launched in February and I would urge all members to nominate people. It would be great if we have at least one nomination from every ward.

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT CHRONICLE AWARDS 2016 – COUNCIL OF THE LAST 20 YEARS**

I am delighted to announce Blackburn with Darwen Council has been shortlisted in a special category at this year's Local Government Chronicle Award.

In commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the LGC Awards this year, the trade magazine will run a one-off reward celebrating excellence over the past two decades. We, of course, have been shortlisted in two other categories but this one is a special nomination because of the length of time it spans.

It is a great honour to be shortlisted and shows that this Council has a great track record of achieving and delivering high quality service to our residents.

The theme of our bid is an exceptional enduring story. The last five years have been extremely tough and the challenges will continue. But this nomination shows we have faced these challenges by innovating, by doing things differently and by working with partners to make sure we are still delivering the best we can for our residents and communities.