

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES

COUNCILLOR ANDY KAY

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
EXEC DIRECTOR: DENISE PARK**

DATE: 21 April 2016

Registration Services

The Registrars have now relocated all face to face appointments from King George's Hall to the ground floor of the Town Hall. To facilitate the service change, four new interview rooms have been constructed and a new flexible wedding venue has also been established in the Northgate suite on the ground floor adjacent to Blakey's.

The Registrars service will now commence an ambitious digital programme which will provide efficiencies and service improvements to both the customers and the council. In addition to the digitisation of the records, all customer requests and payments will be enabled on-line.

Council Tax, Housing Benefits and Business Rates

The transfer of the Council Tax, Housing Benefits and Business Rates service from Capita continues to progress well. On Monday 11 April the staff moved to their new accommodation in the former Collecting Hall in the Town Hall and work is continuing on the associated IT systems which are on track to transfer from Capita at the end of June.

Universal Credit

Iain Duncan Smith MP, the then Secretary of State for the Department of Work and Pensions, announced that a number of pilot areas will implement the full Universal Credit service in 2016. Whilst Blackburn is not listed as a pilot area, it is widely expected to be rolled out nationally by early 2017.

The full Universal Credit service will result in all new claims from all claimant types being placed on Universal Credit. This will also include anyone who is currently on existing benefits or Tax Credits and has a change of circumstances that would naturally trigger a new claim to Universal Credit.

Welfare Cap

The protocol for implementing the revised Welfare Cap has now been agreed with the Department of Work and Pensions. From this summer the council will receive lists of those households that are affected by the cap. Implementation of the cap via a deduction to Housing Benefit payments will have to be introduced as soon as the cases are received.

Advice for All service

The current contract and service model for the Advice for All partnership will come to an end in June 2016. In conjunction with the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods, Housing & Customer Services, a new service specification has been drawn up and agreed within the council. It is anticipated that the service will be tendered in the coming weeks.

The Making Rooms (Fab Lab)

The Making Rooms development includes a Fabrication Laboratory (Fab Lab) at the former Bentley's building close to Blackburn Town Hall. £275,000 funding has been approved by the Arts Council England (ACE) and £451,000 has now been approved by the Lancashire Local Economic Partnership (LEP).

The ACE funding will provide a comprehensive range of 3D printing equipment alongside a number of other advanced manufacturing technologies. The 3D additive manufacturing and technical equipment has been selected by Dr Eddie Kirkby, who is the Director of The Making Rooms; he was previously Operations Manager for The Manufacturing Institute which oversees the development of Fab Labs across the UK. The equipment will be available for both individual and commercial use.

The Lancashire LEP funding will enable the Council to undertake the internal construction and refurbishment works necessary to make the building fit for purpose and DDA compliant.

IT

Progress continues to be made on implementing and upgrading the Council's IT systems and digital technologies, including the Public Access solution for Wi-Fi in Libraries as mentioned elsewhere. MOSAIC, the new Adults Social Care system is being tested and will soon be ready to go live providing opportunities for more agile working for social care staff.

These and other developments support the Council's digital strategy delivering improvements in service delivery for customers, a more resilient IT infrastructure and more efficient and cost effective processes.

Further projects which will commence shortly include a Public Access solution for P.C. access in key Council premises, digitisation of the Planning System including online access and Web chat facilities for citizens contacting the Council.

Legal Services

On 15 February 2016 Legal Services successfully defended another taxi licence appeal. Legal has an unbroken record of successfully defending all such decisions appealed, for at least two and a half years, both in the Magistrates Court and Crown Court.

HR Services

Whilst supporting the Council in the delivery of its budget objectives the service also continues to improve its reputation and increase its customer base and has recently secured additional service contracts from local schools.